

Spectral Animals:
Autobiographical Strategies for 21st-Century Humans

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Starting in Fall 2021, he will be pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Alabama.

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INTRODUCTION – SPECTRAL ANIMALS: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STRATEGIES FOR 21ST-CENTURY HUMANS

At the 1997 Cerisy conference on “the autobiographical animal,” Jacques Derrida starts in a place where he declines to start for his entire philosophical career up to that point: with the beginning, and with the self: ““In the beginning, I would like to entrust myself to words that, were it possible, would be naked” (*The Animal* 1).

Although it is certainly possible to read the address recorded in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* [*L’Animal que donc je suis*] as a continuation of Derrida’s lifelong deconstructive project, and although many scholars have done so to productive effect, I would like to introduce this dissertation on “spectral animals” by reading Derrida’s treatment of the animal as a radical break from his earlier work. The break, I will show, serves to correct a problem that builds throughout Derrida’s life and culminates with his treatment of the specter [*spectre*] in 1993’s *Specters of Marx*. This problem is a unilateral placing of the Other *before* the self, betraying a linear sequential logic that merely reframes the hierarchies that Derrida views as responsible for metaphysical violence rather than challenging them. It is only in his autobiographical address on the animal that he grants the self a possibility of priority in a manner that disrupts sequential hierarchies altogether. This is a priority of the self *with* rather than *before* the other.

Specters and animals alike haunt Derrida throughout his life, but only in the decade or so before his death in 2004 does he treat them, albeit as largely disparate figures, with enough philosophical rigor to point the way toward their potential hybridization, a hybridization that I believe must be considered as we enter the 2020s, a task that this dissertation undertakes through its readings of contemporary Anglophone and Francophone narratives in the chapters that follow. Spectrality, formulated by Derrida as a universal condition of being that humans have come more and more to recognize in the virtual spaces of technical imagery (and the challenges these spaces pose to stable notions of truth), offers the promise of access to what Mark Fisher calls “lost futures” (*Ghosts of my Life* 26). How might reformulating the autobiographical strategies we use to describe ourselves and the species to which we belong allow us to realize the spectral presence of the animals already lost to the ongoing extinction event? How might contemporary literary responses to this spectral presence grant us access to futures where we can prevent further loss of animal—and human—life?

I begin by critiquing the spectral animal known as Derrida himself, the selfsame subject that poses the philosopher so much trouble until the end of his life. First, I track how a disempowered approach to the self limits some of Derrida’s most potent early challenges to what he frequently calls the “metaphysics of presence” (*Writing and Difference* 60; *Of Grammatology* 22), including his engagements with Foucault and Levinas and, later, his deconstruction of autobiography. Next, I discuss how the thematics of hauntology and spectrality emerge in response to political discourses that pose a challenge for the Other-directed thinking of deconstruction. Finally, I explain how Derrida’s address on the autobiographical animal allows him to move beyond both the presupposed opposition between self and Other and the sequential hierarchy that underlies this opposition. I then clarify the focus and stakes of this dissertation by

comparing the rectification that takes place in Derrida's work with the rectification that contemporary authors allow us to introduce into our autobiographical relations with ourselves and with the nonhuman world.

I. The Biography of the Cogito, or the Maddening First Philosophy of the Self

In recognition of the violence that Derrida rightfully attributes to grand biographical narratives that speak for an absent Other ("Jacques Derrida On Biography"), I will resist, for the most part, gestures that assign a single, stable structure to Derrida's life. Nonetheless, in locating a certain *discomfort* with the self that emerges in some of Derrida's more problematic texts, I think it is necessary to show that others have noticed this discomfort, and that more than one of these scholars have done so in their attempts to forge just such a biographical structure.

Biographers Jason Powell, Benoît Peeters, and Peter Salmon have all underscored the circumstances of Derrida's early psychosocial development in childhood. They contend, I believe correctly, that the force of deconstruction and its radical philosophy of aporetic openness to the Other could not have arisen without young Derrida's divided experiences of his identity in French Algeria, particularly during the years of Vichy occupation. "Writing the life of Jacques Derrida," writes Peeters, "means writing the story of a Jewish boy from Algiers, excluded from school at the age of twelve, who became the French philosopher whose works have been the most widely translated throughout the world; the story of a fragile and tormented man who, to the end of his life, continued to see himself as 'rejected' by the French university system" (3).

However, beyond these external sources of exclusion and alienation, which alone might have inspired Derrida to challenge institutional systems of law and logocentrism, one must also consider the acts of violence Derrida committed against himself in his own name: for example, his replacement of his given name "Jackie" with the less "American," "more French and more

intellectual” “Jacques” (Powell 12). One could also wonder whether Derrida struggled to respond to a certain shame he may have felt upon leaving El-Biar and joining the elite circles of the ENS. “It was at this stage of life,” writes Powell, “that Derrida entered into the life of self-determination, and he seems to have found it very difficult to come to terms with” (23). Equally crucial to Derrida’s struggle to accept “the life of self-determination” seems to be the struggle to see himself as the claimant to an individual “life” at all; according to Powell, Derrida “was to suspect throughout his life that he was merely a replacement or ‘supplement’ for the dead brother,” Paul, who died soon before Jacques’s birth (11).

But since I take seriously Derrida’s claim that “the one who reads a text by a philosopher, for example a tiny paragraph, and interprets it in a rigorous, inventive, and powerfully deciphering fashion, is more of a real biographer than the one who knows the whole story” (“Jacques Derrida on Biography”), I will refrain from lingering on “the whole story” and attempt to deconstruct a problematic treatment of self-determination that arises early in Derrida’s career, toward the end of his 1963 response to Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*, “Cogito and the History of Madness.”

The core of Derrida’s argument in this essay, which hinges on Foucault’s (mis)reading of Descartes’s *Meditations*, is not the source of the problem. As Slavoj Žižek has summarized, Derrida brilliantly demonstrates how the philosophical method of the Cogito inscribes madness into itself as “ex-timacy” rather than excluding it as “direct externality” (*Less Than Nothing* 333). “The difference [between the two thinkers] is that, for Foucault, the cogito is grounded in the exclusion of madness, while, for Derrida, the cogito itself can only emerge through a “mad” hyperbole (universalized doubt), and remains marked by this excess” (328). And Derrida is right; madness functions as a “hyperbolical” limit-case for Descartes. As Derrida puts this at his most

succinct: “Whether I am mad or not, *Cogito, sum*” (*Writing and Difference* 56). The knowledge of the self, he goes on to elaborate, is “a zero point,” “an impenetrable point of certainty.” The problem with this essay, rather, lies in the sequential logic whereby he places this “zero point” *after* “a precomprehension of the infinite and undetermined totality” that constitutes a world supposedly exterior to the *ego* of the *ego cogito*:

Invulnerable to all determined opposition between reason and unreason, [the zero point of the Cogito] is the point starting from which the history of the determined forms of this opposition, this opened or broken-off dialogue, can appear as such and be stated. It is the impenetrable point of certainty in which the possibility of Foucault's narration, as well as of the narration of the totality, or rather of all the determined forms of the exchanges between reason and madness are embedded. It is the point at which the project of thinking this totality by escaping it is embedded. By escaping it: that is to say, by exceeding the totality, which—within existence—is possible only in the direction of infinity or nothingness; for even if the totality of what I think is imbued with falsehood or madness, even if the totality of the world does not exist, even if nonmeaning has invaded the totality of the world, up to and including the very contents of my thought, I still think, I am while I think. Even if I do not in fact grasp the totality, if I neither understand nor embrace it, I still formulate the project of doing so, and this project is meaningful in such a way that it can be defined only in relation to a precomprehension of the infinite and undetermined totality. This is why, by virtue of this margin of the possible, the principled, and the meaningful, which exceeds all that is real, factual, and existent, this project is mad, and acknowledges madness as its liberty and its very possibility. (56)

It is in *Of Grammatology* where Derrida stakes his philosophical career in opposition to a logocentric “Western tradition” of metaphysics according to which “the order of the signified is never contemporary, is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel—discrepant by the time of a breath—from the order of the signifier” (18). It is ironic, then, that Derrida’s explication of the *cogito* assigns sequential primacy to an infinite “madness” that is signified by, precomprehended by, the thinking self that signifies its meaning as thought.

Derrida’s rhetoric of “totality” and “infinity” likely comes from the influence of Emmanuel Levinas, whose book *Totality and Infinity* is the subject of “Violence and Metaphysics,” a 1964 essay that would later be published alongside “Cogito and the History of

Madness” in 1967’s *Writing and Difference*. Derrida’s lifelong interest in our responsibility to others emerges, at least in part, from his engagement with Levinas’s claim that philosophy and ethics originate in the face-to-face encounter with the other. The face of the other marks an excess, an infinite alterity from which the self is separated, at which point the “metaphysical desire...toward the *absolutely other*,” the “desire for the invisible” (Levinas 33), emerges. Taking a stance that is surprising in light of his later openness to alterity, Derrida challenges the possibility of a philosophy based on the face of the other as a “positive” representation of infinite alterity: “The positive Infinity (God)—if these words are meaningful—cannot be infinitely Other. If one thinks, as Levinas does, that positive Infinity tolerates, or even requires, infinite alterity, then one must renounce all language, and first of all the words infinite and other. Infinity cannot be understood as Other except in the form of the in-finite” (*Writing* 114).

However, although Derrida *says* that his dispute is with a philosophy of infinite alterity, what he truly seems to be resisting is a philosophy of infinite selfhood, the selfhood that, for Levinas, is necessary for infinity to be signified as alterity in the first place. As Levinas writes, “alterity is possible only starting from me” (40). The alterity is encountered *as* thought interior to the self. By subordinating the encounter with alterity to a thinking self, a self that is therefore as infinite and undetermined as the alterity it encounters, Levinas assigns primacy to a *cogito* that, for Derrida, comes *after* nonmeaning.

While this may seem to pit Levinas against Heidegger (and therefore against Derrida), insofar as Heidegger contests the Cartesian formulation of *cogito ergo sum* for its failure to attend to the ground of *being* itself, it simply points to the self’s inextricable participation in the contemporaneous movements of retention and protention that Heidegger, drawing on Husserl, assigns to *Dasein*. Furthermore, it is a mistake to say that, for Levinas, selfhood simply comes

before alterity. Rather, selfhood and one's own thought is *and is not* the infinite that precedes it and from which it is separate: "Separation is not reflected in thought, but produced by it. For in it the After or Effect"—i.e. thought, the ego—"conditions the Before or the Cause"—the absolute, the Other. And because of this "positive event" that is the "condition[ing]", one cannot simply say that alterity precedes the self either. When Descartes infers the infinite from the *cogito*, writes Levinas, "The cause of being is thought or known by its effect as though it were posterior to its effect...But this illusion is not unfounded; it constitutes a positive event. The posteriority of the anterior—an inversion logically absurd—is produced, one would say, only by memory or by thought" (Levinas 54). The "separation" we experience between the ego and the infinite, therefore, is responsible for the separation between past, present, and future.

"The idea of Infinity," writes Levinas, "implies the separation of the same with regard to the other, but this separation cannot rest on an opposition to the other which would be purely anti-thetical" (53). Derrida seems to recognize this when he suggests that the "division between the same and the other" as conceived by Levinas must "suppose, at very least, that the same is the other's other, and the other the same as oneself" (*Writing* 127). But when he explains the *cogito* to Foucault, he does so by taking seriously Descartes's own rhetoric of the thinking self's opposition to an "evil genius." The fiction of a primordial evil that precedes and underlies the goodness of the *cogito* becomes a necessary one, if not an absolute truth for Derrida:

This is why [the project of the Cogito] is not human, in the sense of anthropological factuality, but is rather metaphysical and demonic: it first awakens to itself in its war with the demon, the evil genius of nonmeaning, by pitting itself against the strength of the evil genius, and by resisting him through reduction of the natural man within itself. In this sense, nothing is less reassuring than the Cogito at its proper and inaugural moment. (56)

Not only is the "nonmeaning" of alterity unequivocally precedent to the self in Derrida's formulation; it is also evil, something to be opposed. But this opposition to alterity is reliant,

ironically, on an opposition to the self: the self who comes before thought and before speech, the self who is absolutely other. This, for Derrida, is the self before its entrance to “philosophical discourse”:

Foucault's interpretation seems to me illuminating from the moment when the Cogito must reflect and proffer itself in an organized philosophical discourse. That is, almost always. For if the Cogito is valid even for the madman, to be mad—if, once more, this expression has a singular philosophical meaning, which I do not believe: it simply says the other of each determined form of the logos—is not to be able to reflect and to say the Cogito, that is, not to be able to make the Cogito appear as such for an other; an other who may be myself. (58)

I am only insofar as I am at war with an evil genius. Furthermore, I am at war with myself *as* evil genius. Were to I remain silent, with myself as a self and not as another, I would be mad. And even once I have spoken, I must continue to speak, or else the evil-genius-that-I-am will come back. Being myself is evil, and mad, and comes first; thinking and speaking for another (even “an other who may be myself”) is good, and sane, and comes second. Derrida attempts to maneuver his way out of the Cartesian (or even more-than-Cartesian) equation he has just made between madness and “demonic hyperbole” by saying he “do[es] not believe” in “a singular philosophical meaning” for “madness,” but all he does here is obfuscate the singular meaning *he himself* has just assigned to the word. There is, in other words, a fundamental lack of responsibility for and to the self here. I do not ascribe to this lack of *responsibility*, which is to say the lack of a capacity for a *response*, any sense of a moral failing, as conventional usage of the word might suggest; rather, I refer to a failure to treat the self as worthy of more than an automatic *reaction*, for this is the word Derrida later guards in opposition (albeit a deconstructed opposition) to the *response* when he reads Lacan during his address on the animal.

It is this lack of responsibility, this reactivity to the self, that follows Derrida throughout his career, that reaches a point of contradiction and makes itself clear as a void in Derrida’s

thought with *Spectres of Marx*, and that he only manages to answer in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. This void manifests as a refusal to think outside of a linear time that opposes past and future.

II. Inadequate Autobiographies: Calls That Cannot Be Answered

One would be justified at this point to ask, how could Derrida have possibly been irresponsible to the self? Surely, does his passionate interest in autobiography throughout his career not reveal a clear responsibility to the self? From *Glas* to *The Post Card* to “Circumfession,” Derrida indeed seems to engage in a practice of drawing on his own experiences for the purposes of understanding the self’s role in relation to otherness. Indeed, when asked in a 1984 interview to identify his work under the rubric of a single genre, Derrida names “autobiography” as the “least inadequate name” (““This Strange Institution Called Literature”” 34). Derrida acknowledges that his practice serves to deconstruct the self-presence of *autos*, to show how an autobiographical deconstruction of the self (or, as he calls the autobiographical at various times to underscore the genre’s inherent attunement to the “ear of the other,” “otobiographical”) exemplifies what he elsewhere identifies as deconstruction’s affirmative power, its “positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it” (“Deconstruction and the Other” 118). But the deconstruction of autobiographical practices is not the problem.

The problem, rather, is that Derrida consistently resists practicing autobiography on its own terms, which is to say the writing of the self in response to oneself. He rejects this writing of the self in response to oneself, *a priori*, as the attempt to manifest an impossible self-presence. This is why, even in “Circumfession,” the text that manifests to the greatest extent Derrida’s

capacity for self-reflection, he refuses to manifest this capacity without allowing another author to determine Derrida's text for him – in this case, Geoff Bennington, who writes the main body of the 1993 volume *Jacques Derrida* where "Circumfession" appears as a footnote running across hundreds of pages, and to whom Derrida refers ambiguously as G., making it clear that, for Derrida, writing for *an other* is at once writing for *the Other*, God (as well as his then-recently-deceased mother, Georgette Safar): "I posthume as I breathe, which is not very probable, the improbable in my life, that's the rule I'd like to follow and which in the end arbitrates the duel between what I am writing and what G. will have written up there" (Bennington and Derrida 26).

Here again, we find the language of conflict, perhaps the same "duel" that the Cogito must wage with a demonic, hyperbolic, evil genius. Throughout his critical examinations and practices of autobiography, Derrida shows his belief that he can win the duel by putting alterity first, before the self. As he writes to an unnamed beloved in *The Post Card*, "And just as you often give me the word without knowing it, again it is you who are writing the history, it is you who are dictating while at the same time I apply myself chewing on my tongue, letter after letter, without ever turning around" (13). Yet this attempt to put the second person first goes against what Derrida identifies as the very nature of the Cogito:

the act of the Cogito, at the hyperbolic moment when it pits itself against madness, or rather lets itself be pitted against madness, must be repeated and distinguished from the language or the deductive system in which Descartes must inscribe it as soon as he proposes it for apprehension and communication, that is, as soon as he reflects the Cogito for the other, *which means for oneself*. It is through this relationship to the other as *an other self* that meaning reassures itself against madness and nonmeaning (*Writing and Difference* 59, italics mine).

I agree, then, with some of the critiques Thea Bellou makes in her 2013 book, *Derrida's Deconstruction of the Subject*. Deconstruction may indeed be the affirmative response to the

other's call, but exactly "Who answers the call of the other becomes a vexing and unresolved question. Derrida does not consider the possibility of a reflective (as against an unreflective) answer to the call of the other." Moreover, Derrida's attempts to privilege otherness often risk reinscribing the very metaphysics of presence he tries to subvert: "When the self becomes subject to the demands of the other, what results can only be an ethics of submission. The absolute other increasingly resembles the absolute subject of Western metaphysics; and if so, then Derrida effects merely a transference of power rather than a radical break with the metaphysical residues of the logos" (Bellou 220).

Reviewer Kevin Inston claims that Bellou's critique lacks subtlety, "overlooking Derrida's analysis of the undecidability of the self-other relation. Derrida does not invert the power structure of that relation...but analyses how self and other mutually inhabit one another while remaining irreducible to one another." On this point, I agree completely, but Inston goes on to say, "The self cannot move outside itself to embrace otherness fully: its understanding of the other is always mediated by its own experiences. For the same reason, it cannot achieve self-presence, remaining permanently marked by an alterity which exceeds it" (Inston 111). Derrida consistently proves the excess of alterity determining the self, but it is not until "Circumfession" that he shows any great interest in the mediating role played by the self's "own experiences," and it is not until his address on the animal that he even acknowledges the potential ethical value of placing these experiences first. Furthermore, it is not until this late period in his life that "undecidability" comes to bear explicitly on "the self-other relation." And in order to appreciate what Derrida can teach us about this undecidability, one must understand what catalyzes its appearance in its work: it is, unsurprisingly, a call—the call to politics Derrida might have felt most urgently in 1989, when the fall of the Berlin Wall coincided, roughly, with the publication

in English of Victor Farias's *Heidegger and Nazism*. One can also point, as Powell does in his biography, more generally to a transitional period in Derrida's work between 1987 and 1993, beginning with *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* and culminating in *Specters of Marx*, works born of a need to respond to a growing celebrity and the interest, particularly among American academics, in Derrida's politics. Although Derrida excoriates Farias's book, and although Derrida is generally skeptical of attempts to equate the whole of Heidegger's philosophy with the ideology of National Socialism, the implication that Derrida is somehow complicit in Nazi ideas, combined with the rise of a Fukuyaman celebration of liberal capitalism and the so-called "end of history," pressures Derrida to identify himself more explicitly in relation to leftist political discourse. As Derrida works his way during these years through themes of friendship, cosmopolitanism, and messianicity, he moves, little by little, sometimes in fits and starts, toward a philosophy not only of the Other but of the self in its relation to alterity, an alterity within the self that he conceives first through the specter and then through the animal.

III. Unavoidable Metaphysics and the *Revenance* of Spirit

Before I discuss *Specters of Marx*, the book that oscillates madly between some of the greatest triumphs and the greatest failures in Derrida's career, I should first note the deconstruction of spirit [*Geist*] in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Derrida persuasively argues that Heidegger "failed to avoid what he knew he ought to avoid"—namely, the attribution of a positive, teleological content to *Geist* (2). Whereas the Heidegger of 1927's *Sein und Zeit* critiques the efforts of philosophers like Descartes, Hegel, and Husserl to locate *Geist* in the movements of human consciousness and history, Heidegger's 1933 *Rectorship Address* in some sense endorses a subjectivist metaphysics of presence by appealing to a "spiritual world"

(*geistige Welt*) proper to the German people. Heidegger therefore “capitalizes on the worst, that is on both evils at once: the sanctioning of nazism, and the gesture that is still metaphysical” (40). As Derrida shows, one can infer this eventual failure “to avoid” even in *Sein und Zeit*, where Heidegger, despite his critiques of the word, “takes up the values and the word “spirit,” simply *in quotation marks*” (23, italics Derrida’s). *Dasein*, admits Heidegger, is “spiritual” [*geistig*], albeit in quotes. As “a sort of drape, a veil or a curtain” allowing for a certain staging of spirit, the quotation marks allow a metaphysics of *Geist*, “the *Geist* of *Geist*,” to return as a *spectral* “double” haunting Heidegger’s philosophy:

Geist is always haunted by its *Geist*: a spirit, or in other words, in French [and English] as in German, a phantom, always surprises by returning to be the other’s ventriloquist. Metaphysics always returns, I mean in the sense of a *revenant* [ghost], and *Geist* is the most fatal figure of this *revenance* [returning, haunting]. Of the double which can never be separated from the single. Is this not what Heidegger will never finally be able to avoid [*vermeiden*], the unavoidable itself—spirit’s double, *Geist* as the *Geist* of *Geist*, spirit as spirit of the spirit which always comes with its double? Spirit is its double. (40-41)

Derrida’s reading of Heidegger is compelling and convincing, but is he not inviting a future reader to deconstruct Derrida’s own lifelong quest to “avoid” metaphysics? If metaphysics “always returns,” and if it does so “in the sense of a *revenant*,” then perhaps we ought to look at this very word to locate where Derrida gives in to an “unavoidable” metaphysical gesture.

The logic of return and haunting recalls Derrida’s persistent interest in Nietzsche, whose own thinking of the relationship between *Geist* and the soul [*Seele*] comes up late in *Of Spirit*. Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal recurrence is implicit in Derrida’s search for “another thinking of the spiritual” in Heidegger’s later work, one that will go beyond “the Platonic-Christian, metaphysical or onto-theological determination of the spiritual (*geistig*)” (12). Heidegger arrives at this other thought, Derrida claims, in 1953, when, through a reading of George Trakl’s poetry, he opposes the meaning of *geistlich* to that of *geistig*. The *Geist* of Trakl’s “spiritual night”

[*geistliche Nacht*] is a spirit of “flame” that “inflames *itself*”: “Spirit is flame. A flame which inflames, or which inflames *itself*: both at once, the one and the other, the one the other” (84).

Derrida then closes his book by imagining “a scene between Heidegger and certain Christian theologians,” these latter pointing out the compatibility between their own views (along with the views of Hebrew mystics who, Derrida observes, conceived of a spiritual fire as *ruah*) and Heidegger’s thinking of spirit as an “abyssal” “origin-heterogeneous” repetition, “the path of a repetition which crosses the path of the entirely other,” an entirely other that “announces itself in the most rigorous repetition”:

“Yes, precisely,” his interlocutors would then reply, “that’s just what we’re saying, at the same crossing of paths, and these paths would be equally but otherwise circular...The misunderstanding is that you hear us better than you think or pretend to think. In any case...it’s enough to keep talking, not to interrupt—between the poet and you, which means just as much between you and us—this *Zwiesprache*. It’s enough not to interrupt the colloquium, even when it is already late. The spirit which keeps watch in returning [*en revenant*, as a ghost] will always do the rest. Through flame or ash, but as the entirely other, inevitably.” (113)

The imagined reconciliation is beautiful, but does thinking spirit in terms of the *revenant*, “the entirely other,” an otherness that returns in “equally but otherwise circular” repetition, truly approach that radically other thinking Derrida seeks? Derrida, breaking from the language of Heidegger’s text, claims he introduces the figure of the *revenant*

out of fidelity to what, in Heidegger’s text, hears the coming and going of [Trakl’s] dead man as a coming back [*revenir*] from night to dawn, and finally as the returning [*revenir*] of a spirit. To comprehend this revenance which goes towards a younger morning, to understand that the end of “*verwesenden Geschlechtes*” of the decomposing species precedes the beginning, that death comes before birth, and the “later” before the “earlier,” it is necessary to arrive, precisely, at a more originary essence of time; to return “before” the interpretation of time which has ruled over our representation at least since Aristotle. (91)

But is it enough simply to invert the order of the end and the beginning? To assert the primacy of death over life? To put the “later” before the “earlier”? To put the “entirely other” before the

self? Is this not still a form of “succession, dimension for a quantitative or qualitative calculation of duration” that forces us to remain “prisoners of the Aristotelian *representation* of time” (92)? Is this not just the *representation* of a certain linear *order*, an order that may have been (or at least should have been) the true object of Foucault’s historicist critique all those years earlier, but which misses Derrida’s analysis of Foucault entirely?

What if Derrida had started from the notion that he himself was the fire of spirit? Would this have forced him to endorse a metaphysics of presence? Or might it have encouraged him to think recurrence differently,¹ in a manner that dispensed with the dualism he inserted between himself and a monolithic representation of all philosophy prior to him, the dualism between presence and absence, self and other, second and first?² The good news, I believe, is that Derrida allows us to imagine his answers to such questions by way of his hauntology in *Spectres of Marx*. The less good news, however, is that he does not seem to know he is answering such questions.

IV. Derrida’s Spectrality: The Life That Comes Back to the Living?

In “Otobiographies,” Derrida writes that “to be dead means that” nothing “can *ever* return again to the bearer of the name...What returns to the name never returns to the living.” He

¹ My point here, though I may not mention clones in my reading of Derrida’s phantoms, is at least adjacent to that of Catherine Malabou, who searches for “a reading of Nietzsche...that would refuse to turn difference into its guiding thread... leaving open the possibility of a new understanding of the eternal return, that is to say also of life, that would substitute synthesis for difference, and the equally unsettling figure of the *clone* for that of the phantom” (28)?

² I am not the first to suggest that Derrida homogenizes the “other” of all preceding philosophy in an effort to emphasize the novelty of his approach. Žižek implicates Derrida in “a process of violent simplification (reduction, obliteration) which occurs with the rise of the New: in order to assert something radically New, the entire past, with all its inconsistencies, has to be reduced to some basic defining feature (“ metaphysics,” “mythical thought,” “ideology”...)...the past as a whole is totalized as “phallogocentrism” or “metaphysics of presence,” which—it can be argued—is secretly modeled upon Husserl.

then says, quite programmatically, “Nothing ever comes back to the living” (7). Is he sure about this?

There is more to say about *Of Spirit*, particularly in relation to how Derrida deconstructs Heidegger’s “poor in world [*weltarm*]” animals, but I will leave that reading aside until later. For now, I want to try to locate an altogether different thinking of recurrence, return, and revenance at work in Derrida’s hauntological notion of the “specter” [*spectre*], described in *Specters of Marx* and, to a lesser but still important degree, Derrida’s collaboration with Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*. Derrida’s formulation of hauntology and the spectral nature of “the event,” I believe, is one of the greatest triumphs and the greatest openings toward the future his philosophy has to offer. The opening, however, is in part coterminous with the formulation’s incompleteness and insufficiency, failures that I will discuss shortly.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida engages in a dialogue with the Communist “specter” announced in the first sentence of Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto*. Despite the intentions of those like Fukuyama who seek to “conjure away” Marxism, one can never dispense with ghosts; specters always come back, as Derrida reminds us in his playful reading of *Hamlet*. In order to speak with specters, to reveal their potentialities, one needs not ontology but rather “a *hauntology*. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the “to be,” assuming that it is a matter of Being in the “to be or not to be,” but nothing is less certain). It would harbor within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves” (10). What is so revolutionary about Derrida’s hauntological turn here, I believe, is a shift in his interpretation of *revenance* from the mere inversion of a sequential logic separating the living and the dead to the possibility of a simultaneity, a conjunctive bridging of “first” and “last”:

Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. (10)

When one thinks in these terms, when one admits that the specter has a certain presence, it suddenly becomes possible for *everything* to return to the living. If this presence does not present itself *to us* in its entirety, if it remains “out of joint” with our perception in the way time is “out of joint” for Hamlet, it is because the specter contaminates us. The disjunction inheres in the conjunction. It is *and* is not us. Derrida admits as much in the book’s final lines: “Can one, in order to question it, address oneself to a ghost? To whom? To him? To it...The question deserves perhaps to be put the other way: Could one *address oneself in general* if already some ghost did not come back?” To think about the “future,” Derrida suggests, one must “learn to live by learning...how to talk with” the specter, “how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet” (221). Every time one speaks, one gives speech to the specter *in oneself*. The specter is a part of the self. Finally, Derrida seems to have acknowledged the first injunction of the Cogito, an injunction he emphasizes to Foucault: One must address the other in *oneself* before speaking to an Other.

One also finds a conjunctive logic of simultaneity at work a few years later in *Echographies of Television*, where Derrida defines the specter to Stiegler as that which is “of the visible, but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood...A specter is both visible *and* invisible, both phenomenal *and* nonphenomenal: a trace that

marks the presence with its absence in advance” (116-117, emphasis mine). Derrida therefore affords a certain reality and currency to that which is *virtual* but not yet or no longer *actual*.

Nevertheless, Derrida does not go as far as he could have in the final lines of *Specters*. He does not quite say, “I am a specter,” nor even, “I am and am not a specter.” A certain hesitancy in announcing the self, in announcing what is proper to the self, still haunts him. And one notices an important difference takes place in the years between *Specters* and *Echographies*. Whereas the latter Derrida describes the specter as “first and foremost something visible” (Derrida and Stiegler 116), the earlier Derrida parses the significance of specter, *spectre*, as “spectrum,” defining the specter merely as “the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains...beyond the phenomenon or beyond being” (*Specters* 125). Moreover, although Derrida first seems certain that “a specter is always a *revenant*” (*Specters* 11), he will later change his mind about this, telling Stiegler the specter is only “like a ghost [*un revenant*]...And what happens with spectrality, with phantomality – and not necessarily with coming-back [*revenance*] – is that something becomes almost visible which is visible only insofar as it is not visible in flesh and blood. It is a night visibility...It incarnates in a night body, it radiates a night light...We are already specters of a “televised”” (115). And finally, whereas the Derrida of 1993 affords a certain omnipotence to the specter, emphasizing what he calls the “*visor effect*,” according to which “we do not see who looks at us” (6) and “feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross”(7), the Derrida of 1996, in his engagement with the photographic “spectrum” as conceived by Barthes, cannot avoid engaging with a certain presence of the photographic object and therefore implying a certain power of access and awareness on the part of the *spectator*.

What explains this later revelation of the specter's phenomenality and visibility—partial, admittedly, but real all the same? Could it be that Derrida, in reconciling the significance of the *spectrum* with that of the *specter*, recognizes a certain insufficiency in his initial explanation of hauntology? By 1996, a growing number of academic voices react to *Specters of Marx* with skepticism, pointing out its lack of a clear political project and the tepid, noncommittal nature of Derrida's affiliation with Marx or Marxism. It is at least in part these challenges, I believe, that provoke Derrida not only to reframe his definition of the spectral but to do so in reference to a specific domain of contemporary culture: the televisual and the technical.

V. Messianism Without Content, or a Self Without Deconstruction?

One can find some of the most important contemporary critical responses to *Specters of Marx* in the 1999 collection *Ghostly Demarcations*, edited by Michael Sprinker. The harshest criticism tends to focus on a certain doublespeak in Derrida's reading of Marx. On the one hand, his hauntological reading of *The German Ideology* suggests that Marx's ontological attempt to do away with Stirner's ghosts undermines the spectral potentials announced in the first sentence of *The Communist Manifesto*, potentials Derrida at least appears to want to realize in his critique of a post-Cold War neoliberal "Holy Alliance." On the other hand, Derrida is eager to critique any homogenous representations of Marxist politics while refusing to advance any concrete objectives or practices that would help his audience to conjure the "certain spirit of Marxism" to which he claims deconstruction "has remained faithful" (*Specters* 95). As Antonio Negri writes, Derrida "rightly" "uses" the changing "phenomenology" of the spectralized postmodern era to "criticize the horizon of Marxist ontology...but he does so in an inconsequential manner, refusing to change the ontology itself or to reconstruct it according to the standard set by the

phenomenological change” (Negri 13). Gayatri Spivak (whose review of *Specters* does not appear in *Ghostly Demarcations* but nonetheless seems to have drawn the most ire from Derrida in “Marx and Sons,” the essay he addresses to his critics at the end of the collection) draws attention to “Derrida’s seeming refusal to honor the difference between commercial and industrial capital” (Spivak 65); she locates, correctly in my view, an uncharacteristically sloppy neglect of “labor-power” in Derrida’s deconstruction of use-value and exchange-value: “So committed is he...to the “ontological” Marx that the skeleton key slips from fingers that cannot grasp” (77). Steven Shaviro notes something similar in a more recent review when he contends that Derrida seems to choose to ignore “the already-deconstructive implications of Marx’s own categories” (Shaviro, “Specters of Marx”).³

In all fairness, Derrida does offer at least two openings to future readers who are more interested in a hauntological Marxism than he seems to be. One of these is in his call for “a New International...without coordination, without party, without country, without national community (International before, across, and beyond any national determination), without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class” (106-107). But I at least partly agree with Terry Eagleton, whose review, perhaps the most bellicose published in Sprinker’s collection, mocks this idea’s total detachment from the Marxist conception of class struggle, dismissing it as “without organization, without ontology, without method, without apparatus” (87). Indeed, without any clear articulation of who would belong to a New International or what its goals might be, Derrida seems to be claiming ownership to a “spirit of Marxism” that only he understands—ironic, given

³ Shaviro writes, “Derrida keeps on reminding us that the underlying problem is the one of which specters we are dealing with; but at the end of his analysis he ignores his own warning, in favor of just saying that Marx is trying to exorcise ghosts, and that he can never really accomplish this, and that therefore all his concepts (use- and exchange-value, commodity and surplus value) are compromised and should not be retained. It’s a lame and weak conclusion, after so much textual and conceptual exegesis” (“Specters of Marx”).

his chastisements of Spivak's "proprietary" attitude toward Marx ("Marx and Sons" 223). Moreover, for all of Derrida's focus on "inheritance" and responsibility to the Other, he seems, as the selective and sloppy reading of Marx shows, all too willing to discard the most useful elements of the concepts he claims to inherit. One can also see this tendency, I believe, in the second opening to the future Derrida offers, when he converts Walter Benjamin's notion of "weak messianic power" into a "messianism without content" (*Specters* 82) or a "messianic without messianism" (74). After all, a faint but nonetheless omnipresent hope for redemption ("every second of time was the strait gate through which Messiah might enter" (Benjamin 397)) offers infinitely more opportunity for a response than none at all.

But I would argue that the appeal to messianicity in the first place is unnecessary, particularly when one enters into conversation with a thinker who famously calls religion "the opium of the people" (Marx 1). Derrida acknowledges in "Marx & Sons" that many may wonder "why" Derrida does "not describe the universal structure in question *without even mentioning* the messianic" (254). His twofold excuse is that, "On the one hand, this word (messianic)...has merely rhetorical or pedagogical value" (254), but that, "on the other hand, [he finds] it hard to decide whether messianicity without messianism (*qua* universal structure) precedes and conditions every determinate, historical figure of messianism" (including, it is implied, Marx and Marxism) (255). It is ironic that Derrida, critical of universality throughout his life, invokes a messianic "universal structure" (a structure that precedes and determines all historicity of messianism!) to assert that *his* privileged sense of messianicity "remains undeconstructible because the movement of any deconstruction presupposes it – not as a ground of certainty, the firm ground of a *cogito*...but in line with another modality" (253). This other modality is at once "a vulnerability or a kind of absolute powerlessness" and "a power...the attractive, invincible

élan or affirmation of an unpredictable future-to-come (or even of a past-to-come-again), the experience of the non-present, of the non-living present in the living present (of the spectral)” (254). But as the Derrida of 1963 would know, absolute powerlessness without the *cogito* is madness, submission to a power that may as well be the evil genius of illusion. The “‘messianic without messianism’ appeared to [Derrida] well suited to translating [the] difference between faith [in a future-to-come] and religion,” but the kind of messianic faith Derrida wants to proselytize, a faith with no presence, is nothing but a faith in the world as it already is.

Fredric Jameson, the most generous reader of *Specters* in Sprinker’s collection, tries to rehabilitate Derrida’s contentless messianicity, pointing to the provocative, if maddeningly vague, passage on technics near the book’s end, where Derrida rightly points out that spectrality “obliges us more than ever to think the virtualization of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever...from opposing presence to its representation...the living to the living-dead of its ghosts. It obliges us to think, from there, another space for democracy. For democracy-to-come and thus for justice” (212). But this democracy-to-come depends on the advent of an event that, as Derrida makes no point in concealing, can never in fact happen precisely because it is “messianic”: “In the virtual space of all the tele-technosciences, in the general dis-location to which our time is destined—as are from now on the places of lovers, families, nations—the messianic trembles on the edge of this event itself. It is this hesitation, it has no other vibration, it does not “live” otherwise, but it would no longer be messianic if it stopped hesitating” (213). This infinite hesitation somehow “does not paralyze any decision, any affirmation, any responsibility. On the contrary, it grants them their elementary condition. It is their very experience” (213).

There are only two ways that this can make sense: either one must appeal to one or more of the many determinate forms of external, ideological messianism, against which Derrida is adamant to distinguish himself, *or* one must accept that this inevitable tendency toward and “experience” of “affirmation” in fact resides in the very self at the heart of this experience. Messianicity without messianism *requires* the self and the cogito. An intervention in the technical simulacrum requires the intervention of a user. Derrida, unfortunately, does not think about users, perhaps because they would strike him as too determinate.

There are, nonetheless, signs that Derrida knows he is engaging in a private dialogue and treading on a personal ground. Although Derrida does not exactly endorse Jameson’s attempts to situate Derrida’s conception of messianicity within a more determinate discourse of Jewish messianism that, like Benjamin’s, “does not deploy a linear idea of the future” (the same linearity that I argue is difficult to dispel whenever Derrida speaks of *revenance*) (Jameson 62), he admits that “It may be that what I am attempting to do tends in that direction” (250). He then says he is “not at all sure” of this, but he clarifies his position by saying that, “Involved this time...would be a waiting without waiting, a waiting whose horizon is, as it were, punctured by the event (which is waited for *without* being awaited); we would have to do with a waiting for an event, for someone or something that, in order to happen or 'arrive', must exceed and surprise every determinant anticipation” (251). Derrida cannot, in fact, explain his sense of messianicity without appealing to a “we,” an a priori first-person that is, in its indeterminacy, the origin of the event itself.

Derrida closes “Marx & Sons” with another, more self-aware moment of introspection. He takes issue with Antonio Negri’s search for an “ontology” but, addressing Negri’s invocation of Spinoza, suggests that he and Negri could use the word as “a shibboleth, which only pretends

to mean what the word ‘ontology’ has always meant. In that case we could, between us, use a coded language, like Marranos.” As Derrida notes, this reference to Spinoza’s (and, more playfully, Marx’s) “Marrano” identity calls back to other texts where Derrida presents himself, “as seriously as can be imagined...as a sort of Marrano” (261). He closes the essay with these thoughts: “Claims have also been advanced to the effect that the question of marranism was recently closed for good. I don’t believe it for a second. There are still sons - and daughters - who, unbeknownst to themselves, incarnate or metempsychosize the ventriloquist specters of their ancestors” (262). At first glance, this seems to be a rather unremarkable reminder of spectral *revenance*, the present non-presence of one’s predecessors. But what is striking is the reference to “metempsychosis,” the transmigration of souls into new bodies. Was Derrida aware when he wrote this line that certain mythic accounts of metempsychosis allow for souls to migrate not only into bodies that have just been born but bodies that are already living? Was he thinking, for instance, of the Lurianic distinction between *gilgul* on the one hand and *ibbur* or *dybbuk* on the other?⁴ Can one find in this line an acknowledgment, even an unintended one, that the dead can, in fact, present themselves to the living?

VI. Derrida’s Reconciliation with the Animal That Therefore He Is

If I have been harsh in the preceding section, it is largely in order to underscore what I see as the key contrasts between *Specters of Marx* on the one hand and *The Animal That Therefore I Am* on the other. Whereas it is quite easy for me to be critical of the former text,

⁴ Whereas *gilgul* (“wheel”) refers to a cyclical reincarnation of a spirit through different bodies over time, *ibbur* (“impregnation”) refers to the impregnation of an incomplete soul by the soul of a spiritual master or tzadik. *Dybbuk* (“clinging”), in contrast, refers to a malignant possession. Kabbalist mystic Isaac Luria believed *ibbur* and *dybbuk* could take place while the possessor of a soul was still alive. For more, see Gershom Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1961).

reading it as an opportunistic attempt to affiliate deconstruction with another popular academic movement on the Left that never aligned with Derrida's philosophy in the first place, I find much less reason to be critical of the latter text.⁵ Through the double meaning of the *je suis*, Derrida finds a way to acknowledge that he both *follows* the Other and *is* the Other. He therefore sublates the linear logic of return and *revenge* into a circular logic of simultaneity. I choose this word "sublates" carefully, for it is not that Derrida contradicts or corrects his earlier formulations of an ultimate responsibility to an Other, but rather that he finds a way, rhetorically, to reconcile this responsibility with a responsibility to oneself, which is to say, as he puts it in *Specters of Marx*, "the other in oneself." This recognition of simultaneity and of the otherness in oneself does not by any means require a flattening of differences or a reduction, in Levinas's terms, to the identity of the Same; rather, it locates the Other's difference within the inherently disjunctive structure of the *cogito*. Speaking of the pun in his address's title, Derrida remarks: "It follows, itself; it follows itself. It could say "I am," "I follow," "I follow myself," "I am (in following) myself." In being pursued this way, consequentially, three times or in three rhythms, it would describe something like the course of a three-act play or the three movements of a syllogistic concerto, a displacement that becomes a *suite*, a result, in a single word" (*The Animal* 3). Derrida follows the animal Other by putting the animal that he is, the spectral animal behind his words, on stage.

I will follow three core gestures in this staging: first, a reformulation of and a reconciliation with the autobiographical genre; second, a rethinking and a recentering of the

⁵ Some may suggest that the narrative of correction or rectification that I am applying to this era of Derrida's career is anachronous insofar as "Marx and Sons" (1999) is published two years after he delivers *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. But anachrony is hardly anathema to deconstruction, as Derrida makes clear in his reading of the time that is "out of joint". Just as it is possible for one to be out of joint with oneself, it is possible to praise text as a correction of what came before while reading a later text as the reappearance of an unproductive rhetoric (i.e., the assertion that a reduction such as the one Marxism makes in its narrative of class struggle must necessarily be a violent simplification). In referring to Marxism as a singular "movement," I do not want to neglect Derrida's point that "Marxism" comprises heterogeneous discourses, but the refusal to engage with class as a social form with identifiable determinations suggests at best a naïve reaction to the common narrative supporting these discourses.

human and the self in terms that evoke those of the Biblical description of God; and third, the articulation of a relational ethics built on a “being-with” the animal one *is* and *is not*, an ethics and an ontological position (though he would never call it such) that Derrida takes through a rereading of Heidegger and a reinterpretation of *Dasein*.

To start with the most basic of observations, it is not irrelevant that Derrida begins his address with some of his personal experiences: first, his experiences speaking at prior Cerisy conferences, and second, his experience standing naked in front of his pet cat. As Derrida “entrusts” himself to words that could never be “naked” enough to express the depth of his fondness toward friends and colleagues both living and dead (1), he reflects on “the involuntary exhibition of the self” that takes place with the “passivity” of “nudity.” When seen by his cat, says Derrida, “I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat.” It is in his encounter with “The point of view of the absolute other...this absolute alterity of the neighbor” that Derrida recognizes the absolute alterity of his self (11). One of Derrida’s main stated objectives in the address—to restore to animals their status as heterogeneous individuals rather than mere figures of literature or objects of anthropocentric knowledge (“If I say “it is a real cat” that sees me naked, it is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity (9))—is at once an objective to restore to the autobiographical self its own version of this “unsubstitutable singularity.” Whereas Derrida’s prior critiques of autobiography focus on the name and the name’s capacity to betray its bearer after the author’s death, his interest here is in locating a form of autobiography that, like the animal, “was born first, before the names” (18).

On the one hand, such a form of primordial autobiography implies a disruption of the collective autobiography “Man” has told himself in relation to the singular “Animal”: “Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that

enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond” (32). What would it mean, asks Derrida, for humans to see themselves through this very lack of a response they project onto “the animal”? When one writes an autobiography such as humans have done in relation to all other animals, observes Derrida, one in effect says that “I decline all responsibility. I respond no more, I no more answer for what I am saying. I reply that I am no longer responding” (56). If one questions the “auto-biography of Man” (24) in these terms, if one questions the singular “appellation” of “The animal...the name [men] have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living Other” (23), it becomes possible to view the animal’s apparent lack of a response differently: “It would not be a matter of “giving speech back” to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation” (48).

On the other hand, Derrida’s turn to the animal is at once an attempt to redefine his own autobiography – the absent autobiography in place of which his philosophical work will forever present itself. At an important moment, Derrida seems to interrupt himself (he is speaking of animals’ dreams before and after this point) and acknowledges a gesture of “self-exception” that precedes his entire life’s deconstructive project:

I am saying “they,” “what they call an animal,” in order to mark clearly the fact that I have always secretly exempted myself from that world, and to indicate that my whole history, the whole genealogy of my questions, in truth everything I am, follow, think, write, trace, erase even, seems to me to be born from that exceptionalism and incited by that sentiment of election. As if I were the secret elect of what they call animals. I shall speak from this island of exception, from its infinite coastline, starting from it and speaking of it. (62)

What appears out of context to be nothing more than a declaration of arrogant exceptionalism is in fact, I argue, a moment of uncharacteristic humility for Derrida. As I suggested earlier (in agreement with Žižek), Derrida's attempt to supplant a monolithic metaphysics of presence depends in part on a rhetorical binary between self and Other, Derrida himself representing the former and all preceding philosophy representing the latter. And here, late in his career, he admits it. He admits that he "exempt[s] [him]self" from the anthropocentric world and that he speaks from a position of "exceptionalism." Rather than undermining his critique of metaphysics, however, this admission allows Derrida to expose himself and his point-of-view to the same deconstructive analysis that he has so effortlessly and productively directed toward (the) Other(s).

"Nothing," according to Derrida, "risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography, poisonous for oneself in the first place, auto-infectious for the presumed signatory who is so auto-affected" (47). Is it possible, then, to read the autobiographical gesture of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* as the moment when deconstruction's apparatus turns against itself in an autoimmune manner? Is this the moment when the "I" who deconstructs starts to deconstruct itself, thereby undermining all prior deconstruction that originated with this "I"? Or does this autoimmune deconstruction of the "I" take place, rather, in the service of a self that transcends the self-excepting gesture of any "I"? Is this address therefore the moment where Derrida locates, as Gerald Bruns writes in his review of the text, "a path of escape from absorption into any identity-machine" (404)? It is, I believe—but not simply because, as Bruns states, Derrida "wants to multiply" the differences between himself and an animal like his cat (through such rhetorical gestures as his reference to *limitrophy*)⁶ or to prove "His cat is an Other

⁶ Derrida writes, "Let's allow that word [*limitrophy*] to have a both general and strict sense: what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit. In the

in a way that no human being...could ever be” (Bruns 404); this is certainly true, but it is also because the self that can think of itself as both human and animal is a self that includes the Other. And it is, ironically, in this extremely ‘selfish’ rethinking of self and of being-with-others that Derrida best articulates the promise of a deconstruction open toward an alterity as radical as the animal’s.⁷

VII. A Spectral God Who Names the Animals

Conventionally, any reference to an omnipresent “self” would invoke the names of God or Spirit, names that Derrida makes no secret of distrusting because of the sense of determinacy and closure they encourage. Nonetheless, as John D. Caputo’s theological readings of Derrida have shown, it would be a tremendous mistake to assume that Derrida wants to dispose of the divine or the transcendental altogether. “The negation [of God], says Derrida, is a *dénégation*, a denial which de-negates or un-negates itself, a denial that by denying names of God affirms the unnameable God; a denial that by denial effects the return of the denied” (Caputo 235). I would

semantics of *trophē*, *trophē*, or *trophos*, we should be able to find everything we need to speak about what we should be speaking about in the course of these ten days devoted to the autobiographical animal: feeding, food, nursing, breeding, offspring, care and keeping of animals, training, upbringing, culture, living and allowing to live by giving to live, be fed, and grown, autobiographically. *Limitrophy* is therefore my subject. Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Everything I’ll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply” (29). If I had more space, I would pose the question of a limitrophic autobiographical practice, which might draw a link between “feeding” the animals at the limit between self and other and “speaking with” the specters in oneself.

⁷ I do not have space to consider Sartre in depth here, but it is not in my view coincidental that, at roughly this same moment in Derrida’s career, as Bruce Baugh notes, he headlines the 1996 fiftieth anniversary issues of *Les Temps modernes*, thereby announcing something of a “*rapprochement*” with Sartre, whom he earlier mocked as the “onto-phenomenologist of freedom” (Baugh 1). There is an embrace of something like radical freedom (more radical than Sartre’s, perhaps) in both the address on the animal and a text Derrida publishes in 1997, *A Taste for the Secret*, where he writes (in a line cited by Bruns as well): ““‘I am not one of the family’ means: do not consider me ‘one of you,’ ‘don’t count me in,’ I want to keep my freedom, always: this, for me, is the condition not only for being singular and other, but also for entering into relation with the singularity and alterity of others” (*Taste* 27).

suggest that this same principle of denegation applies to Derrida's deconstruction of the "I" or *je* in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. For Derrida, to deny the closure of the "I" is merely to affirm what Caputo calls "the promise by which the I is promised over to language" (236). However, where my reading of Derrida's essay on the animal diverges somewhat from Caputo's reading of deconstruction (the article I am citing comes, importantly, from 1993) is in my rebuttal to Caputo's claim that there is "nothing about deconstruction that settles the debate about the referent of apophatic discourse, nothing that affirms or falsifies the claims of faith" (238). On the contrary, what Derrida comes to affirm in his response to the call of the animal Other is a faith (perhaps messianic, perhaps not) in a responsibility to the self. The promise that delivers the self to language is a promise *I* have made to myself, to the other, the other in myself.

To demonstrate how Derrida recognizes the entrance into language as a promise to the self, let us look more closely at the passage where Derrida deconstructs Adam/Ish's naming of the animals in Genesis/Bereshit. In this passage, he notes an analogous resemblance between the God of Genesis and the autobiographical "I". He does this by drawing his audience's attention to the line in the Chouraqui Bible that states God summons the animals to Adam "*in order to see* what [Adam] will call out to them" (16). This "*in order to see*," Derrida points out, grants God both infinitude and finitude, omniscience and radical unknowing:

God thus lets Ish do the calling all alone; he accords him the right to give them names in his own name—but just in order to see. This "*in order to see*" marks *at the same time* the infinite right of inspection of an all-powerful God *and* the finitude of a God who doesn't know what is going to happen to him with language. And with names. In short, God doesn't yet know what he really wants: this is the finitude of a God who doesn't know what he wants with respect to the animal, that is to say, with respect to the life of the living as such, a God who sees something coming without seeing it coming, a God who will say "*I am that I am*" without knowing what he is going to see when a poet enters the scene to give his name to living things. (17)

What is most striking here, I argue, is that this co-incidence between an “infinite right of inspection” over what is present and a finite knowledge of what is “coming” or of what is “want[ed]” applies not only to God but to how God’s mirror image, the human, positions itself in relation to the animal. God, in this account, “has created man in his likeness *so that* man will *subject, tame, dominate, train, or domesticate* the animals born before him and assert his authority over them” (16)—*just as* God subjects, tames, dominates, trains, or domesticates man. Moreover, this coincidence between finitude and infinitude is what determines the individual’s attempts to *domesticate itself* (or, as Derrida puts it later, to track and hunt itself) by way of the “I” and the positioning of the self in language: “I am (following), I pursue, I track, overcome, and tame the animal” that I am (42). The “in order to see” that originates with God, argues Derrida, installs the temporality and the extension toward the future inherent in any attempt at self-knowledge: “it is the very genesis of time” (17). There is, then, a key similarity between the self who does not know itself and the God who does not know Himself. I create myself in my likeness just as God creates man in His likeness. This likeness manifests through the self-referentiality of language. As for the difference between God and the human, the main one is one of sequence, the sequential logic Derrida disrupts throughout this text. God, human, and the animal follow *one another* in a circular simultaneity. And lest one conflate this simultaneity between the unknowing self and the unknowing God with a simple humanism that installs the human subject in the place of the divine, it is imperative to note that Derrida affords the animal equal access to the omnipotent non-knowing that comes with this “in order to see,” as Derrida makes clear the very first time he uses the phrase, when he is discussing the shame he feels when “naked faced with the cat’s eyes looking at [him] from head to toe, as it were just *to see*, not

hesitating to concentrate its vision—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the direction of [his] sex” (4).

It would be fair, at this point, to ask whether the observation of an analogy like the one I have just drawn is sufficient evidence for an equivalence. Is Derrida merely revealing a resemblance, a mirroring between disparate entities, or is he in fact positioning the (human *and* animal) self in the place of God? This question is especially appropriate given that it is the question Derrida asks of Descartes in his deconstruction of the “animal-machines” who appear in a 1638 letter. In this letter, Descartes imagines “a character, a man, and this man is a man who, having learned, fictitiously, to manufacture impeccable automatons, would conclude *in reality*, by means of a judgment, that the animals are *in truth*, for their part, automatons, automatons of flesh and blood. And why is this so? Because they *resemble* automatons that *resemble* humans” (83). Derrida, however, does not for his part outright reject this line of reasoning based on resemblance; it is not necessarily a problem to draw on resemblances to make “an inferred judgment, an act of understanding tied to the will, an infinite will, as always in Descartes, which extends beyond the ends of understanding” (83). The problem, rather, is in assuming the animal’s lack of access to this judgment. It is just as possible that the humans, like the animals, are the very automata they resemble. Conversely (and this seems to be the possibility Derrida finds more compelling), it is just as possible to infer that the animals *and* the automata alike, insofar as they both resemble humans, possess the capacity for a response that comes with what Descartes believes is the infinite human will. This possibility is implicit in Derrida’s call to rethink the “grand mechanist” “tradition” that relies on anthropocentrism:

The relation to itself of the soul and of thinking, that very being of the thinking substance, implied the concept of an animal-machine deprived of what would be, in short, nothing less than the *ego* as *ego cogito, je pense*. Such an automaton would be deprived of a “me” or “self,” and even more of any capacity for reflection, indeed of any mark or

autobiographical impression of its own life. Taking this grand mechanist—and what is also called materialist—tradition back to the drawing board should not involve a reinterpretation of the living creature called “animal” only, but also another concept of the machine, of the semiotic machine, if it can be called that, of artificial intelligence, of cybernetics and zoo- and bio-engineering, of the *genic* in general, etc. (76)

This “reinterpretation” of “the semiotic machine” brings us back to Derrida’s call in *Specters of Marx*, a call to rethink “the virtualization of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever...from opposing presence to its representation...the living to the living-dead of its ghosts.” It is not surprising, then, that “the specters and phantoms that come to haunt Descartes’s dreams...in the *Second Meditation*” are of interest to Derrida (73-74). More surprising is that Descartes’s inability to distinguish between “real man” and “spectral man as animal-machine” occupies only “a parenthesis” in Derrida’s reading of Descartes, since this impossibility of distinction would seem to close the gap Derrida opens with his faith in a contentless messianism. To the extent that I cannot distinguish *myself* from a specter, to the extent that I cannot distinguish *myself* from an animal, and to the extent that I *myself* am a spectral animal-machine, I have a responsibility to answer to these “inhuman” or “ahuman” others as though they are a part of the very self I am chasing and tracking every time that I, like God, say “I am that I am.”

VIII. *Dasein* as Caring for the Animals the Human is and is Not

Another name for this selfhood that transcends the I and the merely thinking self of the *cogito* would be *Dasein*. It would, of course, be insufficient to say that Derrida’s reconciliation with the self would be a reconciliation with *Dasein*, since this would suggest a prior deficiency in Derrida’s understanding of the concept, when it is Derrida who, beginning with “The Ends of Man” in 1968, enriches our understanding of *Dasein* by deconstructing Heidegger’s presuppositions. Most relevant to his work on the animal would be his challenge to Heidegger’s

logocentric anthropocentrism, “this co-belonging and this co-propriety of the name of man and of the name of Being, as it inhabits and installs itself in the language of the Occident” (“The Ends of Man” 54).

Nonetheless, there are certain facets of *Dasein* that Derrida does not entertain fully until 1997, facets that, had he confronted them more seriously in texts like *Specters of Marx* and “The Politics of Friendship,” would have clarified some of Derrida’s more mystifying calls for a politics that “*answers first to the Other*” (as opposed to oneself) (“Politics” 639; italics Derrida’s). Most important among these to my analysis are *Dasein*’s primordial condition of being-alongside and being-with-others—“In that Da-sein is at all, it has the kind of being of being-with-one another” (*Being and Time* 117-18)—and its essential nature as concern with and care for other beings—“being-with-others belongs to the being of Da-sein, with which it is concerned in its very being” (116). “One is after all,” according to Heidegger, “what one takes care of” (296). Derrida does not discuss care in his address on the animal explicitly, but in exploring an autobiographical analytic of “*Dasein* with...the animal” (*The Animal* 24), Derrida expresses care for the self *by way of* his care for animals, thereby exemplifying Heidegger’s claim that “Existentially, selfhood is only to be found in the authentic potentiality-of-being-a-self, that is, in the authenticity of the being of Da-sein as care” (*Being and Time* 296). In showing care for the animal self (or, rather, to make this consistent with the plurality of others Derrida describes earlier as “specters,” the animals in oneself), Derrida elucidates a deconstruction in which, to quote Marie-Eve Morin, “What is primary for [Derrida] is neither the self nor the other, but a quasi-transcendental community of witnesses” (Morin 165). Derrida’s thematic of being witnessed by the animal that he himself is allows him to refigure Heidegger’s notion of

“being-with” as a “being-huddled-together,” a formulation that evokes the community of others “huddled” within *Dasein*, to which *Dasein* remains responsible:

Being *after*, being *alongside*, being *near* [*près*] would appear as different modes of being, indeed of *being-with*. With the animal. But, in spite of appearances, it isn’t certain that these modes of being come to modify a preestablished being, even less a primitive “I am.” In any case, they express a certain order of *being-huddled-together* [*être-serré*]...the being-pressed, the being-with as being strictly attached, bound, enchained, being-under-pressure, compressed, impressed, repressed, pressed-against according to the stronger or weaker stricture of what always remains pressing.

Derrida’s care for the animal beings “attached” to the self comes through in his departure from what Heidegger has to say about them, a departure that begins in *Of Spirit*, where Derrida first takes up Heidegger’s “guiding thesis that the animal is poor in world [*weltarm*]” (*Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 267), therefore standing in contrast to man who is “world-forming” [*weltbildend*] and the stone that is “worldless” [*weltlos*]. As Derrida points out, Heidegger claims that this “difference...between poverty and wealth [of world] is not one of degree.” The animal’s “poverty...has, without doubt, the sense of a privation (*Entbehrung*), of a lack: the animal does not have enough world, to be sure. But this lack is not to be evaluated as a quantitative relation to the entities of the world. It is not that the animal has a lesser relationship, a more limited access to entities, it has *an other* relationship” (*Of Spirit* 49; italics Derrida’s). Nevertheless, although Heidegger’s “analysis...respects a difference of structure while avoiding anthropocentrism,” “it remains bound to reintroduce the measure of man by the very route it claimed to be withdrawing from that measure—this meaning of lack or privation. This latter is anthropocentric or at least referred to the questioning *we* of *Dasein*. It can appear as such and gain meaning only from a non-animal world, and from *our* point of view” (48-49). This “measure” of *Dasein*’s point-of-view emerges in the supposed difference in the animal’s relation to “entities *as such* [*als*’-

Struktur]”: “The animal can have a world because it has access to entities, but it is deprived of a world because it does not have access to entities as such and in their Being” (51).

By referring the animal’s “deprivation” to a world “as such” that only opens itself to the human mind, “Heidegger’s discourse is still,” as Derrida says when revisiting these passages in 1997, “Cartesian,” insofar as it foregrounds the logocentric construct of a rational, self-identical *cogito* in its attempt to analyze the structure of being, the *sum*; this Cartesianism is, of course, exactly what Heidegger wishes to avoid (*The Animal* 146). Importantly, Derrida does not so much dispute the “deliberately contradictory things” Heidegger has to say about animals as he does Heidegger’s certainty that the human does indeed have exclusive access to the “as such”: “perhaps,” he decides, “in order to analyze, formalize, take account of these contradictory statements of the type “the animal *has and doesn’t have* world,” thus *has and doesn’t have* the “as such”—in the end, one has to get out of this opposition...between the “as such” and the “not as such,” as if one could choose only between the “as such [*als*’-*Struktur*]” and its opposite” (156). Derrida therefore concludes his address with a call for a “strategy” that “would consist in pluralizing and varying the “as such,” and, instead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of, as it were, in marking that the human is, in a way, similarly “deprived,” by means of a privation that is not a privation, and that there is no pure and simple “as such”” (160).

As I noted earlier, however, Derrida sometimes struggles to overcome certain oppositions, certain instances of the “is and is not” in his own work: namely, those between self and other, presence and absence, living and dead. If he succeeds in addressing the first dualism through his tracking of the animal that he himself is, and if he at least provisionally opens a path toward deconstructing the second dualism in his earlier formulation of hauntology and his

gesture toward the virtual, it is in the final lines of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that he recognizes the radical contingency of what is meant by living and dead. A project of “pluralizing” the “as such,” he goes on to say, “would presume a radical reinterpretation of what is living, naturally, but not in terms of the “essence of the living,” of the “essence of the animal”” (160). The need for such a reinterpretation arises from another contradiction he observes in Heidegger’s treatment of the animal: the extent to which the animal does and does not “die” [*sterben*]. Whereas the Heidegger of *Being and Time* extricates Dasein from animality by arguing that animals do not die (that is, they do not display being-toward-death) but merely perish, the Heidegger of *Metaphysics* claims that it is in fact the animal’s possibility of dying that determines its status as a living being and hence a being that has a world (even in the sense of a deprivation). Jumping on Heidegger’s contradictory judgments of the animal’s relation to death, Derrida suggests that the impossibility of apprehending the “being “as such”” is evident in the impossibility of “let[ting] things be such as they are, in [one’s] absence,” which is to say following one’s death. One can only let being “as such” be if one can imagine it “starting from mortality and from the possibility of being dead.” “So,” he asks, “can the human do that, purely? Is there a relation of apprehension to the being “as such”—the “ontological difference,” therefore—to the being [*être*] of the being [*l’étant*], such that it lets the being of the being be, such as it is, in the absence of every kind of design, living?” Whereas Heidegger thinks the human can do this, “Nietzsche,” Derrida believes, “would have said no: “the relation to a being, even the “truest,” the most “objective,” that which respects most the essence of what is such as it is, is caught in a movement that we’ll call here that of the living, of life, and from this point of view, whatever the difference between animals, it remains an “animal” relation” (160).

Since this “no” leads into Derrida’s call for a “radical reinterpretation of what is living,” we can infer that Derrida himself says no together with Nietzsche. But would such a “reinterpretation of the living” not also require a reinterpretation of what is dead? Would death even stand outside such a “movement,” or would a radically redefined life sublate it, such that it becomes impossible to say what is “living” and what is “dead”? Is this impossibility not what makes the figures of the specter and the animal alike so fascinating? Sadly, to quote an expression Derrida uses many times in these short remarks on Heidegger, he will not “have time” (144, 149, 157) to ask this and other potential questions. But he at least and at last clears the way toward such a question, a question that I will be using to guide my readings of “spectral animals” in contemporary narrative throughout this dissertation.

IX. The Stakes of this Dissertation and a Review of Relevant Scholarship

By the end of his address on the animal, Derrida returns to the “ultratranscendental condition of life” that occupies his 1968 critique of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*. As Derrida writes there, any movement of life that sustains its own *différance* “has never been inscribed in language” and “requires *another name*” (15). The first name he gives to this movement (a name that, as Derrida knows, cannot help but be inadequate) is “the trace”;⁸ nevertheless, it is in the names of spectrality and the animal that he inscribes this movement in a political discourse that will bear his proper signature.

What is to be gained from these names? And what is to be gained from the position I have just prepared, according to which it is the self that has access to the movements designated by these names, movements that follow no simple linear logic, not even the temporality of a

⁸ “The living present springs out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace” (85).

before and after that could be inscribed within a logic of return? Am I not just erasing the otherness of death, the otherness that demands a response from the living?

No. I am suggesting that death is life with a *différance*. And so, too, are the animal and the human. But this *différance* cannot be wholly other. I participate in it. I am responsible for it. Every action I take, every word I speak and write in my name is responsible for it. I am responsible for my survival, a survival that is and is not mine alone, a “justice” that “carries life beyond present life...not toward death but toward a *living-on [sur-vie]*” [*Specters* xx]. The authors and texts in this dissertation identify with animals in search of this spectral justice. In one form or another, they say, as Derrida does, “I am an animal.”

Why examine *spectral* animals specifically? In comparing Derrida’s representations of animals with his representations of specters, I have shown the following key, interrelated similarities between the two figures: 1) An alternative relation to death; a death that is not finitude as the condition of our possibility, not the Heideggerian human’s death “as such”; 2) An ability to, in some sense, “see without being seen,” to see without the human knowing what it sees; conversely, a vulnerability to being seen without being recognized (i.e. admitted into the community of speaking subjects; 3) An apparent (if fictitious) access to an undivided presence that the human perceives itself as lacking; 4) An ability to transcend the causal temporality of linear, rational, autobiographical time; an attunement to coincidences, synchronicities, repetitions and returns; an uncanny, inopportune, and unpredictable relation to linear time; and 5) An ability and an imperative, in spite of their exclusion from human language and justice, to define the human’s sense of itself as *Dasein*, as divided between past and future; the animal and the specter make the human’s experience of itself “out-of-joint” because they *are* (and are not) the human.

This dissertation searches for contemporary narrative texts (novels and films) that combine or hybridize these two figures. What can the spectral animals of contemporary culture tell us about the limits of human narrative and the possibilities of displacing, transgressing, and transcending those limits? And how, in responding to mass extinction, climate change, and the specters of genocide and imperialism, does the human—long defined in continental philosophy as the “political animal” or the “technical animal”—fashion itself as a “spectral animal”?

By suggesting that we as humans are ourselves “spectral animals,” I am indicating both the apocalyptic horrors and the liberatory potentials offered to us when we identify with animals in the 21st century. On the one hand, I convey mass extinction, and along with it the complete breakdown of a world on which human life depends. On the other hand, I convey the animal’s capacity to reflect our own spectrality back to us. This spectrality, our ability to access a living-dead and a life yet to come, can either harbor our demise or offer our freedom. It is in our own name, as humans, that we must choose which spectrality to bring to presence in the world. It is in companionship with the animal, an embrace of what Donna Haraway has called “becoming-with” the animal, that we delay and defer death, which is to say a form of life where the human is no longer present: “If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism then we know that becoming is always becoming with, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” (Haraway 244).

Unfortunately, many of the “contact zones” that once seemed so promising to Haraway and Derrida alike—those tele-technoscientific spaces of virtuality on whose edge the messianic was seen to tremble—have grown into sites of apocalyptic threat. Baudrillard’s writings on the threat of simulacra prove prescient when read in the context of the mass disinformation and

conspiracy theories that have spread through social media.⁹ Humans and animals alike face the prospect of extinction as the scientific consensus over anthropogenic climate change and what to do about it continues to elude vast swaths of both the voting public and elected representatives. Clouds of doubt, misguided though it may be, around the origins and the dangers of COVID-19 prevented a globally coordinated response to a once-in-a-century pandemic. Those on the academic left who believed the Internet would allow us to move beyond individualistic humanism are now in the awkward position of defending liberal democratic norms against the white supremacists and neofascists seeking to overthrow them. We seem to be in the double bind of either allowing authoritarian world leaders access to means of instantaneous mass communication or allowing corporations like Twitter and Google unchecked control over the public sphere. Ecstatic theorists of the “posthuman” such as Rosi Braidotti, promising supposedly “new forms of subjectivity” that would embody relationality rather than a false autonomy, were under the mistaken impression that contemporary technologies could be “normatively neutral” (Braidotti 45). Those like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who correctly diagnosed “the figure of the mediatized” as that of a “mystified and depotentialized human intelligence” (Hardt and Negri 17), now appear naïve in their calls for a “common” that could somehow operate independently of the technology companies who have used algorithmic

⁹ Social media, as I suggest further in chapter 3, belongs to what Baudrillard calls the “hyperreal order and to the order of simulation,” where “it is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle” (25). An alternative version of this dissertation may have drawn the title “Simulating Animals” from this quote of Baudrillard’s in *Simulacra and Simulation*: “We will live in this world, which for us has all the disquieting strangeness of the desert and of the simulacrum, with all the veracity of living phantoms, of wandering and simulating animals that capital, that *the death of capital* has made of us—because the desert of cities is equal to the desert of sand—the jungle of signs is equal to that of the forests—the vertigo of simulacra is equal to that of nature—only the vertiginous seduction of a dying system remains, in which work buries work, in which value buries value—leaving a virgin, sacred space without pathways, continuous as Bataille wished it, where only the wind lifts the sand, where only the wind watches over the sand” (153).

structures to reduce their users' identities to commoditized data. The future threatens to be more neo-feudal than either democratically socialist or anarcho-communist.

One of my goals in prefacing my introduction to this dissertation with such a lengthy critique of Derrida's work is to contextualize what I see as an inadequacy in recent endeavors to apply deconstruction to literary animal studies and posthuman ecocritical theory. A deconstruction detached from the self is a deconstruction detached from being. When one ignores the participation of individual *Dasein* in *différance*, it becomes possible for charlatans like Jordan Peterson, who do not show any evidence of significant engagement with Derrida's works, to lump deconstructionist scholars in with a fictional mass of "postmodern neo-Marxists" who believe that "everybody is basically not an individual...but a member of whatever their identity group happens to be" (Peterson). As ignorantly detached from what actual deconstructionist scholars believe as Peterson's comments may be, his ability to energize the faction of anti-leftists identified as the 'alt-right' benefits at least in part from rhetorical imprecisions on the part of deconstructionist scholars, imprecisions to which Derrida himself opened the door at certain points in his career. These imprecisions have limited our capacity to discuss what an ethics beholden to the animal (and to others more broadly) might look like.

Lynn Turner, for example, in her introduction to the collection of essays *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*, writes that Derrida, in his thoughts on the specious distinction between a human response and an animal reaction, "both patiently questions whether humans can respond and alters what response might mean, such that it does not remain a capacity that belongs to an intending subject. Rather, response becomes adulterated by repetition and joins with Derrida's postal ethics in which all our 'sendings' are beholden to the other" (2). In equating Derrida's explicitly autobiographical questioning of the response to those pseudo-

autobiographical texts like *The Post Card* where Derrida unilaterally places the other *before* himself, Turner misses the fact that Derrida never seeks to dispose of the “intending subject” altogether. Rather, he seeks to differentiate and multiply the very meanings of intention and subjectivity. It is not that I am not an intending subject, but rather that “I” am not *purely* this intending subject. Cary Wolfe comes closer to this point I believe Derrida is making: “Derrida's point is that, yes, it is true that what we think of as personhood, knowledge, and so on are inseparable from who ‘we’ are, from our discourses and disciplines, but at the same time ‘we’ are not ‘we’...Rather, ‘we’ are always radically other, already in- or ahuman in our very being.” Wolfe, too, however, focuses too much on the “before” when he describes this “being” as “our subjection to and constitution in the materiality and technicity of a language that is always on the scene before we are,” as though this “radically ahuman precondition” is not also a condition to which we actively contribute and a ‘postcondition’ which will persist after we are gone (Wolfe, “Human, all too Human” 571). Matthew Calarco, more critical of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, asks why “Derrida resolutely refuses to abandon the human-animal distinction” (Calarco 145). The answer is that he knows he is *both* human and animal, that he cannot choose one word and erase the other; in order to know himself and the living language in which he participates the best that he can, he needs both words.

How does one address these imprecisions without eliminating the valuable critiques against humanism made by all of the scholars I have just named? The solution, I believe, is the solution Derrida offers in the name of the autobiographical animal, and it is the same solution that the authors and texts in this dissertation offer. It consists in interpreting and writing the autobiography of the human from a different perspective. This perspective will remain human—it cannot *not* be human—but it will be animal as well. Moreover, it will be spectral, which is to

say that it will write a dialogue between different parts of the human self: those we conventionally call living, and those we conventionally call nonliving, dead, mute, or inanimate. Most of the texts in this dissertation rely on the novel form to engage in this dialogue, but films and other imagistic technical media play a role as well. When we view ourselves through the mediation of what Stiegler has termed “exosomatic exorganisms” (120), we are able to rethink the posthuman era in the terms suggested by Katherine Hayles, who emphasizes “the erasure of embodiment” that is “common to *both* the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman” (4). An animalist philosophy would emphasize the fragility and the vulnerability of our embodiment, an embodiment we share with animals. We cannot, however, consider this animalist philosophy without also thinking the spectrality that always already conditions (and is projected by) this embodiment. This spectrality is reflected in (but nonetheless differentiated by) the technical object. As Slavoj Žižek writes in his reading of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: “what man encounters in *the Animal* is itself in the oppositional determination: viewed as an animal, man is *the* spectral animal existing alongside really existing animal kinds” (410).

Žižek speaks here of the spectrality in capital, but what he misses in his reading is the deconstructed definition of spectrality offered us by Derrida. Spectrality, as a reflection of the futural extension inherent in being, is a characteristic of animality and the living writ large. Derrida’s reinscription of *Dasein* in terms of hauntological *différance* allows us to ask how nonhuman beings might project themselves into the future by way of past retentions. This questioning of nonhuman beings allows us to devise new responses to contemporary challenges ranging from climate change to grossly unequal access to healthcare. We may mediate these responses through technology, but it is up to us to define our story as both humans and animals. No longer can this story depend on a linear logic built on a definition of growth and progress that

excludes the thriving of animal life. As Mark Fisher reminds us in his own interpretation of hauntology, the stories we write today and project into the future could very well draw on the “lost futures” of past revolutionary dreams—for instance, the social democratic projects of the 60s and 70s that gave way to neoliberalism and austerity: “we shouldn’t have to choose between, say, the internet and social security. One way of thinking about hauntology is that its lost futures do not force such false choices; instead, what haunts is the spectre of a world in which all the marvels of communicative technology could be combined with a sense of solidarity much stronger than anything social democracy could muster” (*Ghosts of my Life* 26).

The coronavirus pandemic, a crisis born from a zoonotic illness that may not have transferred to humans if not for the industrialized exploitation and annihilation of animal life, has drawn particular attention to a certain *virality* we can locate in the spectral logic of possession and exorcism. Virality, of course, is a dominant metaphor in today’s culture of contagious disinformation and instantaneous spreading of affects. Zoonosis, a concept I will discuss more in chapters 3 and 4, forces us to consider how the suffering of animals may spread back to us if we continue to assert a false boundary excepting us from the rest of the living world. John Berger writes in the 1970s of how the “cultural marginalisation” (15) of animal life to the spaces of zoos and photographs foreshadows the marginalization of human life that takes place in “modern totalitarianism (28). Akira Mizuta Lippit, drawing on Berger, writes of the “spectral animals” who “recede into the shadows of human consumption and environmental destruction” (1). Lippit argues that we as humans have assigned animals to “a state of *perpetual vanishing*. Animals enter a new economy of being during the modern period, one that is no longer sacrificial in the traditional sense of the term but, considering modern technological media generally and the cinema more specifically, *spectral*. In supernatural terms, modernity finds animals lingering in

the world *undead*” (1). The despair that has surged into our lives during the time of COVID-19—a time of mass death, unrest around racial inequality, economic devastation, and systemic failures of institutions we previously believed capable of solving global crises—this despair has forced many to wonder whether they, too, have been left “undead” in a world not meant for them. This is not new: Scholars in the fields of ecocritical and anticolonial theory have long reminded us how phenomena like environmental racism demonstrate the shared suffering of human and nonhuman life.¹⁰ The pandemic, however, as a preview of the suffering that awaits us with climate change, demands that we reanimate and revive the undead animal.

The same zoonotic process that infects the human with the animal’s suffering can work in our favor. Autobiography, as Derrida reminds us, is a *pharmakon*. While it is true that “Nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography, poisonous for oneself in the first place” (47), it is equally true that autobiography inoculates the self, affording the self an otherwise inaccessible excess of survival or *sur-vie*. By rewriting the human’s autobiography from the perspective of the animals that we are, the authors and filmmakers in this dissertation seek to poison a destructive iteration of the human and to protect the human who can live on. The spectrality of zoonosis requires us to conjure the animals of the past and the future. And as Derrida reminds us in *Spectres of Marx*, every “conjuring” is a “conjuring away”; every imposition of a unity is the rejection of an excess. Conjunction, therefore, is a temporary solution, but it is the one that is urgent in this moment. By conjuring the animals who live, we seek to conjure away the animals who die. These animals are and are not humans.

¹⁰ For recent work by such scholars, see especially *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice* (edited by Ryan Holifield, Jayajit Chakraborty, and Gordon Walker, Routledge, 2018) and *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory* (edited by Teena Gabrielson, Cheryl Hall, John M. Meyer, David Schlosberg, Oxford UP, 2016).

X. Chapter-by-Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter, “(Con)Temporary Animals: The Transgressions of Human Narration in Alain Mabanckou’s and Tristan Garcia’s *Mémoires*,” explores how key concepts in my dissertation interrelate with one another: autobiography, temporality, the finitude of individual life, and the boundaries separating humans from animals. Drawing on “L’Animal que donc je suis” and Giorgio Agamben’s definition of the contemporary, this chapter reads two fictional animal autobiographies—Alain Mabanckou’s *Mémoires de porc-épic* (2006) and Tristan Garcia’s *Mémoires de la jungle* (2010)—as examples of a narrative temporality whereby humans can both follow after *and* be present with animal others. I attribute this temporality to the novels’ shared technique of metalepsis, a transgression of the boundaries separating a given diegetic “storyworld” from the extradiegetic world: Although both novels assume the form of animal autobiographies, voices of human authors disrupt the boundaries of this form. Exploring these disruptions in form allows us to imagine how we might reformulate autobiographical practices in a manner that challenges linear organizations of past, present, and future. By challenging these organizations, we can more effectively embrace our contemporaneity with nonhuman existence. Humans and animals share finitude, but our respective forms of finitude are conditioned by and differentiate into multiple possibilities for life and its continuous survival.

In the second chapter, “On the Specter: Autistic Vision and the Presence of the Immortal (Non)Human,” I delve more fully into Derrida’s hauntological idiom by exploring the “spectrality” of autism, a topic of autobiographical relevance for me personally. The French refer to what Anglophone psychiatrists call “autism spectrum disorder” as “le trouble du spectre autistique”—literally, “the trouble of the autistic specter.” Through my readings of novels, essays, and films by Mark Haddon, Temple Grandin, and Fernand Deligny, each of whom deploys distinct autobiographical strategies, fictional and nonfictional, in relating personally to

the broader psychoanalytic and neuroscientific narratives that have developed around autism over the last century, I ask what it means to represent and diagnose subjects on the autism spectrum as being *on the specter*. A hauntological reading of autism requires to deconstruct this “autistic specter” that poses such “trouble” for literary and medical narrative. What this particular specter “haunts,” I will argue, is a definition of *the human* as a subject that possesses, in contrast to nonhuman animals and machines, a unique capacity to create and interpret narrative. This haunting takes the form of an extra-human dialogue between the living and the dead. Autobiographical engagements with animals, machines, and autistic humans become a means of “learning...how to let [specters] speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself.”

As I have suggested in critiquing Derrida, letting specters speak does not mean merely inverting the relationship between life and death. Such an inversion forces the living to submit to the dead, preventing any forms of life from defining the terms of their survival. In Chapter 3, “Spectro’s Animals: Interfaces of Extinction in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* and Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy,” I demonstrate how Pynchon and Atwood disclose the consequences of such an inversion through the concept of *extinction*. “Extinction,” as *Gravity’s Rainbow* makes explicit in the context of Pavlovian psychology, refers not only to the disappearance of a species but also to the elimination of a *response* to a stimulus. When juxtaposed, Pynchon’s and Atwood’s texts provoke an inquiry into the relationship between the two forms of extinction. Extinctions of signification can result in the extinction of life; the future seems to program the present, reality takes on the qualities of a simulation, and the dead seem to conquer the living. The contemporary context of climate change and zoonosis will factor into my reading, as will writings by Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and contemporary accelerationists

who draw on these theorists' work. Both Pynchon and Atwood's novels consider the potential for mass death inherent in contemporary society's manipulation of the human as an animal whose conditioned instinctual responses can be redirected toward the purposes of capital. What happens, these texts wonder, when the stimulus overloads the subject's capacity for response and becomes inhibitory in its effect? Can the extinction of desire take place without the extinction of the species? What response must we offer when an old way of life ceases to s(t)imulate meaning? Although these novels are not autobiographical in any conventional sense, their apocalyptic imaginaries present a unique lens through which we can (re)interpret a collective autobiography for the human.

Chapter 4, "Specular Animals: Apparatuses of Identification in Contemporary Wildlife Documentary," expands on the discussion of technology and simulation in the third chapter and explores how the medium of film serves to script our collective narratives around the human and the animal. I argue that, although wildlife documentaries have transformational potential in their capacity to make the human viewer imagine nonhuman modes of being in the world, they often cannot avoid assimilating the viewer's perspective to that of the filmic apparatus. The result is a simple reframing and reinforcement of the anthropological divide between a technically capable human, whose relation to the environment is an active, agential one, and a mute, objectified animal, whose relation to the environment is passive, and who is available for viewers' consumption. In Lacanian terms, film implies a radical and potentially dangerous inseparability between the big Other of ideology and the ego-ideal of the image as little other. These films therefore threaten to subordinate human and animal alike to a structure of technical mastery that could annihilate them both. I compare and contrast a dialectic of disclosure and concealment at work in the 2016 BBC documentary series *Planet Earth II* with the structures of identification on

display in a set of five documentaries produced and/or directed by French filmmaker Jacques Perrin. I argue that the style of filmmaking on display in Perrin's films is in a sense more honest and effective than the BBC Natural History Unit's style, insofar as they reflect the apparatus back on itself and force viewers to situate themselves in a more complicated relation to the image than one of jubilant identification. I end my analyses by evoking Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of "becoming-animal." The structure of becoming, in its reliance on multiplicity and active mediation, is, unlike Lacanian identification, inherently anti-dialectical in nature. If one learns to see the apparatuses of identification in these documentaries properly, one can enter into a "line of flight" that escapes the filmic structure and the conflict between human, animal, and apparatus.

In the conclusion, I explore Derrida's work on animality and politics in the final years of his life, particularly in *The Beast and the Sovereign* and *Rogues*. I reflect on the stakes of this dissertation and offer some openings toward more concrete proposals for reinterpreting and rewriting our autobiographical narratives around the human, the animal, and the technical object. The animals and humans lost to the ongoing mass extinction event retain a spectral presence in our collective autobiographical practices. Literature and narrative are tools for realizing this presence and renewing our hopes in survival.

CHAPTER 1 – (CON)TEMPORARY ANIMALS: THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF HUMAN NARRATION IN ALAIN MABANCKOU’S AND TRISTAN GARCIA’S *MÉMOIRES*

I. Two Texts, Their Authors, and the Movements in Between

A key element of this dissertation’s effort to derive what I would label an *ecocritical hauntology* will be the search for narrative strategies that transcend the oppositions between past and future. In this first chapter, I lay the groundwork for the analysis of spectrality in later chapters by framing the animal’s spectrality as a *being-contemporary-with* the human.

To what extent is *the contemporary* a concept limited by human experience? What would it mean to imagine an experience of *being contemporary* that accounts for nonhuman or more-than-human means of accessing the present? Would such an endeavor be possible, not to say necessary in the “contemporary moment” of ecological catastrophe and mass extinction? This chapter answers in the affirmative through readings of two contemporary Francophone novels that fall under the genre of “animal autobiography”: Alain Mabanckou’s *Mémoires de porc-épic* (2006) and Tristan Garcia’s *Mémoires de la jungle* (2010). Drawing on Jacques Derrida’s exploration of the autobiographical animal in “L’Animal que donc je suis” and Giorgio Agamben’s definition of the contemporary subject, I read these novels as examples of a narrative temporality whereby humans can both follow after *and* be present with animal others. I attribute this temporality to the novels’ shared technique of *metalepsis*, defined in narratology as a transgression of the boundary separating a given diegetic “storyworld” from the world outside of

(extradiegetic to) the narrative: Although both novels initially assume the form indicated by their titles—“memoirs” authored by animal subjects (a porcupine in Mabanckou’s text; a chimpanzee in Garcia’s) who recollect past experiences—the intrusions made by voices of human narrators at the ends of both works draw attention to and undermine the artificial boundaries of this form. Readers thus encounter two alternative representations of contemporaneity, neither of which require the anthropocentric division between the speaking human subject, who manifests presence, and the mute animal other, who remains trapped within an evolutionary past.

Born in Congo-Brazzaville in 1966, Alain Mabanckou published poetry through the 1990s before winning the 1999 Grand prix littéraire d’Afrique noire for his first novel, *Bleu-Blanc-Rouge*. He then became one of the Francophone world’s most successful contemporary African novelists, winning both the 2005 Prix des cinq continents de la francophonie for *Verre cassé* and the 2006 Prix Renaudot for *Mémoires de porc-épic*. Animals make frequent appearances in his work, but *Mémoires de porc-épic* is his only book narrated from an animal point-of-view to date. In the style of an autobiographical confession, a porcupine named Ngoumba recollects his life as the “harmful double” of a young man named Kibandi: leaving the “animal world,” the porcupine follows Kibandi’s orders to “eat” the bodies and souls of his enemies. When gluttony drives Kibandi to eat a few souls he should have left alone—an infant, for example—the spiritual world takes revenge and kills him, leaving the porcupine without a human host. Pursued by outraged villagers, the porcupine flees into the forest. After following his “instinct” for a couple of nights, he comes across a baobab tree on the bank of a river he fails to cross (38-39) and decides to confess to it his crimes.

Novelist and object-oriented philosopher Tristan Garcia was born in 1981 in Toulouse, France, but spent much of his childhood in Algeria. He won the 2008 Prix de Flore for his debut

novel, *La Meilleure Part des hommes* (translated into English as *Hate: A Romance*), an exploration of AIDS and its impact on gay culture in 1980s Paris. As a philosopher, he is most known for his speculative realist work *Forme et objet: Un traité des choses*, published in 2011; he is also the author of *Nous, animaux et humains: Actualité de Jeremy Bentham*, an essay on utilitarianism and animal suffering published earlier that year. He received little attention in 2010 for his second novel, *Mémoires de la jungle*, a work of post-apocalyptic science-fiction narrated by a chimpanzee named Doogie. Doogie begins his story orbiting the Earth aboard a space shuttle, as an involuntary participant in a publicity stunt designed to save the failing experimental zoo where he has been raised. The shuttle crash-lands in the middle of the African jungle, where Doogie finds no sign of either his home or the humans most important to him: Gardner Evans, the behavioral scientist who designed Lantek, the artificial language responsible for the “ape syntax” that characterizes the jumbled prose of Doogie’s narration (168); and Gardner’s daughter Janet, who taught Doogie Lantek (along with sign language) and thereby became his mother figure. To survive long enough to find the zoo, Doogie must adapt to the environment of the jungle, which proves difficult after a life in captivity.

Mabanckou’s and Garcia’s animal narrators thus begin their autobiographies in comparable situations of peril; both their “memoirs” start with forced departures from human society. One even wonders whether Garcia may have drawn on the first lines of Mabanckou’s novel when writing Doogie’s introduction of himself, given how similarly the two narrators express their sense of helplessness and inferiority when faced with the threat of a wilderness they no longer recognize as their proper habitat. One also wonders whether either or both authors were in deliberate dialogue with Derrida’s enormously influential 1997 address on “L’Animal que donc je suis,” the title of which Mabanckou’s porcupine echoes near verbatim in his very

first words : “donc je ne suis qu’un animal, un animal de rien du tout, les hommes diraient une bête sauvage comme si on ne comptait pas de plus bêtes et de plus sauvages que nous dans leur espèce, pour eux je ne suis qu’un porc-épic, et puisqu’ils ne se fient qu’à ce qu’ils voient, ils déduiraient que je n’ai rien de particulier” (*Mémoires* 11). Were it not for the restrictive “ne...que,” (“only”) and the use of the indefinite article instead of the definite, the porcupine’s first five words would be a rearrangement of Derrida’s title: “donc je suis l’animal.” Doogie omits the “donc,” and doesn’t use the label of “animal,” but he duplicates the porcupine’s “je ne suis qu’un” : “Je ne suis qu’un Doogie, je ne suis qu’un monkey. Pauvre Doogie, pauvre monkey. Tout petit tout petit, tout est très grand” (11).

Derrida’s title is, as has been much discussed, a pun. Throughout his reflections on the division between human and animal, he playfully manipulates the double temporality of “je suis,” the phrase that serves as the first-person singular conjugation of two different French verbs (*être*, “to be”; *suivre*, “to follow”). Through his interpretations of religious and philosophical texts that have helped to entrench the anthropocentric divide—including the book of Genesis and the works of Kant and Descartes—Derrida argues against a distinction between the human’s “being *after*” the animal (“Être *après*”) and his¹¹ contemporaneous “being-with” the animal (“l’être-avec”) (27). Derrida explains the double significance of his title very early on, when he reflects on the fact that his address marks his third appearance in Cerisy. Referring to the “phrase” that is his title, “a phrase offering more to follow [une phrase qui se donnerait à suivre],” he says: “Elle suit, elle-même, elle se suit. Elle pourrait dire “je suis,” “je me suis.” À se poursuivre ainsi avec quelque conséquence, en trois temps, elle décrirait comme la course d’une pièce en trois ou les trois mouvements de quelque concerto syllogistique, un déplacement

¹¹ I use the male pronoun here to maintain consistency with Derrida’s frequent use of “man” (“l’Homme”) in lieu of “human.”

qui se fait suite, une suite en un mot” (17). I could point to many other passages from Derrida’s address where the same double meaning of “je suis” is at stake, but this quote in particular is key to my readings of how contemporaneity functions in these two animal autobiographies. The “three times” or the “three movements” of Derrida’s “syllogistic concerto,” a concerto that “follows itself” with the ipseity and presence of “a single word,” inspire the three movements I will identify in the formal composition of these two texts—specifically as regards their shared use of metalepsis, i.e. what Gérard Genette called “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.)” (Genette 234-35).

To understand the “movements,” let us return to the narrators’ first words: What happens if our readings of the porcupine’s and Doogie’s shared “je ne suis que” take into account the double meaning of Derrida’s more affirmational “donc je suis”? What if the porcupine’s declaration that he “is only an animal” is at once the claim that he “follows only an animal,” and Doogie the chimpanzee’s declaration that he “is only a Doogie [...] only a monkey” is simultaneously a claim that he “only follows a Doogie [...] only follows a monkey”? In that case, we must verify who or what “comes before” these narrators, and we must, then, flip back to the preceding pages. We then find that *humans* come before these animals. But they are no ordinary humans—they are authors. What is more, they are authors who, in transgressing a diegetic boundary, *speak for* the two animals in question. Let us identify these human authors one at a time—first in Mabanckou’s text, then in Garcia’s.

Readers familiar with Mabanckou’s work may, in reading the dedication page, recognize the allusions to his 2005 novel *Verre cassé* : “*Je dédie ces pages à mon ami et protecteur L’Escargot entêté, aux clients du bar Le Crédit a voyagé, et à ma mère Pauline Kengué, de qui*

je tiens cette histoire (à quelques mensonges près)” (7). But even someone who recognizes “L’Escargot entêté” as the owner of “Le Crédit a voyagé,” the bar where *Verre cassé* takes place (a character who, we should note, is human, despite his sobriquet [“The Stubborn Snail”]), as is also the case for the novel’s eponymous narrator, Verre Cassé [“Broken Glass”]), is likely to disregard the intertextuality: first, because of the extradiegetic function dedications typically serve, and second, because the reference to the late Pauline Kengué, the actual Mabanckou’s mother, may lead us to view the dedication as a purely metafictional gesture of self-identification from the author, and to consider the story of a porcupine who begins to narrate once we turn the page as just that: the story of a porcupine.

The dedication only assumes its diegetic function through the metalepsis in the novel’s final pages. By the end of the porcupine’s confession, he feels a new sense of purpose; he ends his narration with a vow to become a “peaceful double” rather than a harmful one. But in the novel’s appendix, Mabanckou casts doubt on not only the porcupine’s future, but indeed his very existence as a speaking subject. An addendum (“annexe”) to the text contains a letter written by L’Escargot entêté to the novel’s real-life publisher, Éditions du Seuil. L’Escargot entêté explains that he found the manuscript for *Mémoires de porc-épic* next to the river where Verre Cassé, at some point after the conclusion of his own novel, drowned himself (a fate foreshadowed, as I will later discuss, in that text’s final pages). The narrative is L’Escargot entêté’s attempt to reassemble the scattered manuscript found next to the author’s body:

Il est vrai que l’année dernière, juste après sa mort, je vous avais fait parvenir par courrier recommandé ce que je prenais alors pour son seul et unique manuscrit, puisque c’est moi qui le lui avais commandé en vue d’immortaliser mon bar Le Crédit a voyagé. Ce premier texte, vous l’aviez publié quelques mois après sous le titre Verre Cassé [. . .] [J’ai] l’immense plaisir de vous adresser cet autre manuscrit qu’un de mes employés [. . .] a retrouvé dans un bosquet, près de la rivière Tchinouka où fut repêché le corps du regretté Verre Cassé. (227)

Those who reread *Mémoires de porc-épic* will therefore have to consider the porcupine's status as a metadiegetic narrator, a character whose narrative is embedded within a larger story told by Verre Cassé, the true author (according to the letter, at least) of these memoirs. If the same Verre Cassé who writes the dedication *is* the porcupine who speaks a couple pages later, then it becomes clear why the porcupine might say "he only follows" an animal. The author's transgression into the diegetic space of his narrator is at once his transgression into animal being. Therefore, the "three movements" that allow human and animal to exist contemporaneously within, to borrow another of Genette's terms, a single "narrative instance" (that is, a single "time" wherein the porcupine narrates his story [Genette 212-15]) are as follows: first, in moving from dedication to narration, the human author's (and reader's) entrance into the animal's diegetic space; second, the movement to the letter which seems to mark an exit from intradiegetic into extradiegetic space; and third, the movement of metalepsis whereby the two spaces blur together and lose clear distinction.

Parallel movements are seen in Garcia's novel. In the pages preceding Doogie's narration, a prologue carries the ostensibly self-explanatory title, "Un être humain prend la parole." The human who "takes the floor" (or, to translate literally from the French, "takes speech"), is Janet Evans, Doogie's primary guardian. She begins her four-page introduction in the present tense: "C'est ma nature, hélas. Je pense toujours à moi et aux autres en éthologue, quoi que je fasse. C'est pourquoi je crois comprendre mon comportement et savoir dans quelle mesure ma compréhension ne l'affecte et ne l'arrange souvent guère." But she then switches tenses, employing both the passé composé (e.g. "ce qu'a été ce singe" or "what this ape was/has been") and the more literary, more definitive passé simple (e.g. "je fus" or "I was"), as she relates her current state of mind to some mysterious event in the past, an event which

somehow involved Doogie and fundamentally changed her understanding of humanity's relationship to other animals: "Mais ce qu'a été ce singe pour moi et ce que j'ai été pour lui, je ne me l'explique pas. Je fus la dernière héritière d'un mouvement sinueux par lequel, humains que nous sommes, nous nous opposâmes aux autres animaux, pour parvenir au point paradoxal où nous en vînmes à réaliser pourquoi et comment nous leur appartenions pourtant" (17).

While it may be Doogie whose first words resonate with Derrida's seminar on "the autobiographical animal," it is Janet whose philosophical reflections set the tone for the novel's exploration of the unstable and variable "limit" (to use a Derridean term) between the human and the animal. But Janet seems to have reached a different judgment regarding the value of such a limit: whereas Derrida explicitly refuses to disavow the limit ("la limite entre l'Homme avec un grand H et l'Animal avec un grand A") and expresses an interest only in that which can "multiply" and "feed" the limit (51), Janet claims that humanity (or at least the humanity that dwells in her post-apocalyptic present) has, in its opposition to animals, "come to realize why and how we belong to them nonetheless."

Simultaneously, however, she affirms a temporal limit between the present in which she speaks and the past in which Doogie, somehow "inexplicably," changed her. For all we know at this point in the text, Janet's description of Doogie as now "mute" in the prologue's final lines is her euphemistic way of saying he died: "Et même s'il est aujourd'hui muet, encore et toujours je l'entends grogner, rire et raisonner. Si je pouvais entrer une dernière fois sa petite tête, oh si seulement..." (20). Our impression is that we are leaving the narrative space of her perspective and crossing the threshold into a separate diegetic level, contained within Doogie's past consciousness. In print, the points of ellipsis even resemble a sort of bridge that leads us directly

to the opposite page, where the words “Je ne suis qu’un Doogie” seem to signal a “first movement,” our entrance into the animal’s separate locus of experience.

But bridges mark connections just as much as they do divisions: in what we would call this novel’s “second movement”—which, like in Mabanckou’s text, occurs during the final pages—Janet reappears...but did she ever leave? The title of her epilogue alone, “Un être humain a toujours le dernier mot,” casts doubt on this; the word “toujours,” doubly translatable as “always” or “still,” allows us to imagine a temporal continuity between the end of her prologue and the start of the epilogue. What if, in crossing the “bridge” into Doogie’s autobiography, the reader never really enters an animal’s independent storyworld, and merely enters another part of the human’s?

We only learn for sure whether or not Doogie is dead several pages into Janet’s epilogue, but we know his fate was tragic in one way or another by the time she reappears. As Doogie succumbs to the violent influences of his environment (which I discuss in further detail later), he ultimately loses all ability to communicate with humans. Even the fluency of his narration (as rendered in the prose through sentence structure, vocabulary, a clear discrimination between the first-person and the third, etc.) deteriorates as he himself deteriorates into “animality” over the last several chapters of his story. In addition to knowing how Doogie loses language, we know, thanks to a flashback that comes just a few pages before Doogie ceases to narrate, two reasons why Doogie had such difficulty “re-adapting” to the jungle: Firstly, Doogie was not, as he seems to remember, born in the jungle and then captured; rather, he and a long line of his ancestors were born in the zoo, but Gardner manipulated his genome in such a way as to implant false memories. Secondly, the “jungle,” like Doogie’s memory thereof, is itself an artificial creation designed for the purposes of an experiment; the purpose of Doogie’s life, we ultimately learn,

was for Gardner to see if a living being could be induced to overcome its socialization and re-adapt to its “natural condition”—a condition simulated, in this case, by a contained and controlled wilderness under scientific observation (332-35).

We thus have already recognized Doogie’s memories as artificial by the time Janet returns, but only on the novel’s antepenultimate page do we find significant reason to doubt whether the narrative presented through Doogie’s “memoirs” even belongs to him. As Janet holds the mute, traumatized Doogie, she concludes that the conversations she had with him during her childhood and adolescence (first in sign language, then in Lantek) were not in fact true dialogues, but just “stories” she invented from her own interpretations, her “readings,” of his trained behaviors:

Je sais de quelle illusion j’étais la proie, et elle m’aveugle encore aujourd’hui, parfois, lorsque je le vois. Comme si je lisais en lui un récit qu’il ne pourrait pas me faire et qui n’a jamais existé, que je me persuade pourtant d’entrevoir vaguement à trop l’observer [. . .]. C’était idiot, je me sais idiote de me raconter à moi-même ces histoires en lui tendant les bras. Car ces histoires n’existent pas. La jungle a définitivement digéré mon singe, et la jungle n’a pas de mémoire. (356)

Which “stories” and which “memoir”—which “histories” and which “memories”—does Janet nullify here? The ambiguity forces the reader to decide. In the “third movement,” the movement of transgression and return, we may revisit the ellipses that formed the bridge between Janet’s present and Doogie’s past, and reinterpret them as nothing more than the circles leading into a cartoon-like thought bubble: if the jungle indeed “has no memory,” and Doogie has no language with which to write his “memoirs,” then Janet is the only character left with a voice, and the entirety of the diegetic storyworld is her imagined or daydreamed creation. The epilogue obscures one limit—the temporal limit between Doogie’s narration and her own as established by the prologue—and affirms another—the limit between self and other, reader and author.

But what happens to the limit between human and animal? It is, ultimately, preserved, but not according to the same logic we imagined when we started the novel. That logic was one of a linear, sequential temporality: what happened to the animal seemed to take place in the past, and what was voiced by the human seemed to take place afterwards, in the present. The fact that, structurally, Garcia's novel placed the human's voice before the animal's was not a challenge to this logic; on the contrary, it reaffirmed the primacy of the present, indeed the presence that the human voice claims for itself. When the human returns, however, she does so literally in the presence of the animal whose voice she and we had assigned to the absent past. Whether we judge Janet to be the "author" of Doogie's "memoirs" or, alternately, decide that she is simply wrong and Doogie's narrative voice is indeed his own does not matter, at least insofar as one limit has ceased to determine our interpretations: the temporal limit between past and present, before and after, on which a linear sequential logic depends.

Mabanckou's and Garcia's novels provocatively reimagine the limit(s) between the human and animal, as I will demonstrate when I compare the autobiographical narratives of the two animals in more detail. First, however, I want to draw on Agamben to underscore the existence of a limit inherent in the structure of contemporaneity itself. I will then map this limit onto a limit that is inherent in the literary form of fictional autobiography.

II. Limits of Presence: Autobiography as the Narrative Form of the Contemporary

There are, of course, crucial differences between the "movements" that yield contemporaneity in Mabanckou's and Garcia's novels. For example, the first displacement, from the human author to the animal narrator, finds a far more subtle form in the transition from a dedication page to the start of a narration than in that from a clearly intradiegetic prologue to a separate point-of-view. Conversely, with respect to the second movements, one could argue that

the “letter to the publisher” in Mabanckou’s novel serves to “displace” the animal’s voice in a more profound sense than Janet’s epilogue in Garcia’s; the latter still preserves the existence of a flesh-and-blood animal character. Finally, there is the challenging question of the “done,” employed by the porcupine but not the chimpanzee, which will no doubt affect the implications of our third movement, the movement whereby readers reinterpret the animal’s voice and the sense of contemporaneity that results.

Before I explore those differences, however, it is worth reflecting on the notion of “the contemporary” itself. There is reason to state that the genre of fictionalized autobiography has acquired a new significance in this contemporary moment of ecological catastrophe. Following Derrida, I do not dispute the validity of any and all limits between humans and animals; one could argue that the destruction produced through the exploitation and instrumentalization of animals’ bodies and their environments has led to an urgent need for more limits and boundaries in the form of regulation. What these novels ultimately reveal, in their displacements of the diegetic boundaries between past and present, is the potential to locate new, as-yet-unthought limits between humans and other species in the very structure of contemporaneity itself.

Giorgio Agamben’s essay “What is the Contemporary?” serves as a productive launching point for any effort to think such limits. Responding in part to the insights of Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* and Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History,” Agamben argues that artists and thinkers who are truly “contemporary” must be able to assume an observational “distance” from their era, a radical form of “noncoincidence” and “dys-chrony”: “Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism” (41). To lack this distance, Agamben

asserts, is to miss the context of an era, to miss the “obscurity” of the present, the “demented grin on the face of his age” that makes contemporary ethical judgments possible: “The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as not to perceive its light, but rather its darkness” (44). Agamben’s emphasis on anachronism temporalizes what Édouard Glissant describes in spatial terms as “la pensée de l’errance”; to hold one’s gaze on the present darkness is to wander in and with time, to perceive another way of seeing “Le monde, immédiatement inconnu” (Glissant, *Philosophie* 61).

Agamben then conceptualizes what he means by “darkness” through two scientific analogies: First, he draws on the “neurophysiology of vision” to explain what exactly is present to the person who looks at darkness: “the absence of light activates a series of peripheral cells in the retina called ‘off-cells.’ When activated, these cells produce the particular kind of vision that we call darkness. Darkness is not, therefore, a privative notion (the simple absence of light, or something like nonvision) but rather the result of the activity of the ‘off-cells,’ a product of our own retina” (“What” 44). He then pans out to the cosmological scale, equating “the darkness of the present” with the darkness beyond the limits of the observable universe:

In an expanding universe, the most remote galaxies move away from us at a speed so great that their light is never able to reach us. What we perceive as the darkness of the present is this light that, though traveling toward us, cannot reach us, since the galaxies from which the light originates move away from us at a velocity greater than the speed of light. To perceive, in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot—this is what it means to be contemporary. As such, contemporaries are rare. And for this reason, to be contemporary is, first and foremost, a question of courage, because it means being able not only to firmly fix your gaze on the darkness of the epoch, but also to perceive in this darkness a light that, while directed toward us, infinitely distances itself from us. (46)

Authors of the twenty-first century who write from the animal’s perspective are, I would argue, performing this “courageous” work of perception in the darkness of contemporary animal suffering. The animal’s existence outside of human language is the obscurity that demands

representation. One can compare Agamben's view of darkness as a "product" of representational activity, something other than "a privative notion," with the absence of language Derrida seeks to "access" through his notion of *l'animot*, a portmanteau (*animal* + *mot* [word]) intended to resonate with *animaux*, the plural form of *l'animal*. Language, Derrida argues, has the capacity to liberate the "multiplicity" of animal experiences from the singular hegemonic figure of "the animal," even without overcoming "l'unique et indivisible limite qui séparerait l'homme de l'animal, à savoir le mot [. . .]" When writing animal autobiography, "[il] ne s'agirait pas de 'rendre la parole' aux animaux mais peut-être d'accéder à une pensée, si chimérique ou fabuleuse soit-elle, qui pense autrement l'absence du nom ou du mot, et autrement que comme une privation" (73-74).¹²

There is something else that must be thought, however. Perhaps it would not be necessary to clarify the "non-privative" function of linguistic representation if human authors did not interfere in these two novels, but these texts ultimately seem to "deprive" their animals of their stories in their final pages. These are, indeed, autobiographical projects for the humans involved at least as much as they are for the animals. For precisely that reason, however, the texts cannot deprive the animals without also depriving the humans. Verre Cassé's "appearance" after the end of his own manuscript is not an appearance into presence but rather the announcement of his absence, his death. Janet, meanwhile, cannot erase the "récit" she read in Doogie's gestures without also erasing a part of her own story, a story which, because of her complicity in her

¹² I should acknowledge here the critiques of Matthew Calarco, who argues that both Derrida and Agamben fail to decenter the human in their efforts to dismantle anthropocentrism. I would hope that my emphasis on the contemporary may go a small step toward, as Calarco urges, "*let[ting] the human-animal distinction go*" and "*invent[ing] new concepts and new practices along different paths*" (149). However, I recognize that my reliance on the distinction exposes me to some of Calarco's critiques. It could be argued that the trope of "vision" in Agamben's description of contemporaneity is itself anthropocentric (and ableist). I would suggest, though, that the obscurity in question could be compared to the voids in all domains of perception, not merely the "darkness" produced by human sight.

father's experiments, is arguably as full of darkness and obscurity as Doogie's. The meaning of these texts only presents itself through a double privation, a double negation that takes both human and animal away from themselves.

This double negation is in the autobiographical form itself, as Derrida notes near the end of his address through the terminology of "auto-immunization":

L'autobiographie, l'écriture du soi du vivant, la trace du vivant pour soi, l'être pour soi, l'auto-affection ou l'auto-infection comme mémoire ou archive du vivant serait un mouvement immunitaire [. . .] mais un mouvement immunitaire toujours menacé de devenir auto-immunitaire, comme tout autos, toute ipséité [. . .]. Rien ne risque d'être aussi empoisonnant qu'une autobiographie, empoisonnant pour soi, d'abord, auto-infectieux pour le présumé signataire ainsi auto-affecté. (72-73)

Derrida's analysis of the autobiographical form underscores an equivalence between, on the one hand, the two types of "limit" we have already seen collapsed onto one another—the limit between past and present, and the limit between animal other and human self—and on the other, a limit that always already divides the self into two. Autobiographical writing textualizes a rupture between the living self (the "soi du vivant") and the self as lived, as represented to itself through archival practices of memory (the "vivant pour soi"). The "autoimmune" gesture of autobiography places the two selves in confrontation and "poisons" both, leaving only the text itself present.

Since Derrida's address, several literary scholars have granted contemporary relevance to the genre of "animal autobiography." David Herman's 2018 book *Narratology Beyond the Human* provides a comprehensive review of both the genre's history and the most recent critical engagements (although he curiously neglects to devote anything more than a footnote to Derrida's influence). Herman's narratological method, based largely on the schema introduced in 1972 by Genette's *Discours du récit*, is relevant given his extensive discussion of intra- and extradiegetic perspectives; however, none of the animal autobiographies in his study offers a

very strong structural analog to those I discuss here. His discussion of Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, a biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel, resonates somewhat, insofar as Woolf's very human authorly voice conflicts with our apparent access to Flush's canine sensations, which Woolf narrates in the past tense on an apparently separate diegetic level. Nevertheless, because *Flush* does not claim to be an autobiography, we have here a relatively unambiguous case of "heterodiegetic narration" filtered through Flush's "internal focalization" (Herman 164-70). Herman does not, for the most part, build his archive around movements of transgression. He briefly addresses "the role of metalepsis" in a few "more-than-human storyworlds," but he himself acknowledges the need for "further study" (303) of the device.

The transgressive function of metalepsis encourages us to read these two novels not only as autobiographies but as avowals of past wrongs, acts of confession and commemoration suited to the subgenre of "memoir." Indeed, the double meaning in English of the French "mémoires" ("memoirs" and "memories") suggests how Janet's and the porcupine's efforts to reconcile past wrongs with present outcomes must adhere to the ruptures inherent in contemporaneity. Whereas the memoir, as textual form, archives past events as past, the memory marks the past event's resonance in the present. We may at this point ask, who remembers whom in the confrontation between human and animal? But "remembrance" alone does not capture the act of double privation that grants the memoir its presence. I would instead point to a logic of *memorial*, or of commemoration of the self. To memorialize, to externalize memory and share it with another, is a double movement of disavowal: to disavow one's claim to an exclusively individual experience of a past event, while also disavowing any relegation of this event to the past. The memorial is the avowal that results, an affirmation of a shared relation between present and past.

As François Noudelmann argues in “Le contemporain sans époque : une affaire de rythmes,” the logic of “memorial” characterizes our very experience of the contemporary moment:

Les années 80 ont été marquées par un renversement idéologique qui a redessiné la courbure du temps: le contemporain est devenu mémoriel. Non seulement les savoirs mais aussi les pratiques culturelles ont valorisé et reconstruit un passé hypostasié qui fonde le partage du temps présent [. . .]. Superficiellement cette tendance mémorielle semble une réhabilitation du passé, après les futurismes négateurs. Le geste des avant-gardes, appelant à détruire les bibliothèques et les musées, la passion de la vérité ici et maintenant, auraient montré leurs limites et une raison collective sonnerait le rappel des valeurs à sauvegarder [. . .]. Mais il y va bien davantage que d’une réhabilitation, car le passé n’est pas simplement réintégré dans le présent : le présent est désormais vécu comme un passé. (61)

Employing his own terminology of “movement,” Noudelmann argues that the “ideological imposition” (62) of a “hypostatic” collective past serves to suppress the contrapuntal “rhythms” of individual experiences in the present. Like Agamben, he calls for a recognition of the ruptures inherent in contemporaneity: the “durations,” “speeds,” and “pulsations” of discrete lives that share a historical moment “dessinent différents profils de temporalisation. Être contemporain c’est articuler ces profils aux rythmes du monde. La synchronie est ainsi débordée par des polyrythmies, par des contretemps aussi. Pour cette raison il semble toujours périlleux de nommer ‘le’ contemporain” (75).

But would a memorial that is simultaneously autobiographical, authored during the very life it claims to commemorate, suppress the polyrhythms of the present? Perhaps it would where it claims to be factual, where the “autoimmune” gesture of self-transcription might replace the many forms of an individual life with its single instance in the text. But when one writes and memorializes oneself as a fictional animal, a self obviously different from oneself, perhaps the textual instance “articulates” multiple rhythms, even as it retains the limits of a single life. The

text would then, to invoke one of Derrida's terms, inhabit a sort of "chimerical" present, neither fully human nor fully animal.

In contrast to a present lived as a "hypostatic past," a chimerical present would resemble the "posthistorical world" Agamben imagines in *The Open: Man and Animal*. For Agamben, the "theriomorphous" chimeras depicted in the Ambrosian Bible augur the advent of such a world: "It is not impossible," he claims, "that in attributing an animal head to the remnant of Israel, the artist of the manuscript in the Ambrosian intended to suggest that on the last day, the relations between animals and men will take on a new form, and that man himself will be reconciled with his animal nature" (3). The "opening" to which Agamben's title refers is the "negativity" discussed in a letter Georges Bataille wrote to Alexandre Kojève, identified by Agamben as that which "remains" once the dialectical process of history reaches its conclusion and gives way to a posthistorical "epilogue": "The end of history involves, then, an "epilogue" in which human negativity is preserved as a "remnant" in the form of eroticism, laughter, joy in the face of death" (7).

Do the epilogues of our two novels leave us with this "remnant"? Is the human's "reconciliation" with "animal nature" either possible or, as Agamben argues, necessary in the contemporary moment? Let us answer these questions through a reading of the texts as memorials—memorials, specifically, of a time when the limits between human and animal, present and past, seemed to have clear definition.

III. Reconciliation and the (Dis)Placement of the Living in *Mémoires de porc-épic*

In Mabankou's text, it is the animal who must reconcile himself with his past among humans through a practice of both confession and commemoration. Drawing on the animist oral

mythologies that inspire him to imagine a society where male elders “transmit” animal doubles to their sons and grandsons, Mabanckou frames the porcupine’s reconciliation with the human, as I will demonstrate, as a memorializing reconciliation between the living and the dead.

The text’s structure is such that there are two sections we could reasonably call the “epilogue.” I have already discussed the fictional “letter to the publisher,” based on which the porcupine’s voice can be understood to be the textual “remnant” of a deceased human author. But just before the letter is the epilogue narrated by the porcupine himself. After he finishes his story, which ends with the death of his human host, he describes his absurd and ambitious future plans in a section titled, “comment je ne suis pas encore un porc-épic fini.” Even though he is already, somehow, forty-two years old, he assures the baobab he will raise a family, transform into a “double pacifique” (in contrast to a “double nuisible”), and become “le Mathusalem de l’espèce animale.” He thus projects himself as a “remnant” in the sense of being immortal, leaving no impression whatsoever that a paratextual letter is about to break open the limits of his selfhood. “[S]i j’existe encore,” he decides, “c’est parce qu’une volonté au-dessus de moi l’a décidé, or s’il en a été décidé ainsi, c’est que je dois forcément avoir une dernière mission à remplir ici-bas” (219).

Strangely enough, the porcupine’s literary double, Verre Cassé, finishes his own novel with a promise to fulfill a final “mission” of his own. Devastated over the loss of his mother, kicked out of his home by his wife, and fired from his job as a teacher, he sees no choice but to commit suicide in the same river where his mother, due to unknown causes, drowned: “à minuit pile, je vais plonger dans les profondeurs de ces eaux étroites [. . .] je serai heureux parce que j’aurai rejoint ma mère, et le lendemain [. . .] depuis l’autre monde, le sourire aux lèvres, je pourrai enfin murmurer ‘mission terminée’” (*Verre* 200).

This suicide mission would, on first impression, seem totally opposite to the porcupine's mission of longevity. The opposition only enhances the sense of displacement we experience in the movement from the porcupine's diegetic level to Verre Cassé—until, that is, we reflect on the exact “place” at stake in this displacement. It is no coincidence that the site where Verre Cassé both kills himself and leaves the manuscript to the porcupine's story—a river—is the site where the porcupine narrates his commemoration of Kibandi. Nor can we ignore a scene in *Verre Cassé* where the narrator recounts his own “légende d'errance” to, of all possible listeners, a tree: “l'arbre pleurait en m'écoulant parce que, quoi qu'on dise, les arbres aussi versent des larmes [. . .] et dans ces moments difficiles seul cet arbre me comprenait, il remuait alors ses branches en signe d'acquiescement [. . .] je promettais à mon ami feuillu de me réincarner en arbre quand Dieu me rappellerait” (156-57). The possibility that the baobab tree who listens to the porcupine may somehow be the human author's “reincarnation” appears all the more worthy of consideration given the porcupine's belief that confessional disclosure will allow him to “escape” death: “mon cher Baobab, je suis assis à ton pied, je te parle, je te parle encore même si je suis certain que tu ne me répondras pas, or la parole, me semble-t-il, délivre de la peur de la mort, et si elle pouvait aussi m'aider à la repousser, à lui échapper, je serais alors le porc-épic le plus heureux du monde” (*Mémoires* 39).

The passage brings to mind Derrida's focus on the animal's supposed inability to “respond.” The capacity for response would lead to the potential for interruption, when what the porcupine wants most of all right now is to hear himself speak, to assure himself he is still alive and still able to narrate his experience. But if the tree is Verre Cassé, and the porcupine is Verre Cassé, then we must read this scene as though the porcupine is both a) already dead, and b) communicating with another dead self; the very logic of “response” ceases to operate if the limit

between the living, speaking self and the dead, silent one is undefined. Are we then left with what Bataille would call a “negativity with no use”? To say as much would be to frame the baobab’s silence as useless, when the porcupine believes just the opposite:

Mon choix de me cacher à ton pied n’est pas le fait d’un hasard . . . je veux en fait tirer profit de ton expérience d’ancêtre, il n’y a qu’à voir les rides qui s’entremêlent autour de ton tronc pour comprendre comment tu as su jongler avec l’alternance des saisons, même tes racines se prolongent loin, très loin dans le ventre de la terre, et, de temps à autre, tu remues tes branches pour imposer une direction au vent, rappeler à la nature que seul le silence permet de vivre aussi longtemps. (43)

Not only does the porcupine reject the view that silence is useless, but he also situates the tree at the very center of life’s continuation. Rather than existing in a posthistorical or ahistorical state of negativity, the tree has its own “ancestral experience,” as well as its own capacity to remind—or, to translate literally, “recall to” (“rappeler à”)—its environment the meaning of its “silence.”

Some prior readings of *Mémoires de porc-épic* have focused on the importance of “displacement” to the porcupine’s narrative. Annabelle Marie, for instance, cites Homi Bhabha’s theory of the “fondamentalement déplacé” postcolonial subject to account for the same structural “dédouplements successifs” (78) I have interrogated through the concept of metalepsis: “S’accomplit ainsi un processus conflictuel d’hybridité où tout se confond: des interstices se produisent, des espaces se superposent, mettant fin à toute homogénéité sociale” (87). Marie further underscores displacement and duality in terms of conflict when she attributes the novel’s theme of split selfhood to Mabanckou’s “rivalité mimétique” with Cameroonian author Patrice Nganang, whose 2001 novel *Temps de chien* (which has an embattled animal narrator of its own) could arguably be read as an inspiration for *Mémoires de porc-épic*. Marie offers a compelling comparison of the two novels’ first lines:

La première phrase qu’émet le porc-épic: “Donc je ne suis qu’un animal” (11) est certainement à mettre en rapport avec celle sur laquelle s’ouvrait le récit de Mboudjak dans le roman de Nganang: “Je suis un chien”(13), à la différence que Mabanckou situe

d'emblée le propos de son animal dans le registre de l'infériorité ("ne . . . que"). Ce "donc" sur lequel s'ouvre sa phrase (qui fonctionne ainsi comme une conclusion alors que rien ne la précède—si ce n'est peut-être le roman de Nganang), nous renvoie à la fameuse citation de Descartes: "Je pense donc je suis," ce dernier ayant refusé à l'animal toute aptitude au langage, parce qu'il ne serait qu'un simple automate. (79)

As my earlier discussion of consecutive yet contemporaneous displacements suggested, however, we do not need to read displacement as wholly negative, conflictual, or unresolvable. What strikes me about the porcupine's commitment to tell his story is just how "rooted" he is, how certain he is of his place in both space and time.

To offer an alternative reading of the porcupine's "donc," one need look no further than the "donc" in Derrida's own challenge to the Cartesian *cogito*: if the *je* is always already troubled, divided across the limits of its own presence, then there is nothing to stop the human from labeling itself as animal. The syllogistic "donc," in its capacity to mark both what follows and what is, affirms the porcupine's identity precisely by indicating the rupture inherent in the narrating self. And while the restrictive "ne...que" does convey "inferiority" on a first reading, it serves to reaffirm the animal's presence on the second, as though to reflect back on the metaleptic gesture and dispel in the reader any notions that Verre Cassé is "only" Verre Cassé. The porcupine therefore fulfills his purpose as a "remnant," and reconciliation is indeed achieved.

Whereas Agamben fears that "posthistorical humanity" will assume the control of "natural life itself" as its final "task" (*The Open* 76-77), however, Mabanckou's vision of reconciliation depends neither on an end to history nor on a continuation of the "human." It depends instead on what Achille Mbembe has promoted as an anticolonial "politique du vivant" (*Politiques* 8) which would be based on a reorientation of our focus from the "condition humaine" to the "condition terrestre" (23). In "L'Afrique qui vient," an essay Mbembe

contributed to a collection organized by none other than Mabanckou, he calls for a new “form of democracy” that would “sache prendre en charge l’ensemble du vivant, c’est-à-dire les êtres humains, les espèces vivantes, végétales, organiques, biologiques. L’histoire humaine est une parenthèse dans l’histoire générale de l’univers. Nous sommes de passage dans le monde. Le nouveau projet démocratique doit donc faire place à l’idée du passant” (30-31).

Mabanckou’s porcupine, by fulfilling his mission to tell his story of passage from the animal world to the human world and back again, creates a place and a space for “l’idée du passant.” In the few pages before the end of his narration, the porcupine notes life’s persistence: “Le jour vient de se lever, je suis surpris de constater la vie tout autour, les oiseaux qui reviennent se poser sur les branches des arbres, la rivière qui coule avec plus de turbulence, une agitation qui me rassure d’ailleurs, donc c’est encore une petite victoire, je dois la prendre telle quelle” (213). The porcupine’s story may end in death, but his “victory” persists in the continuation of life. As Glissant, one of Mbembe’s foremost influences, declares in his final public lecture, “rien n’est vrai, tout est vivant” ; “le vivant ne s’exprime en rien sinon en son propre transport” (“Rien” 211).

IV. Threshold of (Con)Temporary Life in *Mémoires de la jungle*

Nevertheless, as we now turn—or pass—once more to Garcia’s novel, which concludes on a far less optimistic note than Mabanckou’s, I have to acknowledge the dark side of “passing.” Doogie’s muteness in the epilogue reminds us that the human’s “reconciliation” with the animal can take different forms, that “silence” can indeed prove useless (at least for those forced into silence), and that the mere continuation of life is not enough to ensure our survival.

Earlier, I omitted to mention that the pages of Janet's prologue are not, in fact, the opening pages of *Mémoires de la jungle*. After an unremarkable dedication page (addressed to philosopher-musician Agnès Gayraud) and an ominous epigraph from primatologist Frans de Waal's *Our Inner Ape* ("On peut sortir le singe de la jungle, mais pas la jungle du singe" [11]), the first page of actual information contains a block of italicized text introducing the novel's setting and its post-apocalyptic context; we learn that this story (like Mabanckou's) takes place in Africa:

Dans un avenir pas si lointain, le sol du continent africain sur la planète Terre a été expérimentalement laissé en jachère pour un siècle au moins, après qu'il a été dévasté [. . .] par la colonisation de l'espèce humaine, qui désormais vit essentiellement dans les villes d'autres continents et à l'intérieur de vastes stations orbitales aménagées [. . .]. Tout autour, à perte de vue, la jungle de jadis a repris ses droits et seule sa mémoire semble à présent conserver les traces de ce qui s'y passe [. . .] (13)

The text resembles an opening description in a stage play, as evidenced by the following three pages, where we find a *dramatis personae* with descriptions of all the novel's characters (e.g. "DOOGIE – chimpanzé mâle éduqué, narrateur [*Pan troglodytes troglodytes*]" [14]). The front matter thereby frames both Janet's and Doogie's narration within the medium of performance—a strategy that serves to formalize a sense of contemporaneity between the text's creation and its reception, in a manner consistent with the previously discussed conflict between the past and present in the novel's prose. In narratological terms, performance conforms to the temporality of the theatrical "scene": we are left with the impression that what Genette calls "narrative time" and "story time" will occupy identical spans (Genette 94-95). The conceit of performance therefore serves to underscore the *temporary* quality of narrative. Whereas Mabanckou's intertextual gesture sets up a sort of immortal recursive loop between the porcupine's story and the human author's, Garcia's techniques make it clear that the contemporaneity between human and animal will, at some point, come to an end.

The conceit of performance continues as we switch between the two narrators: Janet “takes the floor” in her prologue, then Doogie’s first chapter takes the form of a “speech” (on the subject of his misremembered past life in the jungle) that he prepares—“Il est temps pour le discours: faites-moi la place nette!”—and then delivers to the reader in an oratorical fashion greatly reminiscent of Red Peter, the talking chimpanzee narrator of Franz Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy”: “Madame, monsieur, mesdemoiselles, cher très cher respect, Comme vous le pouvez constater, je ne suis pas comme vous, mais je fais presque comme vous” (23-24). This is not the only moment where Doogie seems to echo Red Peter, nor is it the most obvious. Much later in the novel, when Doogie finds he lacks the proper primate etiquette to socialize with a group of bonobos, he dejectedly laments his status on the “threshold” between human and beast: “Toi l’humain, pourquoi m’as-tu sorti de la Jungle du Paradis des bêtes ? Pourquoi m’as-tu mis seul dans le langage sur le seuil de la porte de l’humain, mais pas dedans ? À la porte, Doogie, impossible que tu entres, impossible que tu sortes” (251). Red Peter narrates a similar situation to his own audience of academics: he is unable to give an account of his former life as an ape, he says, because the “archway” through which he passed has now shrunk behind him, and to return to his experience of animality he would have to “scrape the very skin from [his] body to crawl through” (Kafka 250). The conceit of performance, along with the early establishment of separate diegetic levels, forces readers to experience the same state of indeterminacy one encounters on the threshold.

But Red Peter’s image suggests a re-entry which, however difficult and painful it would be, is something other than what Doogie believes is “impossible.” One could, indeed, read what happens to Doogie following his departure from the bonobo colony as Garcia’s take on what

would happen if Red Peter scraped off his skin. If Red Peter returned, would he again be an animal? Or would he only remain as something with even less of a voice?

Before Doogie returns to find complete chaos at the zoo, and before he meets the bonobos, he decides where he should go thanks to the (artificially introduced) help of a tropical bird (labeled by Doogie as “Mille Couleurs”) who speaks to Doogie in Janet’s voice: “C’est moi Doogie, c’est Janet” (122). The bird cannot stop repeating two words that sound a lot like “re-animal” and “renature”: “La Rnimal ! il a dit, l’oiseau. Il faut aller dans la Rnature, Doogie. La solution est dans la Rnature” (123). The bird also repeats the English “Nevermind,” perhaps in intertextual dialogue with the “Nevermore” of Poe’s raven: “C’est le royaume de Nevermind: laisse-tomber, jamais penser, vivent leur vie les singes petits [. . .] Mais...La Rnimal. Tu dois aller au royaume de la Rnature. La Rnature Doogie” (130-31). The bird turns out to be animatronic, as Doogie later discovers when, reacting with rage to all the animals running loose through the ruins of the zoo, he tries to strangle it and finds paint on his hand. He then looks around to discover an entire “nature d’animaux d’arc-en-ciel” (also represented by, among others, “un lama bleu ciel, un renard noir et le tigre aux rayures rouges”) has replaced the zoo’s former inhabitants: “Vieux animaux du vieux Zoo, qu’est-ce qu’il s’est passé? Blessés, torturés, un quelqu’un vous a redessinés, renaturés. Fausses, je découvre les couleurs de chacun, qui fête erre et malade [. . .]. Car la Rnature n’est qu’une repeinte” (307). By saying that “re-Nature” is nothing but a “re-painting,” is Doogie also saying that “Nature”—that is to say, a first Nature, before the animal’s supposed departure that demands its staged reenactment—is itself nothing but “paint”? The inaccessibility of “nature” makes this difficult to answer, but what is clear is that Doogie has crossed a threshold, and what is on the other side is no more “real” to him than what was on the threshold.

As for what the bird meant by the “Rnimal,” it turns out to be a reference to Janet’s brother Donald, whom Gardner had raised as a sort of feral child in an experiment that inverted or operated in chiasmus with the experiment of Doogie’s human socialization. It is Doogie’s battle with Donald that rids the former once and for all of his ties to humanity; whether through blunt force to the head or psychological shock, Doogie leaves with his representational faculties severely impacted. After a couple of chapters in which the prose is nothing but a sequence of self-reflexive linguistic games (e.g. “La jungle jungle, le ciel ciel, la terre terre. Ça s’acte. Animal ah, monkey si” [328]), he has nothing more to say.

And so what “reconciliation” does the epilogue offer us? We have already seen the consequences of Doogie’s confrontation with the fictionality of his own being: in seeing Donald, he sees himself as nothing more than a combination of two artificial selves, neither of which has anything to say. And so he is left silent, even if “reconciled” with the truth.

In his “Introduction to the Paratext,” Genette locates the surrounding materials of a text—which, in the case of Doogie’s “memoirs,” comprise the front matter, the prologue, and the epilogue—on a threshold: “Rather than with a limit or a sealed frontier, we are dealing in this case with a threshold, or [. . .] with a ‘vestibule’ which offers to anyone and everyone the possibility either of entering or of turning back” (Genette and Maclean 261). By drawing attention to the thresholds of the novel and autobiographical forms, and to the performativity of the text, Garcia prompts us to think that, although the threshold may be a space of suffering, the “reconciliation” on the other side may, if the suffering is unacknowledged, be a space without any possibility of communication at all. As Garcia writes in *Nous, animaux et humains*, “la souffrance est ce que nous partageons de minimal avec tout autre sujet” (46). For now, in a

present where humans and animals suffer together, we must embrace our shared existence as contemporaries on the threshold between past and future.

V. (Conclusion): Being and Becoming (Con)Temporary Animals

The comparison of the metaleptic transgressions in Mabanckou's and Garcia's novel yields an ambivalent verdict when it comes to Agamben's call for the human's "reconciliation" with "animal nature." On the one hand, the reconciliation promised in Mabanckou's text, between the speech of the living and the silence of the dead, offers an inspirational, anticolonial politics that expands our concept of "life" to encompass broader ecological processes of change and becoming. On the other hand, Doogie's tragic journey of "re-naturing," his transgression of the "threshold" between man and beast, forces us to challenge the very premise of an objectified "animal nature" that would be a presupposed party to such reconciliation.

The contrast in tone reflects, in part, the different discourses in which Mabanckou and Garcia situate their animal voices. Although both novelists are strongly critical of empiricist epistemologies, Garcia still emphasizes some of the insights science has provided into animal consciousness, while Mabanckou responds to anthropocentric Western rationalism with a focus on animist ontologies. One could also argue that the enormous differences between porcupines and chimpanzees influence the characters' ability to adapt to new encounters with animality. Mabanckou imagines the porcupine, a prey animal reliant on the defenses of his body, as a being more attuned to the rhythms of vegetal and inorganic life; Garcia, aware of the chimpanzee's evolutionary proximity to the human, suggests that apes' shared capacities for pattern recognition and tool use may be what make our interactions with them so consequential and potentially dangerous. Both the different histories inherited by human writers of animal voices

and the multitude of subjectivities implicit in the category of animality make evident the difficulty of reconciliation.

In spite of the contrasts, is there a reconciliation both these contemporary writers make possible? The very structure of contemporaneity, and the very structure of autobiographical representation, demand that we preserve certain thresholds: the thresholds between self and other, human and animal, may indeed be two such thresholds. But they do not need to coincide altogether. The spatial metaphor of the threshold helps us to imagine limits that themselves have limits; metalepsis, a passage across multiple thresholds, reveals how even those limits that intersect at many different points or lines of representation may not separate the same things. Rather than privileging our reconciliation of “human” subjectivity with “animal nature,” these fictional autobiographies suggest how we might reconcile “animality” with our most intimate experiences of suffering and self-representation.

If the value of Mabankou’s text lies in its more coherent worldview and its more inspiring politics, then the value of Garcia’s pessimism is to convey the absolute urgency of such a politics. There is one threshold we cannot help but pass, as we and all other lifeforms face the present force of ecological catastrophe: the limit between past and future. But if the human, as an animal who writes, memorializes the human it can no longer be, we can pass that threshold while remaining on the thresholds that make acts of self-representation possible. To be contemporary in this sense would be to write ourselves as *(con)temporary* beings, to make present the thresholds of contiguous finitude we share with our more-than-human contemporaries.

Thresholds will return in the next chapter, where they signify the limits separating the neurotypical human’s point-of-view from that of both the animal and the autistic human. As I begin to conjure the rhetoric of spectrality through my readings of narratives that explore autism,

it will become clear that the act of being-contemporary, of passing the threshold separating us from the animal, is an inherently hauntological and spectral act.

CHAPTER 2 – ANIMALS ON THE SPECTER: AUTISTIC VISION AND THE PRESENCE OF THE IMMORTAL (NON)HUMAN

I. Introduction: Specters of Two and Seven

The French refer to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as “le trouble du spectre autistique” (TSA). One can translate this back into English as “the trouble of the autistic specter.” Through readings of three authors’ engagements with autistic perception, and through a reading of broader psychoanalytic and neuroscientific narratives that have developed around autism over the last century, I ask what it means to represent and diagnose subjects who are on the spectrum as being *on the specter*. The rise of “hauntological” readings informed by Derrida’s work on “le spectre” requires us to locate and to deconstruct this “autistic specter” that poses such “trouble” for literary and medical narrative. What this particular specter “haunts,” I will argue, is a definition of *the human* as a subject that possesses, in contrast to nonhuman animals and machines, a unique capacity to create and interpret narrative. This chapter begins with a reading of Mark Haddon’s novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*; places it in conversation with the writings of autistic animal scientist Temple Grandin; then approaches a theoretical understanding of autism’s role in narrative through the writings of educator, essayist, and filmmaker Fernand Deligny.

“The dog was dead.” It looked alive, but it was, in fact dead. This capacity for the (dead) animal’s appearance to deceive is the first thing announced in English novelist Mark Haddon’s

2003 novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: “2. It was 7 minutes after midnight. The dog was lying on the grass in the middle of the lawn in front of Mrs. Shears’s house. Its eyes were closed. It looked as if it was running on its side, the way dogs run when they think they are chasing a cat in a dream. But the dog was not running or asleep. The dog was dead” (Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* 1).

Who announces the potential for deception? The narrator, Christopher Boone, a fifteen-year-old boy on the autism spectrum. But the narrator, whose sympathy for the animal and frank manner of speaking draws the reader in to hear his story, is not who he appears to be either; he is an invention, created by Haddon, a non-autistic writer. As fiction, he is himself a deception.

But to claim that either the animal or the autistic child deceives is to claim there exists an originary truth that is being denied: the animal’s deadness on the one hand, the autistic voice’s nonautistic author on the other. Haddon’s novel frustrates the reader’s need for an origin with its very first typographical character: “2”. There is no first chapter in this book. And is this even a “book” in the sense it appears to be on its first page? No: It’s a journal, we soon learn, which Christopher shares with his educational case worker at school, Siobhan. Christopher, in a gesture that signals his stereotypically Aspie fascination with mathematics, numbers his entries with prime numbers. Since one, by fault of having only one divisor (itself) rather than two, is not a “prime” number, the reader does not get a “one.” There is always already—to invoke Derrida immediately in this spectral reading of autistic narration—*plus d’un*: “the more than one/no more one” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xx).

The novel thus opens with the immediate denial of an origin (the existence of which it nonetheless affirms in the denial). Christopher begins with a rupture, an allusion to a binary. The binary, in its coincidence with the establishment of a narrative boundary, opposes multiple terms:

human (Christopher)/animal (Wellington, the dog); I/it; alive/dead. But the terms left unopposed are the same as those left in suspension by the animal autobiographies of the previous chapter: before/after. It *was* 7 minutes *after* midnight. Why is Christopher in front of Mrs. Shears's house? Why is he outside of his own home at all this late? If the story started at midnight, we might know. But it doesn't. Instead, the first sentence declares the opening of a story that always already begins after the act of creation.

The binary is thus never truly binary. And given the attention Christopher will pay to the religious "metaphor" of his own name ("It means *carrying Christ* and it comes from the Greek words **χριστος** (which means *Jesus Christ*) and **φερειν** and it was the name given to St. Christopher because he carried Jesus across a river" (16; bold in original text)), I do not think I am reaching to suggest that the "7" here is crucial; seven, the number of days it takes God to create the world in Genesis, heralds the apparent unity of a world completed in spite of, or rather also because of, the binary opened by the Word. There is a creative continuity here, an authorial direction, that connects the darkness of before and the seeing of after.

But now I am relying on metaphor, and it is precisely the deference to metaphor as truth that this autistic voice claims to reject: Christopher, who observes, rightly, that all metaphor is a "lie," declares, "I do not want my name to mean a story about being kind and helpful [like St. Christopher]. I want my name to mean me" (16). Fine, then; we will decide the two is just a two, and the seven is just a seven. And we will decide that the next time we see a seven, which happens at the start of the fourth chapter (seven being the fourth prime number after 2, 3, and 5), Christopher makes a statement that has no meaning outside of itself: "7. This is a murder mystery novel" (4). At last, some clarity: We are reading a book that will follow the conventions of a genre that proceeds from greater to lesser ambiguity. The story, like all murder mysteries,

will be a “puzzle,” Christopher leads us to believe (5). More helpful still, the chapter provides us with a text for comparison: one of Christopher’s favorite books is Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The allusion is appropriate given that this novel’s title, “the curious incident of the dog in the night-time,” is in fact a line of dialogue spoken by Sherlock Holmes in another Doyle tale, “The Adventure of Silver Blaze.”

Wait, though; that first 7 again starts to resemble more than a 7. There is more than one 7 now. And the first 7 seems to anticipate the second 7, which, in marking this book’s conformance to a genre and a template for our reading, marks the announcement of a unity, the very unity we determined the first 7 could not possibly announce, for that would be a metaphor, and Christopher refuses metaphor.

So which is it? Is the book a murder mystery novel, or is it not?

One thing the book is not, as Christopher admits up front, is Doyle’s novel. Although he mentions the Sherlock Holmes story to defend his use of the “murder mystery” label, his case worker prompts him to confront the differences between that novel and his own:

Siobhan read the first page and said that it was different...She said that it was usually people who were killed in murder mystery novels. I said that two dogs were killed in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the hound itself, and James Mortimer’s spaniel, but Siobhan said they weren’t the victims of the murder, Sir Charles Baskerville was. She said that this was because readers cared more about people than dogs, so if a person was killed in a book, readers would want to carry on reading. (5)

As explained by Siobhan, who stands in here as a neurotypical reader of Christopher’s writing, the human victim is the one who most easily provokes the ideal reader’s sympathies.

Christopher’s choice to investigate the murder of a dog is thus a charming deviance, which marks his novel as an autistic or Aspie twist on the expectations of the genre. So, too, is the fact that this novel is the writer’s account of “real” events, rather than a fictional tale that might indulge the supposedly nonautistic penchant for metaphor or, as Christopher would put it, lies: “I

said that I wanted to write about something real and I knew people who had died but I did not know any people who had been killed[...]I also said that I cared about dogs because they were faithful and honest, and some dogs were cleverer and more interesting than some people” (5-6).

Of course, one does not need an autism spectrum diagnosis to laugh at and perhaps even agree with Christopher’s claim that “some dogs [are] cleverer and more interesting than some people.” What’s more, many of those who have read Doyle’s novel would likely challenge Siobhan’s claim that Sir Charles Baskerville’s “human” status is what draws the reader’s interest in his death; on the contrary, it is the nonhuman hound, whose status as the potential killer Doyle deems interesting enough to announce in his novel’s title.

Doyle’s hound turns out, by the end of Holmes’s investigation, to be a very special hound. He is both myth and fact, absence and presence. The fictional hound is the one of Baskerville family legend, alleged to have killed Charles’s ancestor, Hugo, generations earlier. When Sir James Mortimer brings the case of Charles’s death to Holmes, he brings with him a manuscript that tells of how Hugo, in a night of drunken carousing, kidnapped a young maiden; when she escapes, he releases a pack of hounds to chase after her, only for his own body to be found next to hers hours later. The search party that sets off for Hugo finds “a hound of hell” standing over him and the maiden: “a foul thing, a great, black beast, shaped like a hound, yet larger than any hound that ever mortal eye has rested upon. And even as they looked the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville[...]One [of the three searchers], it is said, died that very night of what he had seen, and the other twain were but broken men for the rest of their days” (13-14).

A very interesting hound indeed! What word can serve to identify this hound, this hound that, as gargantuan “hound of hell,” is only “like a hound,” a hound that, in driving those who

look at it mad, turning them into dead or undead men, must be differentiated from those normalized hounds that are put before the “mortal eye”? When this mythic hound seems to become real in the story of Charles’s death, one of the words that Sir James Mortimer uses is one my reader will not be surprised to see me underscore: “I find that before the terrible event occurred several people had seen a creature upon the moor which corresponds with this Baskerville demon, and which could not possibly be any animal known to science. They all agreed that it was a huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral” (25).

A *spectral* hound, then. What does it mean? The word haunts Doyle’s narrator, Watson, who uses it twice later in the novel: once in a letter to Holmes, who has sent him to conduct investigations in and around Baskerville Hall (“There was the long, gloomy tunnel down which [Charles] fled. And from what? A sheep-dog of the moor? Or a spectral hound, black, silent, and monstrous? Was there a human agency in the matter?[...]It was all dim and vague, but always there is the dark shadow of crime behind it” (90)); and once in his personal diary (“It is incredible, impossible, that it should really be outside the ordinary laws of nature. A spectral hound which leaves material footmarks and fills the air with its howling is surely not to be thought of” (118)). Watson conceives of the “spectral hound” as something “impossible,” something outside “the ordinary laws of nature,” foreign to “human agency.” But he turns out to be wrong on all three counts. The “spectral hound” is quite real, and quite coexistent with the human agency in Charles Baskerville’s death, as Christopher explains in a later discussion of Doyle’s novel:

And Sherlock Holmes finds out that Sir Charles was killed by a neighbor called Stapleton who is a butterfly collector and a distant relation of the Baskervilles[...]In order to [kill Charles] he has brought a huge dog from London and covered it in phosphorus to make it glow in the dark, and it was this dog which scared Sir Charles Baskerville to death. And Sherlock Holmes and Watson and Lestrade from Scotland Yard catch him. And Sherlock

Holmes and Watson shoot the dog, which is one of the dogs which gets killed in the story, which is not nice because it is not the dog's fault. (70-71)

Christopher's declaration that Charles's death "is not the dog's fault" may not seem like a very provocative or objectionable claim: he is just a dog, lacking in human reason, whose ability to kill comes not from feral violence but rather a human's scheme to make him "spectral," an image of the living dead. But what of Christopher's complaint that the dog should not, according at least to his sense of justice, have been killed?

A first glance at the climax of Doyle's novel might lead to the sense Christopher is unambiguously wrong. One might think Holmes and Watson must kill the hound to prevent it from killing Charles's son and heir, Henry, after Stapleton puts the hound onto Henry's scent and sends it chasing after him. Christopher, however, might protest that the hound only pins Henry down *after* the first shots hit him. He might also question whether it was necessary for Holmes to empty a full "five barrels of his revolver into the creature's flank." The fact is, we do not know what was necessary. We know that *some* sort of response was necessary, but we also know the decision to kill the animal, rather than to injure him, may have been a reaction born of panic: "Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain[.]" claims Watson, "could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog" (176).

The fact that Christopher, whose "disordered brain" is as much a source of "interest" for Haddon's reader as the dog whose death Siobhan dismisses as trivial, is the one who responds to Watson's fear and takes issue with its result is significant. It forces us to confront the questions of an "impossible" responsibility that, as Derrida suggests, animals and specters alike demand on the humans who claim to define the limits of language, narrative, the law, and the living. Is there nothing metaphorical in the coincidence between this defense of a spectral animal and Haddon's

creation of a human who is, himself, “spectral”—*on the spectrum*? What can be made of the etymology that connects these two nouns to a single adjective, an etymology obscured in English but kept exposed in French (where the autistic spectrum is at once the autistic specter)? What impossible response is demanded of authors and readers by the autistic voice (which, in contrast with the voice of the “normate,” defined by disability studies theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson as “the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings,” is often defined by its reliance on expressions seemingly outside of language) (Garland-Thomson 8)?

In the pages that follow, I situate Haddon’s novel in a long lineage of texts, both literary and scientific, that have established “spectrality” as the basis for affiliations between autistic and animal voices. I argue that the narratives of life on the autism spectrum that have emerged over the last 50 to 100 years, narratives that alternate their focus between the autistic mind’s seemingly superhuman and subhuman capacities, owe whatever coherence they might have to a spectral presence that haunts the very category of the human. This presence manifests in the autistic human and the nonhuman animal’s shared tendency to, as Derrida writes in one description of the *spectre*, “regularly [exceed] all the oppositions between visible and invisible, sensible and insensible” (Derrida and Stiegler 117). I argue that the autistic human and the nonhuman animal, by standing in excess to the oppositions on which the possibility of a responsibility would seem to depend, gesture toward the specter of *a narrative that the human being can neither write nor interpret for itself*.

I begin, first, with a summary of contemporary critical responses to both Haddon’s book and broader tendencies in literary and scientific representations of autism. I then place passages from Haddon’s novel in dialogue with passages from the works of two writers who have played

key roles in defining autism's relation to narratives of the human: French educator Fernand Deligny, and autistic animal scientist Temple Grandin.

II. The Autism Spectrum and Animal Studies in Contemporary Criticism

The Curious Incident received significant acclaim upon its release, winning the Whitbread Book of the Year award and placing on the longlist for the Man Booker Prize. Although words like “autism,” “spectrum,” or “Asperger’s” never appear in the novel, “the book was marketed with the term “Asperger’s” on the cover, and an audience with even a glancing familiarity with autism will conclude that Christopher Boone is on the spectrum” (Loftis 124). Christopher’s difficulties reading facial expressions of emotion, along with his fascination with subjects like mathematics, are clear tells. Moreover, in an interview with NPR, Haddon acknowledged that “If [Christopher] were diagnosed, he would be diagnosed as having Asperger’s syndrome, which is a form of autism” (Haddon, “Children’s Book Writer and Illustrator Mark Haddon”). The book has sold millions of copies and been adapted by Simon Stephens into an Olivier and Tony Award-winning stageplay, which premiered at the Royal National Theatre in 2012 and on Broadway in 2015.

Despite its success (or perhaps because of it), Haddon’s novel has attracted mixed responses from literary critics in the area of disability studies, who point to its reliance on stereotypes in its portrayal of a voice on the autism spectrum. Although marketed as a “murder mystery novel” and identified as such by its narrator, the book turns out, as several academics have noted, to be a generic family drama, in which the protagonist’s developmental disability drives the plot by contributing to both his parents’ separation and their eventual (partial) reconciliation. “While the novel realistically depicts some of the unique difficulties of parenting an autistic child,” writes Sonya Freeman Loftis, “it also falls back on the cliché of autism as a

family tragedy, allowing Christopher's disability to stand in as a symbol for his family's dissolution" (129). Marla Carlson, writing about the stage adaptation, situates *Curious Incident* and other performances of autism in a genre she calls "the autism family drama"—"the play's success as well as its shortcomings are bound up with its investment in the family romance, and it structures this romance in particularly neoliberal terms: the parents function as technicians of their son's self-fulfillment, which ideally leads to independence and (at least the possibility of) economic advancement" (Carlson 51). Haddon's narrative thus falls back on what Sharon Snyder and David T. Mitchell call the "prosthetic" function of disability in narrative: By reducing disability to tragedy, and "[b]y depicting disability as an isolated and individual affair, storytellers artificially [extract] the experience of disability from its necessary social contexts" (Snyder and Mitchell 19).

It is not that these social contexts are absent from Haddon's novel, as James Berger notes: in one amusing sequence, Christopher goes door-to-door requesting information on Wellington's death from his neighbors, only to find people are either rude or blissfully unaware of the residents around them; as Berger puts it, Christopher finds "that the social order itself is itself placed firmly on the autistic spectrum[...]characterized by its members' isolation and inability to communicate with each other" (201). The problem, as noted by Loftis, Carlson, and Berger, is that these social contexts, which are arguably in part responsible for Christopher's disability (I investigate the questions of causality and etiology in relation to autism later), remain unchanged in spite of whatever personal triumphs Christopher is able to experience by the end of the narrative. Christopher solves the mystery of Wellington's death; relocates the mother he thought was dead; gets top marks on his maths A-Levels; and is gifted a new puppy; but these successes stand in as prosthetic substitutions for more systematic, structural responses to Christopher's

disability that the novel fails to entertain as even possible. I would go so far as to argue that the novel substitutes the autistic subject—a subject who, as Christopher says in comparing himself to Sherlock Holmes, can “detach [his] mind at will to a remarkable degree” (Haddon, *The Curious Incident* 132)—in the place of an idealized self-sufficient, rational-minded subject who poses no challenge to the neoliberal status quo.¹³ Christopher affirms his place within the dominant social order in the novel’s final lines, in which he announces his plans to “go to university” and “become a scientist”: “And I know I can do this,” he says, “because I went to London on my own, and because I solved the mystery of **Who Killed Wellington?** And I found my mother and I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything” (221).

Of course, Christopher’s utter confidence that he “can do anything” demands a suspension of disbelief from readers who have already seen the limitations imposed by his disability. The stage adaptation visualizes this suspension more literally, placing these final lines in a conversation between Christopher and Siobhan. He presents his plans, summarizes his achievements, and, when met with a lack of enthusiastic support on Siobhan’s part, asks, “Does that mean I can do anything do you think? Does that mean I can do anything Siobhan? Does that mean I can do anything?” She doesn’t answer; as the stage directions dictate, she and Christopher “look at each other for a while” in silence before the lights cut to black (Stephens 85). The remainder of Christopher’s story is left untold, allowing us, if we choose, not to think

¹³ Berger describes the presence of a neoliberal society in Haddon’s novel as follows: “Both in reality and in Haddon’s fictional portrayal, [the novel’s setting of] Swindon occupies a post-Thatcher England characterized by vibrant high-tech industries coexisting with declining social services and education and with rising unemployment and homelessness. It seems characterized also by a lack of social networks and civic, community, and class organizations of the sort that E.P. Thompson described as helping to form the basis of a distinct working-class culture in England from the eighteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. Nor do we see any evidence of extended families; the small detached houses of Swindon are inhabited only by nuclear families, or fragments of them. This is a social world that, for reasons Haddon does not investigate, has been flattened, atomized, with each household an isolated and fragile entity” (203).

about how both his disability and his apparent socioeconomic background remain limiting factors. As Carlson writes, “If Christopher actually were to accomplish everything that he plans— get his Further Maths A-Level, attend university, get a first-class honors degree, and become a scientist—he would become as strange to his workingclass family as his presumed [Asperger Syndrome] makes him” (Carlson 59).

As broader surveys of autism’s fictional representations indicate, Haddon’s novel is not alone in its failure to define a clear narrative trajectory for its autistic subject. On the contrary, it has become characteristic to narrativize autism as something of an inassimilable remainder in today’s society. Stuart Murray, whose 2008 book *Representing Autism* is among the first books to define the stakes of literary autism studies, observes how, for authors of both fiction and scientific papers, autism’s “status as a difference from the norm is itself a ‘worry’, a clear embodiment of what can and does ‘go wrong’. Autism appears as[...]an object difficult to identify and too problematic in its range (from the non-verbal to the garrulous, from severe sensory and environmental experiences to small character ‘eccentricities’) to regulate precisely” (Murray 3). The psychiatric community’s efforts to “regulate” autism—and its repeated failures to do so in consistent terms—are manifest in the disorder’s frequently shifting diagnostic criteria. The decision to define an “autism spectrum” (which began with the addition of Asperger Syndrome and “pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified” (PDD-NOS) to the DSM-IV in 1994 and continued with the DSM-V’s collapsing of these diagnoses into a single “autism spectrum disorder” in 2013) reflects what Murray calls the psychiatric community’s “unease[...]that the spectrum of autistic subjectivity might be as wide as the spectrum of non-autistic subjectivity” (3). As Rapoport et al. note, the original “distinction between childhood onset schizophrenia and autism” did not take place until the DSM-III, demonstrating how autism

itself served to supplement another diagnostic category, psychosis, that fell on too wide a spectrum of its own to have clinical meaning (Rapoport et al.). Moreover, further affirming the “widening of meaning” that Murray views as a challenge to the very coherence of an autistic category (9), the CDC increased its estimated prevalence of autism spectrum disorder from 1 in every 150 children to 1 in 59 between 2000 and 2014. “The label ‘autistic’ today,” contends Murray, “is not necessarily always a description of an individual with a clear neurological difference. It is, in many ways[...]a word that is increasingly used to describe both people, and indeed situations, as generically ‘odd’ or even dangerous” (9). It is up to debate whether autism’s rise in prevalence is a result of as-yet unidentified societal or biological causes, or simply the result of pathologizing and homogenizing any number of conditions or situations that might explain what the DSM-V vaguely terms, “persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts” (American Psychiatric Association).

More recently, autistic academic M. Remi Yergeau’s 2018 book *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* focuses on “residue” as a figure for the autistic remainder. Those labeled autistic find themselves the recipient of an incurable label, their capacity to produce and interpret meaning forever placed in doubt. “To be autistic,” writes Yergeau, “is to live and to lie in a between space. The autistic symbolic is always a reduction, a motion rather than a rhetorical repertoire. It is mechanistic, rigid, routinized, reducible. Consequently, its significations are never more than quasi-significations” (16). The capacity to address another through rhetorical appeals, Yergeau observes, requires the social reciprocity that autistic individuals are understood to be lacking. The drive to diagnose autistic significations as the embodiment of “an anti-rhetoric, a kind of being and moving that exists tragically at the folds of

involuntary automation[,]” may, in part, explain the relative dearth of autism narratives written by authors who are in fact diagnosed on the spectrum (11).

Importantly for our reading of Haddon’s book, Yergeau takes particular issue with the discourse that contrasts autistic signification with *human* address. Yergeau hones in on the work of rhetorician Todd V. Oakley, who writes, “rhetorical practices must...pose some form of an intentional agent to be coherent, and there is no better evidence to that effect than studies of autistic people, beings who lack the human rhetorical potential” (Oakley 102, qtd. in Yergeau 11). “Nowhere is the syllogism clearer” than in Oakley’s work, responds Yergeau: “—One must be human in order to be rhetorical. —Autistic people are not rhetorical. —Autistic people are not human” (11).

As I continue my reading of Haddon’s book, I want to situate my reading in relation to this discourse that unites nonhuman beings and autistic humans outside of normative, “intentional” language. The very construction of an autistic category depends, I argue, on a logic consistent with the anthropocentric rupture of Cartesian dualism that Derrida challenges in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*; the mechanistic, automatic, purely material embodiment of the anti-rhetorical autistic animal opposes the intentionality and freedom of the human soul. Indeed, the association of autism with animality is as old as the diagnosis itself. After Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler introduced the concept of “autistic thinking” in 1911, referring to the loss of contact with reality that took place in his schizophrenic patients (Evans 4), the diagnosis of “autism” as separate from an infantile form of schizophrenia developed through Leo Kanner’s work at Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore decades later. In 1943, Kanner presented his case histories of 11 children who exhibited “autistic disturbances of affective contact”; among them were Charles, who behaved “just like a foal who’d been let out of an

enclosure,” and Elaine, whose eyes displayed an “animal wildness” before an eventual improvement in symptoms (Kanner 236, 241).

Such comparisons have often, as Yergeau contends, “denie[d] autistic people not only agency, but their very humanity” (11); however, they have also served to challenge anthropocentric notions of agency and language, particularly when they come from autistic writers. Most famously, autistic activist and animal scientist Temple Grandin, whose work I discuss in greater depth later, has compared her own capacity for visual thinking with the supposedly automatic, instinctual, anti-rhetorical cognition of farm animals. Anthropologist and primatologist Dawn Prince-Hughes, who has a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome, explains how her heightened sensitivity to certain sensory stimuli helped her “to understand and identify with the gorillas” she studied in a “way other human people did not identify with them” (Prince-Hughes 209). Grandin and Prince-Hughes remind their readers of the intersectional matrix linking ableism and speciesism; as Sunaura Taylor notes in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*, it is in fact a form of “ableism”—in addition to speciesism—that “allows us to view human abilities as unquestionably superior to animal abilities” (Taylor 58-59).

Relatively few readings of Haddon’s novel have paid attention to how Christopher’s position on the spectrum allows him to challenge intersectionally ableist and speciesist notions of language.¹⁴ The obvious difficulty with such a reading is the fact that the novel’s most important animal character (although Christopher’s pet rat Toby ranks a notable second) dies before the first page. Since the dog’s agency is left unwritten, what we are left with is Christopher’s own

¹⁴ One notable exception is Sarah Jaquette Ray’s “Normalcy, Knowledge, and Nature in Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*,” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2013. However, whereas Ray’s central claim is that “the disabling features of society that Christopher encounters are the same features that distance humans from nature, particularly through language,” my reading seeks to show how Christopher’s narration deconstructs the anthropocentric and ableist premises underlying the concept of “language” itself.

desire to speak for the animal, rather than any potential of letting the dead animal speak for itself. In order to read Christopher's experience of a communicative disability as an effective substitute for the animal's experience outside of human speech, we must embrace the metaphor of spectrality as one of continuity, transgression, and "*sur-vie*" or living-on.¹⁵ Citing Haddon's book in a chapter on Coetzee, Ato Quayson gestures toward this continuity between the dead animal and Christopher through the language of sacrifice:

We are told on page 4 of the novel that the dog was leaking blood from its forkhole wounds. Thus as soon as Christopher hugs the dog to his body he takes on the ritual aspect of the dead animal and becomes its walking surrogate within the text. And it is evident on reading further that Christopher is indeed the ritual pharmakon for various familial and social disorders in the text.[...]It is Christopher's pursuit of who killed the dog that progressively reveals all these levels of social disorder. By acting as a detective, he inadvertently becomes both the key to unearthing familial and social contradictions and the direct sacrificial carrier of the effects of these contradictions. (Quayson 157)

As "surrogate," "pharmakon," and "sacrificial carrier," Christopher supplements and stands in for the absent animal. And by investigating the "social disorder" that led to the animal's death, Christopher allies his own exclusion from human rhetorical potential with that of the dog.

III. Operators and the Operated-Upon: Animal-Machines and the Autistic Hypervisual

How does Christopher triangulate his autistic perspective in relation to human, animal, and machine? In one of the many digressive short essays he inserts between scenes, Christopher flashes back to a diagnostic theory-of-mind test he took when he was younger. When a case

¹⁵ "Is there ever justice, commitment of justice, or responsibility in general which has to answer for itself (for the living self) before anything other, in the last resort, than the life of a living being, whether one means by that natural life or the life of the spirit? Indeed. The objection seems irrefutable. But the irrefutable itself supposes that this justice carries life beyond present life or its actual being-there, its empirical or ontological actuality: not toward death but toward a living-on [*sur-vie*], namely, a trace of which life and death would themselves be but traces and traces of traces, a survival whose possibility in advance comes to disjoin or dis-adjust the identity to itself of the living present as well as of any effectivity. There is then some spirit. Spirits. And one must reckon with them. One cannot not have to, one must not not be able to reckon with them, which are more than one: the more than one/no more one [*le plus d'un*]" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xx).

worker reveals a deceptively labeled Smarties tube contains a pencil rather than candies, she asks what Christopher thinks his mother would guess is inside the tube; deviating from a neurotypical theory-of-mind, he answers, “A pencil.” He says this, he explains, because “when [he] was little [he] didn’t understand about other people having minds” (116). As he grew older, however, he was able to understand others’ perspectives the way he would a difficult “puzzle.” He then explains how he solved the puzzle of others’ minds through an extended comparison with “computers,” in a passage that, admittedly, does little to contradict those who observe Haddon’s reliance on geeky stereotypes in his portrayal of a voice on the spectrum. The passage begins:

It’s like computers. People think computers are different from people because they don’t have minds[...]But the mind is just a complicated machine. And when we look at things we think we’re just looking out of our eyes like we’re looking out of little windows and there’s a person inside our head, but we’re not. We’re looking at a screen inside our heads, like a computer screen. (116)

From here, Christopher goes on to discuss a visual experiment involving “saccades”—small eye movements that keep people’s attention focused on one object—or, when reading, one word or sentence—at a time. If, as in the experiment, the words on a part of a page where one’s eyes are not directed change, the reader will not notice “because your mind fills in a picture of things you’re not looking at at that moment” (117). The “screen inside our heads” may, in fact, be nothing but an inaccurate “picture” our mind generates to resolve inconsistencies.

Christopher then makes a contrast between the human mind-machine and the animal mind, claiming that dogs do not carry these potentially misleading screens:

And people are different from animals because they can have pictures on the screens in their heads of things which they are not looking at. They can have pictures of someone in another room. Or they can have a picture of what is going to happen tomorrow.[...]And that is why a dog can go to the vet and have metal pins sticking out of its leg but if it sees a cat it forgets that it has pins sticking out of its leg and chases after the cat. But when a person has an operation it has a picture in its head of the hurt carrying on for months and months. (117)

Christopher suggests that the human's ability to envision the future is not an unequivocal gift. Challenging the Heideggerian conception of the animal as "poor in world," Christopher suggests that the animal's access to the present is more immediate and, in a sense, less prone to error. Moreover, the human's supposedly more complex access to its own and others' feelings, whether pleasant or painful, is a distraction from the reality of its actual surroundings, as Christopher explains in the final lines of the passage: "Also people think they're not computers because they have feelings and computers don't have feelings. But feelings are just having a picture on the screen in your head of what is going to happen tomorrow or next year, or what might have happened instead of what did happen, and if it is a happy picture they smile and if it is a sad picture they cry" (119). The reader may reasonably ask, who looks at the metaphorical computer screen if the screen and the mind it represents are supposedly identical? But Christopher has an answer to this as well: "...people can see the screen inside their head and they think there is someone in their head sitting there looking at the screen[...]And they think that this person is their special human mind, which is called a *homunculus* [...]And they think that computers don't have this homunculus. But this homunculus is just another picture on the screen in their heads" (118). In other words, there is no substantial difference between the viewing screen and the homunculus behind it; subject and object alike are but virtual images on a mechanized digital plane.

It is difficult to tell to what extent Christopher preserves his status as somehow "different" from neurotypical humans in all this. On the one hand, he seems to dispute the validity of all oppositions between human and machine, flattening the human mind into a "screen" that reflects a system of inputs and outputs; it may be more difficult for him to solve the "puzzle," but he is ultimately able to do so in the way that other humans do—the main difference

being his increased effort in envisioning others' "screens." On the other hand, he does preserve a distinction between humans and animals, and he suggests that the area where animals are deficient—theory of mind—is the same process of visualization that he struggles with. As noted, however, the deficiency is arguably a strength, since the pictures Christopher and animals fail to visualize are fictional ones anyway.

Christopher therefore manages to define himself as both less and more human. He is *less* able to envision certain images on his mental screen (specifically, images that belong to *others'* screens), but he is *more* able to see the screen as what it is—a constructed image.

Later, Christopher will make a bold claim that further distinguishes his particular form of vision: "I see everything." Whereas "most people" only do what Christopher calls "glancing" at their surroundings—"which is the same word for bumping off something and carrying on in almost the same direction"—Christopher claims to notice every element of the visible and even to go beyond: Instead of focusing on mere surface detail (e.g. "I am standing in a field that is full of grass."; "There are some cows in the fields."), Christopher organizes, calculates, and analyzes every datum (e.g. "There are 19 cows in the field, 15 of which are black and white and 4 of which are brown and white"), accessing his archive of visual memories to compare a new physical setting (an unfamiliar countryside, in the example he gives) with all past experiences of similar settings: "For example, I remember standing in a field on Wednesday, 15 June 1994, because Father and Mother and I were driving to Dover to get a ferry to France[...]"

Nonetheless, although Christopher acknowledges a useful talent for "chess and maths and logic, because most people are almost blind and they don't see most things and there is lots of spare capacity in their heads and it is filled with things which aren't connected and are silly[...]",

he suggests that his unique ability, his access to a realm of experience invisible to others, in fact proves to be a source of *disability*:

And when I am in a new place, because I see everything, it is like when a computer is doing too many things at the same time and the central processor unit is blocked up and there isn't any space left to think about other things[...]And sometimes when I am in a new place and there are lots of people there it is like a computer crashing and I have to close my eyes and put my hands over my ears and groan, which is like pressing **CTRL + ALT + DEL** and shutting down programs and turning the computer off and rebooting so that I can remember what I am doing and where I am meant to be going (143).

Here again, however, Christopher suggests a more immediate access to and control over the present; he has a restart command, a failsafe that reestablishes his direction in the moment (“what I *am* doing and where I *am* meant to be going”).

Autism, at its etymological root, evokes the supposed self-containment of those who experience the condition, their supposed imperviousness or indifference to external demands (precisely, the demands made upon them by other minds). Christopher suggests that this indifference is a strength, and in fact reflects an extra degree of mastery over a characteristically human ability. Christopher, like his possible peer on the spectrum Sherlock Holmes, can “detach [his] mind at will” and envision the screen *as* screen, can turn himself off and on again; he is the ultimate human machine—a machine aware that it is a machine.

How, through the metaphor of computers, do we reconcile Christopher's humanness with his animality? I would turn to a 2009 blog post in which Haddon explains that, since he did not want to write a book explicitly about autism, he did very little research on the condition in writing *The Curious Incident*: “i'd read oliver sacks's essay about temple grandin and a handful of newspaper and magazine articles about, or by, people with asperger's and autism” (Haddon, “asperger's & autism,” lowercase in original). Given his citation of Grandin as the exemplar of autistic representation, it seems reasonable to speculate that her

famous 2000 article “My Mind is a Web Browser” may have featured in the “handful” of texts written by people on the spectrum that Haddon consulted. Parts of the article read like direct inspiration for Christopher’s “I see everything” passage. In particular, Grandin draws on “a computer analogy” to develop the claim she first makes in her book *Thinking in Pictures*, where she contends that autistic people (and animals) think in images rather than words:

It is almost as though I have two levels of consciousness that operate separately. Only by interviewing people did I learn that many of them think primarily in words, and that their thoughts are linked to emotion. In my brain, words act as a narrator for the visual images in my imagination. I can see the pictures in my memory files.

To use a computer analogy: The language part of my brain is the computer operator, and the rest of my brain is the computer. In most people, the brain's computer operator and the computer are merged into one seamless consciousness; but in me they are separate. I hypothesize that the frontal cortex of my brain is the operator and the rest of my brain is the computer. (Grandin 14)

Leaving aside the questionable scientific accuracy of Grandin’s analogy, I want to underscore the unconventional metaphysics of language at stake here; Grandin insists, first, on the primacy of image before word, and second, on the primacy of the “computer” before the “computer operator.”

Whereas Christopher seems to contest (or at least not to affirm) the Cartesian trope of animal automata, Grandin allows her reader to sustain it. Simultaneously, however, she does not go so far as to insist that humans *aren’t* automata; she implies only that human language (which she dubiously equates with the frontal cortex) manifests the addition of an “operator” that can complement the animal’s neural “computer.” The visual is animal, the linguistic (as an addition to rather than a replacement of the visual) is human, and the need to separate the two is, according to Grandin, peculiar to autistic subjectivity.

The implication, therefore, is that when Grandin and Christopher write, they are not the narrators but are in fact the narrated, the operated-upon. This is no different from neurotypical writing; what is different is that, for neurotypical humans, the experience of being narrated is seamless with the language that narrates them, is somehow more powerful than them and in control of their imaginations.

Cary Wolfe has cited Grandin's work to argue in favor of an intersectional dialogue between literary animal studies and disability studies. As Wolfe notes, Grandin's scientific contributions pose challenging ethical questions (most famously, her invention of a chute that eases the sensory discomfort of cattle headed for slaughter). He is right, however, to observe a radical potential for alliance in Grandin's comparisons between autistic and animal thinking: in Grandin's writing, "disability becomes the positive, indeed necessary condition for a powerful experience by Grandin that crosses not only the lines of species difference, but also of the organic and inorganic, the biological and mechanical, as well" (Wolfe, "Learning from Temple Grandin" 117). Consistent with my readings of Grandin's and Haddon's work, Wolfe observes the role of a disabling "hypervisuality" in autistic perception. Whereas the neurotypical mind has the luxury of "not seeing"—a necessity for the organization of a coherent semiotic field—Grandin's photographic memory overlays her visual perceptions so as to prevent a "visual field [organized] in terms of reason or a semiotic system" (113).

Wolfe's readings of Derrida's animal texts guide his most well-known contributions to the field of animal studies, but he makes a compelling allusion to a different text, *Memoirs of the Blind*, in his reading of Grandin. Derrida argues that invisibility is not simply opposite to the visible but in fact a constitutive part of it. Wolfe cites a passage which reads:

In order to be absolutely foreign to the visible and even to ... the possibility of the visible, this invisibility would still inhabit the visible, or rather, it would come to haunt it

to the point of being confused with it ... The visible as such would be invisible, not as visibility, the phenomenality or essence of the visible, but as the singular body of the visible itself, right on the visible - so that, by emanation, and as if it were secreting its own medium, the visible would produce blindness ... To be the other of the visible, absolute invisibility must neither take place elsewhere nor constitute another visible, that is, something that does not yet appear or has already disappeared ... This nonvisible does not describe a phenomenon that is present elsewhere, that is latent, imaginary, unconscious, hidden, or past; it is a 'phenomenon' whose inappearance is of another kind (Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind* 51-2, qtd. in Wolfe, "Learning from Temple Grandin" 114).

Wolfe suggests, persuasively, that both nonhuman animals and autistic humans appear to deviate from human reason because they *see* what the neurotypical human does not see: the "identity" between that which is seen and that which is not. If we took this identity seriously, Wolfe argues, we would follow Grandin in her emphasis on how animals' different forms of sight interact with other modes of sensory perception: hearing, touch, and smell. We would then be able to verify Derrida's claim, in *Paper Machine*, that "a de-hierarchization of the senses displaces what we call the real, that which resists all appropriation" (Derrida, *Paper Machine* 156, qtd. in Wolfe, "Learning from Temple Grandin" 115).

If we bring Derrida's definition of "spectrality" to bear on his definition of an invisibility that resides "on the visible," we can expand Wolfe's reading of autistic "hypervisuality" such that it challenges not only the boundaries between human and animal (or biological and mechanical) but the boundaries between living and dead as well. In *Echographies of Television*, Derrida presents the specter as that which reveals the identity of the visible and the invisible: "What has, dare I say, constantly haunted me in this logic of the specter is that it regularly exceeds all the oppositions between visible and invisible, sensible and insensible. A specter is both visible and invisible, both phenomenal and nonphenomenal: a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance" (Derrida and Stiegler 117). When Christopher announces a capacity

to “see everything,” he effaces, in spectral fashion, the opposition between the unseen “I” and the observed phenomena.

What is the relation between the autistic voice, the animal mind, and the spectral “trace that marks the present with its absence in advance”? All of these agents (assuming one calls them such) pose challenges to the primacy of language. Their silence, rendered into narrative through death, forces us to question the overlapping limits we assign to life, language, and responsibility. Kari Weil, who also writes about Temple Grandin’s relevance to animal studies, observes how both animals and “the alternately abled” experience a greater “exposure” to the “wounding” effects of reality, in a manner that forces them to develop “means or modes of getting their minds around” the omnipresent possibility of death in ways that deviate outside of human language (Weil 118). Weil situates both animal studies and disability studies in the context of a contemporary “counterlinguistic turn” (118). Citing Rilke’s work, Weil suggests (contra Heidegger) that animals may have access to an “open” field of vision outside of human thought, lacking the processes of linguistic “screening and deflection” that “prevent [humans] from seeing what animals see” (119). Moreover, Weil argues, “The hunch that human language may be an obstacle to knowing and that, therefore, those who are somehow outside the symbolic may have access to domains that humans cannot know may also explain why the counterlinguistic turn is contemporaneous with particular attention to death and the act of putting to death” (121).

Weil gestures to a Lacanian model of perception here, implying that those, like animals and humans with linguistic disabilities, “who are somehow outside the symbolic may have access” to the dimensions that Lacan would call the Imaginary and the Real. However, whereas the Lacanian theory of the Borromean knot would posit that madness and incoherence result whenever any one of the three dimensions is absent from perception, Weil proposes that the

autistic mind's nonhuman and/or superhuman vision offers a more accurate understanding of death. Those who are closest to death, as Rilke believed and as Weil affirms, are those at last able to "see beyond it": "For, nearing death, one perceives death no longer, / And stares ahead—perhaps with large brute gaze" (Weil 121; Rilke 69).

HBO's 2010 biographical film on Grandin, *Temple Grandin*, leaves its viewers with the impression that the autistic mind is indeed "spectral" in its proximity to the threshold between life and death. Of course, the film, in targeting a largely neurotypical audience, cannot help but conceptualize this threshold in the usual terms of finitude and nothingness. In one scene, Grandin explains her experience touching a cow as it passes the threshold: "I touched the first cow that was being stunned. In a few seconds it was going to be just another piece of beef, but in that moment it was still an individual. It was calm... and then it was gone. I became aware of how precious life was. I thought about death and I felt close to God. I don't want my thoughts to die with me. I want to have done something." The fictionalized Grandin's anxiety that she will cease to be "an individual" upon her death is, funnily enough, the very anxiety that neurotypical people project on those diagnosed as autistic. How can someone excluded from the normative mode of reciprocal communication be *a person*? How can humans who, as Weil notes, lack a clear sense of "body boundaries" *be human*? Those who are deemed the most closed-off from their surroundings are, ironically, the same subjects denied individual intentionality. While I have many reservations about the ultimate ethical implications of Grandin's work, I would nonetheless argue that her (and Christopher's) unique attention to the limits of individuality (precisely because they are exposed to these limits, by virtue of both their unconventional relationship to language and their subjection to a classification of pathology) are what allow them to connect with animals that are passing or already past the limits of life.

The risk, of course, in the deviation from such limits is that life and death will somehow become trivial. There is also, moreover, the possibility that even a new understanding of those limits will guard the apparent equivalence of life and the responsibility of the living with language and the capacity for speech; Weil argues that Grandin fails to overcome this equivalence: “It must be remembered, however, that in all this breakdown of boundaries between human, machine, and animal, what remains unaffected is the sacrificial structure that violently reestablishes those boundaries at the moment they appear to be effaced. It is, of course, the animal alone who dies or at least perishes” (124). Weil concludes her chapter on Grandin with the observation that, even in the most humane of slaughterhouses, “the very ritual that acknowledges the animal’s Being or soul also undergirds the sacrificial and logocentric structure and puts the human back at the center.” (127).

One could argue that all narrative depends on this structure, and we can’t fault Grandin for a failure to demolish it. However, I would maintain that there is something outside the structure, and that narrative can find ways to convey this exteriority. Both Grandin’s call to reduce animal suffering and Christopher’s defense of Doyle’s spectral beast’s right to life gesture toward this. In the next section of the chapter, I return to a figure from the previous chapter: metalepsis. Metalepsis, as we saw in Garcia and Mabanckou’s novels, can lend itself toward new structures of interspecies contemporaneity; how does the relationship between the autistic mind and the thresholds of language expand our sense of the metaleptic potential?

IV. Haddon’s Metalepsis and the Excess of Autistic Presence in the Work of Fernand Deligny

Metalepsis occurs about halfway through *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. As mentioned previously, Christopher’s “murder mystery novel” takes the form of a

journal that he shares with his educational case worker. When Christopher's father discovers his son has been traveling door-to-door asking his neighbors for more information on Wellington's death, he gets angry and confiscates the journal, prompting Christopher to search for it in his father's bedroom. Christopher finds it in a shirt box, but he decides to leave it, lest his father know he searched through his things:

Then I heard his van pulling up outside the house and I knew that I had to think fast and be clever. So I decided that I would leave the book where it was because I reasoned that Father wasn't going to throw it away if he had put it into the shirt box and I could carry on writing in another book that I would keep really secret and then, maybe later, he might change his mind and let me have the first book back again and I could copy the new book into it. And if he never gave it back to me I would be able to remember most of what I had written, so I would put it all into the second secret book and if there were bits I wanted to check to make sure I had remembered them correctly I could come into his room when he was out and check. (94)

We never learn the fate of this first book. Is the book we read the first book, completed through transcriptions of the "second secret book"? Or is it in fact the second book, completed through Christopher's characteristically impressive feats of memory? The fact that the novel never returns to this rupture in its own integrity, never considers it important enough to resolve, shows us something about how Haddon assumes his reader will interpret Christopher's particular relationship to his writing. There's no problem here, the novel seems to assume: Christopher, as autistic savant, has a photographic memory. He is able, as he touts, to "see everything." This autistic writer, like the animal narrators in Garcia and Mabanckou's novels, has the privilege to transgress and suspend the boundary between his story and the time of its transcription.

Murray's discussion of how authors have represented "autistic presence" as an "excess" resistant to narrative logic finds relevance here: "The material nature of such presence, the excess it creates when confronted with any idea of what 'normal' human activity or behaviour might be, stubbornly refuses to be reduced to any narrative – medical, social or cultural – that

might seek to contain it without reference to its own terms” (Murray xviii). Through this indefinite deferral of the book’s closure into a single text, Haddon positions Christopher’s authorial agency as excess to the very story it constitutes. His photographic memory negates any need for the writing it makes possible. While there is an element of deferral inherent to all writing, as Derrida conveys through his notion of “différance”—deferral *and* difference—Christopher’s apparently limitless ability to survey his surroundings and his memories would seem to eliminate the “difference”—the inevitability of a misunderstanding, a mistransmission—that Derrida argues is inherent in such deferral.

I bring up “différance” here because of an uncanny misspelling that occurs soon after the metaleptic suspension is announced. When Christopher puts his book back into his father’s shirt box, he finds an envelope addressed to him, in cursive handwriting he recognizes as his mother’s. As he soon discovers, his mother did not, as his father told him, die in hospital two years earlier; his father has hidden the letters she has sent to Christopher from London all this time. In one letter, she attempts to explain to her son “why [she] went away”; she explains, “I was not a very good mother, Christopher. Maybe if things had been differant, maybe if you’d been differant, I might have been better at it” (106). To take this misspelling seriously, Christopher’s problem—the difference that sets him apart from other children, children who don’t, as his mother implies, destroy their families—is that he is not “differant”: he is, somehow, deprived of the absence, the *lack* of self-presence, that makes communication possible and necessary. What Murray calls the excess of autistic presence is positioned against the communicability of différance.

Of course, the very fact that Christopher is writing, and that we are reading his writing, should give us reason to doubt the possibility of a subject who stands in exception to différance

(if, of course, Derrida's systematic critique of a millennia-long metaphysics of presence did not already do so). However, I want to take the (im)possibility of such an exception to *différance* seriously—precisely because, in deconstructing such an exception, we might find a new understanding of such concepts as “autistic presence,” writing, language, and deferral. There is, I think, something to be said for the argument that the pathologizing narrative of autism as an “excess” of self-presence is a construction on the part of neurotypical diagnosticians who want to believe such self-presence is possible.

My attempt to deconstruct the narrative of autistic presence will proceed through the work of Fernand Deligny (1913-1996), a French psychologist, educator, writer, and filmmaker who spent much of his life organizing residential treatment programs for children with autism and other disabilities. After beginning his career as a special education teacher at the Armentières asylum during World War II, Deligny affiliated himself with France's postwar institutional psychotherapy movement. In 1948, he founded La Grande Cordée, described by Leon Hilton as “a collectively run, loosely organized group of educators and psychiatrists”—stationed at a theatre in Montmartre—“seeking to develop an alternative to the bureaucratic and frequently abusive state-run psychiatric and juvenile delinquent systems.” The group lost its funding and headquarters in 1953, but Deligny and his network of colleagues continued developing programs for autistic children in “a series of temporary encampments in different rural locations throughout the country”; these locations, according to François Dosse, included the Vercors, the Upper Loire, the Allier, and Thoiras in the Cévennes mountains (Hilton; Dosse 73). In 1965, by which point Deligny was completely out of funds, he received an invitation to Jean Oury's famous La Borde clinic in the Loire, managed at the time by Félix Guattari. Two years later, Guattari convinced Deligny to move back to the Cévennes, where Guattari had just

purchased the Gourgas clinic in Monoblet. Although Deligny participated in the leftist political culture at Gourgas, he maintained a place on and outside the margins of mainstream psychoanalysis, operating an independent practice with his young autistic patients in his own house a mile away (Hilton).

In Monoblet, where Deligny lived for the rest of his life, he wrote many essays and produced documentaries. *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, a collection of lyric essays written from 1976 to 1982 but left unpublished until 2008 (and untranslated into English until 2015), contains Deligny's reflections on his period of nomadic practice in the 50s and 60s. As a filmmaker, he formed connections with André Bazin, Chris Marker, and François Truffaut; his first film, *Le Moindre Geste*, which premiered at the 1971 Cannes Film Festival with Marker and Truffaut's support, included footage he had produced over the preceding decade. He then collaborated with director Reynaud Victor on *Ce gamin, là*, released in 1976 (Hilton).

Deligny's literary and philosophical contributions are relevant to the disruptions of the boundaries between humans and other animals we find in both Haddon's and Grandin's portrayals of autism. Deligny argued there was little relevant difference between a subject who was unable to speak and a subject who refused to speak; he argued that what we derisively call "animal instinct" was the domain of as-yet misunderstood means of communication, and that these alternative modes of communication could be studied through direct engagement with alternatively-abled humans. Deligny distinguished himself from his Lacanian psychoanalyst colleagues through his interest in the "innate" (*l'inné*), which he viewed as fundamentally different from the "unconscious" (*l'inconscient*). As he explains in a letter to psychiatrist Jean Milhau, a sponsor of his work at Monoblet, "Ce qui s'avère difficile dans cette entreprise, c'est de travailler en accord avec des psychanalystes (Mannoni, Dolto, etc.) alors que ce qui

m'intéresse c'est "l'inné", qui est d'une autre nature que l'inconscient" (Deligny, "Les Neumes" 47).¹⁶

According to Deligny, the discovery of what is "innate" in the autistic child's refusal to speak would be a discovery of the "animal" that humans have never left behind. The neurotypical human's drive to speak, to signify, would thus be revealed as a response to an instinctual need, no different from the needs of animals. As he explains to Milhau: "Je pense que ce qui est enfoui dans chacun de nous, et est à "découvert" chez l'enfant psychotique, est méconnu parce que reconnaître l'inné, c'est reconnaître l'animal que nous sommes, animal pour lequel "le signe" répond à un besoin spécifique, d'où la parole. Pour moi, la parole n'est qu'une espèce de signe parmi les espèces possibles" (Milhau 101).¹⁷

Deligny reflects most extensively on the complications that autistic subjectivity poses to the boundary between humans and other animals in his essay, "Quand le bonhomme n'y est pas" (translated into English by Burk and Porter as "When the-Human-that-We-Are Is Not There"). The first chapter of the essay, "Ce voir et se regarder" ("*That Seeing and Looking at Oneself*"), written for the 1976 psychoanalytic congress in Milan, also contains one of Deligny's most pointed critiques of Lacanian psychoanalysis—as made clear in the chapter's alternative title, "L'éléphant dans le séminaire". He focuses in particular on a passage from Lacan's seminar, in

¹⁶ "What proves to be difficult in this enterprise is to work in agreement with the psychoanalysts (Mannoni, Dolto, etc.) when what interests me is "the innate," which is of a different nature than the unconscious" (translation mine).

¹⁷ "I think that what is buried inside each of us, and is "discovered" in the psychotic child, is misrecognized, because to recognize the innate is to recognize the animal that we are, animal for which "the sign" responds to a specific need, hence speech. For me, speech is just one type of sign among the possible signs" (translation mine). It is worth noting that, although some of the children in Deligny's care would likely meet today's definitions of psychosis, the term was, at the time he wrote to Milhau, still used as a shorthand for what would later be labeled as autism. Given that he is discussing children who lack speech, I take the liberty of assuming that at least some of the children to whom he refers here would be considered autistic today. Deligny starts using the word "autiste" by the time he writes *L'Arachnéen*.

which the psychoanalyst argues that the words humans use to identify precede and are somehow “more real than” the animals themselves:

Réfléchissez un petit instant dans le réel. C’est du fait que le mot *éléphant* existe dans leur langue, et que l’éléphant entre ainsi dans leurs délibérations, que les hommes ont pu prendre à l’endroit des éléphants, avant même d’y toucher, des résolutions beaucoup plus décisives pour ces pachydermes que n’importe quoi qui leur est arrivé dans leur histoire [...]. Rien qu’avec le mot éléphant et la façon dont les hommes en usent, il arrive aux éléphants des choses de toute façon, catastrophiques [...]. D’ailleurs, c’est clair, il suffit que j’en parle, il n’y a pas besoin qu’ils soient là, pour qu’ils soient bien là, grâce au mot éléphant, et plus réels que les individus-éléphants contingents. (Lacan, *Les écrits techniques de Freud*, 201, qtd. in Deligny, *L’Arachnéen* 114)¹⁸

Deligny challenges this claim and its implications (without altogether disputing its premise of language’s capacity to cause harm) on multiple fronts. First, if indeed it is true that only the word “elephant” and its use by “man” are necessary to have caused the “real” elephants catastrophic harm, what can we say about the harm caused to “real” man by the word “man” or by the third-person pronoun?: “Rien qu’avec le mot éléphant et la façon dont les hommes en usent, il arrive aux éléphants des choses de toute façon, catastrophiques. Rien qu’avec le mot « homme »...etc...Rien qu’avec le pronom « il »...etc...” (114).¹⁹ Second, he observes with skepticism the existence of a single threshold separating “l’homme” from both the animal and the autistic individual: “Par-delà le seuil, le réel – tel que je l’entends – dont l’autiste ne se distingue pas. Par-delà le seuil, l’éléphant.[...] Socialisation, hominisation. On peut dire qu’envers un enfant

¹⁸ “Think for a moment in the real. It is owing to the fact that the word elephant exists in their language, and hence that the elephant enters into their deliberations, that men have been capable of taking, in relation to elephants, even before touching them, decisions which are more far-reaching for these pachyderms than anything else that has happened to them throughout their history – the crossing of a river or the natural devastation of a forest. With nothing more than the word elephant and the way in which men use it, propitious or unpropitious things, auspicious things, in any event catastrophic things have happened to elephants.... Besides, it is clear, all I need do is talk about it, there is no need for them to be here, for them to really be here, thanks to the word elephant, and to be more real than the contingent elephant-individuals” (Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* 178, qtd. in Burk and Porter 132).

¹⁹ “With nothing more than the word elephant and the way in which men use the word, catastrophic things happen to elephants. With nothing more than the word “man”...etc....With nothing more than the pronoun “he”...etc....” (Burk and Porter 132).

autiste, l’homínisation a fait très long” (115).²⁰ Third, he takes issue with Lacan’s sense of “contingen[cy],” according to which the word is somehow more “essential” or “necessary” than the object it signifies. Rather than disputing the entire possibility of essence, however, Deligny argues that language itself is vulnerable to the same contingency; one can find just as much essence, he implies, in the sense of touch, which plays a far greater role than language in defining the object for the autistic child: “Mais lorsqu’un enfant autistique palpe, tient, laisse tomber un caillou réel, s’agit-il d’un caillou à proprement parler ou je ne sais quoi qui serait à la fois substitut de caillou et substitut de langage ?” (115).²¹

Furthermore, consistent with Grandin and Haddon, Deligny speculates that the visual (le regard) may have particular powers of signification; our eyes seem to engender or create meaning in ways that the words we receive and reiterate do not. In his observational role as analyst and educator, Deligny creates a new concept of the human “species,” one (though it cannot be put into words) that assimilates, through the gaze, these children who refuse to speak: “Je l’ai dit ; nous sommes sur le seuil : la pierre en est froide, chaude, brûlante, suivant les moments. A portée de notre regard, tel ou tel de ces enfants-là qui individu ne l’est peut-être pas plus qu’un éléphant ne l’est” (115-16).²² Deligny plays extensively on the ambiguity of the word “portée,” which, as he notes, means at once “purview,” “visual range,” “cargo,” “musical staff,” and a “litter” of newborn animals: “La portée de notre regard—ce regard qui vient et va de

²⁰ “Beyond the threshold, the real – as I understand it – where the autistic individual does not distinguish him- or herSELF. Beyond the threshold, the elephant.[...]Socialization, hominization. It can be said that where autistic children are concerned, hominization has fizzled out” (Burk and Porter 133).

²¹ “But when an autistic child touches, grabs, and drops a real pebble, is a pebble at stake, strictly speaking, or something else that I’m unaware of, something that substitutes for the pebble and for language alike?” (Burk and Porter 133).

²² “I have said this: we are on the threshold: depending on the moment, the stone is cold, hot, burning. Within the scope of our gaze, one or another of these children who is perhaps no more an individual than an elephant is. Unity lies in the species” (Burk and Porter 133).

soi. [...] Ce que ce regard nôtre peut avoir à reproduire, ce dont il est chargé et par qui ? Ce qu'il projette, et avec quelle force..."²³ When one looks at the autistic child, Deligny suggests, one looks at a void in the very concept of the subject that makes the look possible: "Quant à ce qu'il [le regard] permet de *noter*, le risque est évident d'avoir toujours le sujet à la clé. Changer la portée de notre regard puisqu'il y va d'enfants qui vivent (dans) la vacance de cet S qui est ce par quoi se distingue du réel ce qui s'hominise."²⁴ Autistic children, according to Deligny, literally inhabit a vacancy inside the very apparatus of subjectivation that defines the human's ability to distinguish itself from "the real" (116).

The initial *S* (for *sujet*) refers back to the diagram Deligny introduces at the beginning of the chapter, an abstruse visualization of the relationship between subjectivity, nature, and ideology that seems to satirize Lacan as much as it emulates him. He describes his "boussole désuète" ("disused compass"; see Fig. 2.1) thus:

En N : l'objet de la recherche : ce qui persiste à préluder envers et malgré S – le sujet – et qui est (N initiale de nous) d'une « autre nature ». (Celle de l'espèce qui se dit humaine.)
 En Id : l'Idéologie. En mi : la micro-idéologie de la tentative,²⁵ réseau d'*unités*. En n : les unités, petits ensembles de présences. n : initiale de nous griffée de N (rappel²⁶ qu'il ne faut pas « perdre le *nord* » : l'objet même – le projet ? – de la recherche. Le langage circule (les petites flèches) et n se gorge et se rengorge volontiers des produits et sous-produits de l'Idéologie. Les quatre lignes qui s'entrecroisent : les « *cartes* » – notre pratique – qui nous aident à repérer N.²⁷ Les mots en N – N encadré d'un trait noir –

²³ "The "scope" [*portée*] of our gaze – the gaze that comes and goes of its accord[...]What may this gaze of ours have to reproduce, what is it loaded with, and by whom? What does it project, and with what force...." (Burk and Porter 134).

²⁴ "As for what it [the gaze] allows us to note, there is the obvious risk of always having the subject as the key signature. To change the scope of our gaze since we are dealing with children living (within) the vacancy of this S, which allows what is being hominized to be distinguished from the real" (Burk and Porter 134).

²⁵ Deligny used the word "tentatives" ("attempts") to describe his encampments.

²⁶ This parenthesis is never closed. I would suggest it stands in analogy to the "O mal fermé" of the CERNE, described below

²⁷ Deligny and his colleagues drew maps (*cartes*) depicting the wanderings ("*lignes d'erre*") of their autistic protégés throughout the encampments.

utilisés pour ce qui concerne les cartes – sont en « rupture de ban » avec les mots en S – qui sont « du ressort » du sujet parlant-parlé. Au retors de la tentative – qui se transcrit en 8 – un CERNE (tracé en O mal fermé) : langage vacant, langage « en défaut », au défaut du langage. CERNE : le premier de ces mots en N qui peuvent nous aider à nous caler pour repérer le « point-de-voir » de l'autiste qui guette éperdument N. CERNE : C'est un « tracer » surnommé CERNE. Nous ne saurons jamais ce que ce mot peut vouloir dire. IL ne veut rien dire. Autiste. Cette petite calligraphie donne le thème de cette tentative qui a eu neuf ans le 14 juillet dernier. (113-14)²⁸

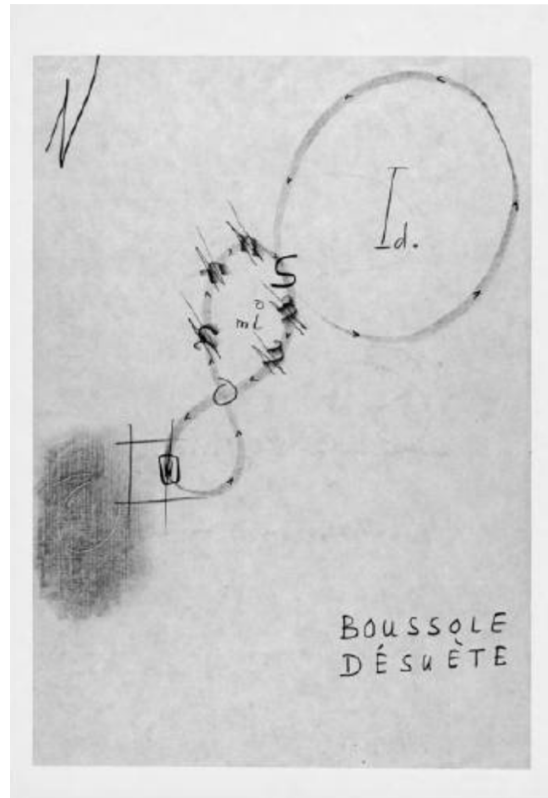


Fig. 2.1. “Boussole désuète” (Deligny, *L’Arachnéen* 112).

²⁸ “In N, the object of research: that which persists as prelude to, and despite, S – the subject – and which is (N initial of *nous*) of a “different nature.” (That of the species that calls itself human.) In Id: Ideology. In mi: the micro-ideology of the attempt, network of *units*. In the *units*, small sets of presences. n: initial of *nous* scratched out from N (reminds one that one shouldn’t lose one’s bearings, shouldn’t “lose track of the north”: the very object – the project? – of research. Language circulates (the small arrows) and n willingly stuffs and re-stuffs itself with the products and byproducts of ideology. The four crossed lines: the “*maps*” – our practice – which help us locate N. The words in N – N framed within a black line – used for whatever has to do with the maps – are “in conflict with” the words in S – which “belong to” the realm of the speaking-spoken subject. At the twisting point of the attempt – which is transcribed as a figure 8 – we find a RING [*CERNE*] (drawn as a poorly closed O): vacant language, language “out of action,” at the default point of language. RING: the first of the words in N that can help shore us up so we can locate the vantage point, the “point-of-seeing,” of the autistic individual who is desperately watching for N. RING: This is a “tracer” dubbed RING. We shall never know what this word may mean. It means nothing. Autistic. This small calligraphic sketch presents the theme of our attempt, which turned nine years old this past July 14 (Burk and Porter 130-31).

Deligny, consistent with his focus on “essence” and “the innate,” suggests first that the collective “we” of a species-being is both the “object of research” and “prelude” to the subject. The “N” that, in the image’s upper-left corner, could be seen as either containing (denoting, labeling) or sitting outside of the circles of language and ideology on which the subject sits is both precursor to and telos of the researcher’s self-knowledge. As for “Ideology,” manifest through, and enclosed by, the linguistic discourse of the “sujet parlant-parlé,” it exists “at odds with” (en « rupture de ban » avec) the realm of the pictorial and the perambulatory, the “words” used for the maps drawn by Deligny and his colleagues.

But where, in all of this, does the “essence” of autistic presence reside? Deligny visualizes the excess of autistic presence through the “poorly closed O” that he labels the “CERNE”. Burk and Porter translate “CERNE” as “RING,” but the word denotes two very specific types of ring. According to the definitions in *Le dictionnaire Larousse*, “cerne” can refer to a “cercle bleuâtre qui se forme autour des yeux battus, d’une plaie, d’une contusion,” or, alternatively, “sur un tronc d’arbre coupé, chacun des cercles concentriques, correspondant à la croissance annuelle de l’arbre” (“Cerne”).²⁹ The opened boundaries of the autistic subject are thus homonyms to a wounding of vision and the tracing of a more-than-human (more-than-animal, even) duration.

As Derrida reminds us in *Memoirs of the Blind*, of course, the wounding of vision leads to an alternative, and in some sense more acute, sense of sight. Deligny evokes this sense in the distinction he draws, in the chapter’s title and in the text, between “*ce voir*” (“this seeing” or “seeing this”) and “*se regarder*” (“looking at oneself” or “watching oneself”). As Deligny

²⁹ “a bluish circle that forms around beaten eyes, a sore, or a bruise”; “on a chopped tree trunk, each of the concentric circles corresponding to the tree’s annual growth” (translations mine).

explains, an attention to both the autistic child and the “elephant in the seminar” “s’acharne à obtenir de SE un peu de respect envers le CE” (118).³⁰

Further inquiry into Deligny’s project reveals that the “ce voir” of animal and autistic being manifests a spectral troubling of the threshold between life and death. The title of Deligny’s essay evokes a ghostly remainder, as though suggesting the autistic presence is what “sees” and creates meaning “quand le bonhomme n’y est pas,” or when “the elephant in the seminar” ceases to refer to any living elephant. Deligny suggests that an inquiry into autistic presence is an inquiry into humanity’s ultimate destination. To reframe Derrida’s claim regarding the specter, I would argue Deligny envisions a kind of autistic teleology: the autistic subject “marks the present with its absence in advance”; this absence takes the form of a vacancy in human language.

V. Autistic (A)causality and the Nonhuman Code

Deligny removes etiology and causality from the question of autistic presence. Whereas psychoanalysts from Bettelheim to Dolto argued autism was a problem that needed to be cured through the identification of parental factors, Deligny viewed his autistic wards as the heralds of a new way of being. This way of being corresponds with an extrahuman sense of visuality: “To our point of view,” explain Burk and Porter in their introduction to the English translation of *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, “corresponds their point of seeing” (Burk and Porter 17). The movement from the past participle (*point-de-vue*) to the infinitive present (*point-de-voir*) signals a contemporaneity between the visual field and the observer peculiar to autistic vision. The disruption of the boundary between the viewed and the viewer maps onto a disruption between

³⁰ “strives to garner from the SELF a bit of respect for the THIS” (Burk and Porter 136).

subject and object that Deligny most insistently conveys through the figure of the “arachnean.” The relational work of signification, exemplified by the spider’s weaving of its web, precedes and supersedes the causal relation of a subject’s will over the object it creates that one finds in language: “si le mot a vieilli, l’aragne n’a pas souffert au cours de siècles et même des millénaires. Le mot n’existait pas alors qu’elle existait et tissait sa toile sans aucun souci de cette pluie de mots qui d’ailleurs ne détériorent en rien la trame arachnéenne” (*L’Arachnéen* 13).³¹ When one views being and visibility in the terms of the grammatical infinitive, the individual’s apparent separation from the object of its “regard” is revealed as a fiction, thereby calling into the question the terms of individual selfhood: “Ainsi en est-il de l’arachnéen dont on ne sait jamais s’il trame ou s’il n’est que d’être tramé” (18).³²

The spectrality of the autistic *point-de-voir* is manifest in Deligny’s cinematic work. An autistic relation to death is prominent in *Le Moindre Geste*, which Deligny called his “monster-film.” The film, which originally included over 20 hours of documentary-style footage before Deligny and his editor, Jean-Pierre Daniel, cut it down into something resembling a fictional narrative, tells the story of Yves, a young adult autistic ward (played by an actual autistic patient of the same name) who escapes his encampment and wanders the Cévennes mountains. A 13-year-old boy named Richard soon joins Yves in a nearby village. Their wanderings take a very loose narrative path, playing over a soundtrack of Yves’s near-incomprehensible, stream-of-consciousness-utterances. As Harry Tuttle puts it in his review of the 2004 restoration, “the film

³¹ “if the word has grown old, the spider has not suffered over the centuries and even over millennia. Before the word existed, the spider spun its web unconcerned with the flurry of words, which moreover in no way damage the Arachnean web” (Burk and Porter 35).

³² “So it is with the Arachnean: we never know whether it weaves or whether it simply exists from having being woven” (Burk and Porter 39).

wonderfully illustrates the lack of communication in a world disconnected from any surrounding concerns and limited by short term memory and attention spans” (Tuttle and Cummings).

Two-thirds of the way through the film, Richard falls into a hole and cannot climb out. He screams Yves’s name, but Yves fails to take appropriate action. He wanders the dry, rocky landscape, perhaps in search of a path, but he succumbs to continual distraction. He seems, as Tuttle explains, to be trapped in the pure presence of autistic being: “Yves follows his flawed logic without being able to abstract himself towards a projected future, or a recalled past, which explains the timing of his responses” (Tuttle and Cummings).

There are signs, however, that Yves’s relation to the present is not as blissful or unmediated as it appears to be. As Yves struggles to understand how he should respond, his narration grows angrier. He seems to know he is dealing with death, but he does not seem to approach it with urgency or with any explicit reference to his immediate circumstances:

Et là / et là j’ai dit à l’asile / l’asile c’est comme l’enfer / l’enfer c’est comme les pauvres / l’enfer c’est comme les pauvres ! / mais l’enfer... / on dit que l’asile / l’asile c’est comme les communistes / l’asile c’est comme les morts / la maison Saint Nizière c’est comme ci c’est comme ça / mais / en général / monsieur les morts / je vous téléphone encore une fois / il y a 50 millions d’anciens francs / prenez un petit pistolet / creusez votre trou / et mettez votre dynamite / ça par exemple alors, les morts ça pleure pas / mais une croix ça pleure / plus / monsieur les morts / mounstre / les morts ça pleure et quand ça rêve ça téléphone / alors / égale plus les morts plus mon général Franco / mon général je crois que dieu vous à dit / allez en enfer ! / roh / allô les morts ? les morts m’entendent bien ? les morts m’entendent / roh ! / ces pauvres morts / qu’est-ce qui sont curieux / mais voilà / quand j’ai dit ça à mon général là-haut dans son trou³³ (*Le Moindre Geste*)

³³ And now / and now I say to the asylum / the asylum is like Hell / Hell is like the poor / Hell is like the poor! / but Hell... / we say that the asylum / the asylum is like the Communists / the asylum is like the dead / the house of Saint Nizier is like this it’s like that / but / in general / Mr. The Dead / I telephone you once more / there are 50 million *anciens francs* / take a small pistol / dig your hole / and place your dynamite / that for example then, the dead they don’t cry / but a cross that cries / more / Mr. The Dead / monster / the dead they cry and when they dream they telephone / so / equals more the dead more my general Franco / my general I believe God told you / go to Hell! / roh / hello the dead? The dead hear me well? The dead hear me / roh! / these poor dead / what are the curious / but there you go / when I said that to my general up there in his hole (translation mine)

Yves's monologue juxtaposes a strange proximity to death (reminiscent of Hélène Cixous's spectral telephone), with the historical carnage of Franco's fascism and Communist gulags. Creating more dissonance still are the images on display as he speaks: he uses a strand of grass to tie a newt to a twig, then twirls the grass in a scene of apparent torture. (It is debatable, of course, the extent to which Yves knows he might be causing harm to the animal.)

This is not the only animal with whom Yves interacts. In the scene just before Richard screams Yves's name, Yves narrates a sort of disjointed sermon standing over a local girl's pet turtle. The tone as he speaks next to a makeshift cross alternates between benediction and malediction: "La banlieue vous a béni tout ça / [...] à tous ceux qui m'ont béni ce jour-là[...] / Amen! / [...] bénéficier là-haut / la banlieue qui nous a tués / je vous bénis tout le monde / [...] Donnez-nous mon cerceuil! / [...] Crevons-nous le ciel là-haut / crevons-nous la terre / ô ciel et tout ça !" ³⁴ Deligny's film, like Haddon's novel, places the animal in a position where the autistic child manipulates it as a sort of sacrificial object; the subject who can both torture and bless the animal as a means of connecting to a spectral realm beyond the grave is a subject who appears at once inhuman and superhuman, taking the human's supposed connection to divine will to an extreme.

Deligny's written and visual works compel those who encounter them to rethink the apparent deficiencies or "vacancies" of autistic subjectivity. However, they at once draw attention to their own artifice, forcing readers and viewers to question what a true immersion into the supposedly nonsymbolic realm of autistic presence would look like. Even in the images of *Le Moindre Geste*, a language of narrative underlies and potentially undermines the desired

³⁴ "The suburb that blessed you all of that/[...]to all those who blessed me that day[...]/Amen!/[...]to benefit up there / the suburb that killed us / I bless you everyone / [...]Give us my coffin! / Die to us the sky up there / Die to us the earth / o sky and all of that!" (translation mine)

authenticity of the montage form. The drawing of the “boussole desuète” in “Quand le bonhomme n’y est pas” is, of course, also Deligny’s creation. Does the autistic consciousness truly manifest the pure “seeing” of a “point-de-voir”? Or is this just Deligny’s way of making legible an intentionality that, although seemingly outside of language, is no less self-divided than his own? He cannot say, as he would likely himself admit.

In the final section of this chapter, I try to present in more general terms, through the metaphor of spectrality, what is at stake in nonautistic authors’ engagement with autistic characters. An unconventional relation to causality drives the narrative in Haddon’s novel as well. For instance, Christopher explains that he has a personal “system” for determining whether he is having a good or bad day:

In the bus on the way to school next morning we passed 4 red cars in a row, which meant that it was a **Good Day**, so I decided not to be sad about Wellington.

Mr. Jeavons, the psychologist at the school, once asked me why 4 red cars in a row made it a **Good Day**, and 3 red cars in a row made it a **Quite Good Day**, and 5 red cars in a row made it a **Super Good Day**, and why 4 yellow cars in a row made it a **Black Day**, which is a day when I don’t speak to anyone and sit on my own reading books and don’t eat my lunch and *Take No Risks*. He said that I was clearly a very logical person, so he was surprised that I should think like this because it wasn’t very logical.

I said that I liked things to be in a nice order. And one way of things being in a nice order was to be logical. Especially if those things were numbers or an argument. But there were other ways of putting things in a nice order. And that was why I had **Good Days** and **Black Days**. And I said that some people who worked in an office came out of their house in the morning and saw that the sun was shining and it made them feel happy, or they saw that it was raining and it made them feel sad, but the only difference was the weather and if they worked in an office the weather didn’t have anything to do with whether they had a good day or a bad day. (*The Curious Incident* 24)

Christopher conforms to an “order” that is not causal in sequence. It is not that he attends to correspondences, synchronicities, and subjective impressions *instead of* objective observation, but rather that he sets them on an equal footing. This is, logically, what results when one experiences a continuity between one’s capacity of observation and the observed world.

Though “illogical,” Christopher’s interpretations remain rational. This personal rational order turns out to intervene in the sequence of Christopher’s own narrative. When he conducts his investigations door-to-door, a lonely elderly neighbor of his, Mrs. Alexander, invites him inside and offers him some biscuits. Distrustful of strangers, and worried she might be calling the police on him, Christopher leaves. Later, when he runs into her at a convenience store, his first inclination is to stay silent as she asks questions to learn more about him. He then remembers, however, that he saw “5 red cars in a row” earlier in the day: “Then I thought that this was a **Super Good Day** and something special hadn’t happened yet, so it was possible that talking to Mrs. Alexander was the special thing that was going to happen” (53; 55). Based on this intuition, he decides to ask Mrs. Alexander about the person whose name most seems to anger his father whenever he hears it: Mr. Shears, the mysteriously missing husband of Wellington’s owner. Christopher knows his father has “made [him] do a promise” “[n]ot to mention Mr. Shears’s name in [their] house,” “not to go asking anyone about who killed that bloody dog,” and “to stop this ridiculous bloody detective game” (56); so, he simply asks Mrs. Alexander if she knows Mr. Shears: “And if you are a detective you have to Take Risks, and this was a Super Good Day, which meant it was a good day for Taking Risks, so I said, “Do you know Mr. Shears?” which was like chatting” (57). By asking this question, he sets off an exchange that leads to the disclosure of key information, the information that leads him to the truth of both who killed Wellington and what happened to his mother: Mr. Shears and his mother were having an affair.

In this exchange, Christopher lands somewhere on the spectrum of things he should and should not be able to do. He does not quite lie about his intentions – this would be uncharacteristic of someone with Asperger’s – but he does not reveal them explicitly either. He does not, at least as he sees it, engage in “detective” work, but he does not forgo it entirely either.

At stake in all of this is the spectrum of what we consider narrative logic: What kind of a story is told by someone who gives equal priority to, on the one hand, the incidental and the opportune, and on the other, the rational and the calculated?

In a much-cited article on the apparent resistance of autistic thinking to narrative logic, Matthew Belmonte argues that the capacity to wield narrative as a “defense against disorder” defines the difference between humans and other animals. Rather than animalize the autistic human by observing a weakness in this capacity, however, he argues that the autistic subject’s tendency toward repetitive behavior and illogical, tangential thinking suggests a heightened capacity for narrative order – hence the lead title of his article, “Human, but More So.” He claims, “precisely because the narrative defense against sensory chaos is so impaired in autism, people with autism are unusually sensitive to the problem of constructing this defense, and their solutions to this problem tend to be more deliberate and explicit than those the rest of us implement” (Belmonte 170). The fact that one can begin from the premise that “narrative defense” is “impaired in autism” and arrive at opposing conclusions calls into question the validity of the “spectra” in question. Autistic thinking both lacks something inherently “human” and is somehow more “deliberate” in the human talent for narrative. As Yergeau argues, “Spectra are reductionist and paradoxical tropes” (Yergeau 51)

However, because Yergeau omits Belmonte’s article from their analysis, they omit yet another spectrum on which the reduction of autistic rhetoric often depends: the spectrum between life and death. Belmonte, in his introduction of the human capacity for narrative, cites Ernest Becker’s influential 1973 book *The Denial of Death*, which famously argued that human

civilization arose as a collective immortality-oriented “project”³⁵ designed to assuage the anxiety of inevitable death:

The human mind occupies a unique status in nature, able to contemplate the eternal and the absolute, and yet bound within a mortal animal and a mutable world. This juxtaposition of mental and physical existence creates a tension fundamental to human psychic development that Becker has labeled “the denial of death.” As Becker describes, this denial can be more generally construed as an aversion to direct experience of disorder and impermanence - the death of the self being an ultimate, personal manifestation of this universal tendency[...]Both the implicit, mental narrative that implements human perception and cognition and the explicit, written narrative of literature can be read as the mechanism of this defense. A fear of death drives us to become narrators, to transform the disconnected chaos of our sensorium into representative mental texts whose distinct scenes contain recognizable characters that act in coherent plots. This capacity to project the concrete and intractable complexity of direct experience onto abstract and predictable scripts is fundamental to human cognition: in this sense there is no thought without narrative, and in fact a strong argument has been made for the genesis of language as an externalized representation of the narrative structure of human thought. (Belmonte 166)

Therefore, to say that the autistic subject is “human, but more so” is to say that the autistic subject more effectively denies death, more effectively promotes the project of collective immortality. But this is only possible because, as Weil corroborates, death presents itself as all the more real and inevitable to the autistic subject. Autistic individuals do more to push themselves away from death because they understand themselves to be closer to death. Belmonte attempts, questionably, to oppose autism to the “animistic de-differentiation of self and other” he claims is characteristic of schizophrenia, arguing that “autism is if anything a solipsistic hyper-differentiation of self and other” (170). If the autistic subject’s greater exposure to death results not in the “death of the self” at the hands of a collective project (which Belmonte, following

³⁵ Becker discusses this in terms of a “*causa-sui* project”—a project that comes from itself. Psychological problems arise, he hypothesizes, when individuals formulate and refuse to abandon a death-transcending project that conflicts with that of society: “Society wants to be the one to decide how people are to transcend death; it will tolerate the *causa-sui* project only if it fits into the standard social project” (46). He identifies this social project as “the symbols and dramatizations of our transcendence of animal vulnerability.”

Becker, considers to be the exemplary “manifestation” of the human narrative impulse), but rather a “hyper-differentiation” of the self, then we cannot truly say that the autistic subject is “human, but more so.” Nor, however, can we say that the autistic psyche allows itself to be consumed by death. We can only stick to Deligny’s claim that the autistic psyche, the “Arachnean” psyche, deviates from the “thought-out project” of humanity; the project of the Arachnean, like the specter, is one that overwhelms the binary between life and death altogether. (Deligny, of course, would dispute fundamentally Belmonte’s claim that the autistic subject distinguishes himself/herself as a “self.”)

The possibility that “autism” itself might mean nothing, might itself be a category invented to sustain the immortality “project” of humanity, deserves serious consideration. As Deligny says of his “poorly closed O,” to be autistic is to mean nothing, to “want to say nothing” (“ne veut rien dire”). But this “nothing” is no more opposite to the human than the invisible is opposite to the visible. It is the nonhuman, invisible element that makes the human visible to scrutiny.

The trope of hypervisuality and the photographic mind informs Belmonte’s reading of autism’s “exaggerated state of humanity” no less than it does Grandin’s equation of autistic and animal thought.

In understanding the role of ritual in the autistic defense against disorder, we find useful the metaphor of film [...]. Imagine that your life is a film, being screened in some Cartesian cinema (a metaphorical one, to be sure, since no such Cartesian representation exists neuroanatomically). The trouble is that this film is being screened by an incompetent projectionist. Perhaps the aperture is wrong, so that you can see only a small corner of the image at a time, or perhaps the sound track is absent, or distorted, or out of synchrony with the picture. In any case, you can glean only disconnected fragments. Everyone around you is talking about this film, and you’d very much like to understand it. So you ask the projectionist to rewind the film and play it again and again. Keeping this one film in the Cartesian projector serves two purposes: it allows you to build an understanding of the story (deliberately, meticulously) by picking up new fragments each time the film is screened, and, perhaps even more importantly, by monopolizing the

projector it prevents any new, unpredictable and incomprehensible film from being introduced. When people with autism replay films in the Cartesian cinema, we say that they are engaging in repetitive or ritualistic behaviors. (170)

Striking here is the manner in which Belmonte's rhetoric inverts the roles played by visual excess and acuity of understanding in Grandin's and Haddon's. Whereas Christopher moves from "see[ing] everything" to being overwhelmed and needing to shut down, Belmonte insists on a deficiency of vision (i.e. the common representation of autism as lack) specifically in order to suggest that the adaptive response leads, ultimately, to a superior understanding. Whereas Christopher and Grandin explain the autistic self's fragmentation via its unmediated access to the present, Belmonte explains the autistic self's immersion in the present via its fragmented distribution of attention between present and past. The reversible significance of fragmentation and unity or immediacy is the ambiguity that makes "spectral" epistemologies possible.

Marc Guillaume and Jean Baudrillard's discussion of "spectrality" as an "elision of the other" ("spectralité comme élimination de l'autre") proves relevant here. Noting the homonymy in French for "specter" and "spectrum," Guillaume and Baudrillard argue that the "spectral" nature of contemporary communication demands subjects undergo a "fragmentation" of the self and, simultaneously, an "erosion" of the boundary separating them from the other. The instantaneous, remote, often anonymous, often fleeting interactions between users of today's tele-technologies require them to try on various "phantomatic" identities, to such an extent that the "mask[s]" they wear for others cease to hide any kind of true, essential self. Self and other dissolve into pure simulacrum:

Dans « spectre », vous avez plusieurs résonances. D'abord, la résonance d'un réel qui s'estompe, qui devient fantomatique. C'est la première résonance du mot « spectre ». La présence corporelle devient discrète, évanescence, et corrélativement cela suscite la peur de la transgression, du morcellement, de l'errance, l'érosion des interdits, l'émergence de nouveaux exorcismes. C'est aussi la résonance du masque, du dédoublement, de la démultiplication et, à ce moment-là, on passe à une autre région de significations, à

savoir, le spectre de lumière blanche qui substitue à une unité apparente ses différentes composantes dispersées. C'est ce sens-là que je trouve le plus riche. Il y a d'ailleurs une connexion à l'origine de ces deux sens : par des expériences d'optique appropriées on met en évidence des images virtuelles (sans matérialité) et dispersées au niveau des couleurs.

On pourrait dire, en jouant sur ces deux régions de sens, avec leurs connotations propres : d'un côté, le spectre, irréel ou du moins libéré du corps et des procédures identificatoires, suscite la peur, et donc divers exorcismes ; de l'autre, la décomposition en plusieurs éléments, en facettes, d'un individu, la possibilité de s'articuler aux autres au coup par coup, d'avoir des rapports à géométrie variable, permettent de comprendre la fonction de passeur, de jeu dans des univers sans commune mesure. Être spectral, c'est être à plusieurs faces, et n'engager qu'une face dans l'interface communicationnel (Baudrillard and Guillaume 33-34).³⁶

To be spectral, in Guillaume and Baudrillard's sense, is to be everything and nothing, everyone and no one. This is the limit point of presence and oneness with the environment, and it bears a striking resemblance to the ghostly subjectivity (a subjectivity without a subject) of the stereotypical autistic. "Corporeal presence" becomes hidden, ephemeral, in such a manner as to incite fear; personhood is replaced by superficial appearances. The distinction to draw, however, is that the autistic specter cannot control which "face" it shows in communicational exchange; then again, perhaps nobody else can, either.

The haunting result of human "spectrality" brought about by the contemporary world of surfaces and screens is, through the forces that seem to "liberate" the subject from the body, a disappearance of the boundary between self and environment. Baudrillard conceptualizes this as

³⁶ "In *"spectre,"* you have several resonances. First, the resonance of a real that fades, that becomes ghostly. This is the first resonance of the word *"spectre."* The corporeal presence becomes discreet, evanescent, and correlatively that arouses the fear of transgression, fragmentation, wandering, the erosion of interdictions, the emergence of new exorcisms. This is also the resonance of the mask, of doubling, of multiplication, and, at that moment, we pass to another realm of meaning, namely, the spectrum of visible light that substitutes for an apparent unity its various dispersed elements. It's that meaning I find the richest. There is by the way a connection at the origin of these two meanings: through appropriate optical experiments one brings out virtual images (without materiality) dispersed according to the colors. We could say, in playing with these two realms of meaning, with their proper connotations: on the one hand, the specter, irreal or at least liberated from the body and from identifying procedures, arouses fear, and therefore various exorcisms; on the other, the decomposition into many elements, facets, of an individual, the possibility of articulating oneself to others piece by piece, of having relations of variable geometry, allow us to comprehend the function of the "passer" or the "go-between," of play in a universe without common measure. To be spectral is to be with many faces, and to involve just one face in the interface of communication" (translation mine).

a false liberation, a “becoming hostage” to “the code” of informational discourse: “Cependant j’émets une objection à propos de la levée du nom, de l’identité, de la présence du corps. Est-ce qu’on est libéré ? Oui, on est libéré par rapport à tous ces opérateurs symboliques forts ? Mais en quoi consiste cette liberté-là ? Disponibilité, virtualité, mais en revanche on devient l’otage complet du code” (39).³⁷ One finds a succinct definition of the supposed autistic condition in their lamentation of our spectral mediascape, in which the Other “is simply confused with the code” (“[l’autre] se confond tout simplement avec le code”) (40).

Christopher’s fascination with prime numbers and mathematics betrays the source of nonautistic authors’ fascination with autistic minds: the possibility that there exists a “code,” however indecipherable it may be to neurotypical intellect, is too alluring for humans to ignore, so alluring that they must invent a rationality that can overcome any and all divisions between the data of life and their meaning. Christopher, of course, manifests such a desire to break the code. Just as he is on the verge of discovering his mother is still alive—shortly after the moment the text’s integrity is suspended through metalepsis—he contemplates the potential for scientific answers to the mysteries of life and death: “Lots of things are mysteries. But that doesn’t mean there isn’t an answer to them. It’s just that scientists haven’t found the answer yet. For example, some people believe in the ghosts of people who have come back from the dead” (100).

Why does Christopher dwell on ghosts here? The effect is definite; the reader is primed to consider his mother, the author of the initially inexplicable letters he has just read, as herself a ghost. But do not think of ghosts as something foreign to human reason, Christopher reminds and assures his reader: “Eventually scientists will discover something that explains ghosts, just like

³⁷ “However, I issue an objection regarding the removal of the name, of identity, of the body’s presence. Are we liberated? Yes, we are liberated in relation to all of these strong symbolic operators. But of what does that liberty consist? Availability, virtuality, but on the other hand we become the complete hostage of the code” (translation mine).

they discovered electricity, which explained lightning, and it might be something about people's brains, or something about the earth's magnetic field, or it might be some new force altogether. And then ghosts won't be mysteries" (100). From the example of ghosts (mysteries that, one day, "won't be mysteries"), he then progresses to "an example of a mystery which isn't a mystery" (100), something that at first seems to defy explanation but is in fact, even with current knowledge, quite explainable: He discusses a "pond at the school, with frogs in it, which are there so we can learn how to treat animals with kindness and respect, because some of the children at school are horrible to animals and think it's funny to crush worms or throw stones at cats"; the frog pond has a variable population from year to year, which he represents through a ("*hypothetical*," he emphasizes) line graph demonstrating unpredictable ups and downs in the number of frogs over the preceding twelve years. He asserts that the unpredictability is nothing indicative of a "mystery," however: "And if you looked at the graph you might think that there was a really cold winter in 1987 and 1988 and 1989 and 1997, or that there was a heron which came and ate lots of the frogs[...]But sometimes it has nothing to do with cold winters or cats or herons. Sometimes it is just maths" (101).

What mathematical factor does Christopher place at the root of the "mystery which isn't a mystery"? He attributes the frog's variable population to the lambda variable in "a formula for a population of animals": " $N_{\text{new}} = \lambda(N_{\text{old}})(1 - N_{\text{old}})$ " (101). As he explains, if lambda is below 1, the population represented will decrease and go extinct; between 1 and 3, it increases and then plateaus; between 3 and 3.57, it will follow a cyclical pattern; finally, above 3.57, it will go in "chaotic" directions, as in the graph of the frog pond (101-2).

This is not so much "a mystery which isn't a mystery" as it is an explanation which isn't an explanation. The λ value, only calculable on the basis of events that have already taken place,

tells us nothing at all about the underlying factors. But this notion seems to elude Christopher, who nonetheless defers to the constancy of “rules”: “And it means that sometimes things are so complicated that it is impossible to predict what they are going to do next, but they are only obeying really simple rules. And it means that sometimes a whole population of frogs or worms, or people, can die for no reason whatsoever, just because that is the way the numbers work” (102). To be fair to Christopher, he does not attribute a causal role to “the numbers” themselves. He does, however, imply that the numbers represent something essential. The numbers are not a “reason” for death, but they execute some form of “work” in the world that manifests as a kind of entelechy. In other words, Christopher treats numbers the way Deligny treats autism; both narrators crave the existence of something at once primordial and ultimate, immanent and transcendent, a language outside of words that they can somehow still convey in words.

Christopher’s narration, in turn, marks Haddon’s attempt to represent such a language. Baudrillard and Guillaume suggest that our spectral encounters with one another in the “floating networks” of the contemporary era force each of us to play the role of a “passer”: “Les machines actuelles à communiquer (et à commuter) engendrent des réseaux flottants où se rencontrent, spectralement, des personnes étrangères les unes aux autres, pouvant tenir, à l’occasion, ce rôle de passeur” (31).³⁸ Haddon’s effort to write a voice that will *pass* as belonging to the other is an indication of the spectral doubling that, granted, is inherent in fictional narrative, but which has demanded new forms in today’s networked mediascape. Haddon chooses the autistic child as his example of the “stranger” who, by virtue of resisting the norms of social exchange, can “pass” through the networks in ghostly fashion. Christopher’s literal passage from Swindon to London

³⁸ The machines we use today to communicate (and to commute or substitute ourselves) engender floating networks in which people who are strangers to one another meet, spectrally, able to hold, when the occasion allows, this role of “passer” or “go-between” (translation mine).

via the Underground best demonstrates his capacity to infiltrate, through autistic hypervisuality, the mechanisms of communication. He navigates the system as though he does not participate in it. For instance, when he looks at the dizzying array of advertisements and restaurant logos in the train station, the letters jumble together and he gets overwhelmed. (The stage version adapts this scene to stunning effect by way of overlapping holograms.) All Christopher has to do to overcome the sensory overload, however, is to close his eyes, thereby pressing the metaphorical reboot command on his neural keyboard (169-170). The images of consumerism are illegible to him, but it is by virtue of their illegibility that he is able to, as he says, “detach his mind at will” and remain focused on his goal to reunite with his mother.

VI. Conclusion: The Impossibility of Autism

How does Christopher’s personal relation to the societal immortality project compare with that of humanity as a whole? For one thing, as I began by observing, he insists on inviting the animal into the project, designating Wellington and the Hound of the Baskervilles alike as worthy of justice. He does this again when he rescues his pet rat Toby, who jumps out of his pocket down onto the tracks ahead of an approaching train. Christopher, to the horror of onlookers, jumps down and nearly sacrifices his own life for that of the rat (180-184).

But this all being said, he doesn’t offer any broader criticisms of the “project,” let alone offer alternatives. Christopher defers any delivery of *justice* to the institutions that he ultimately rejoins at the end of his story, such as the nuclear family and the neoliberal fantasy of individual self-reliance. Most tellingly, he resumes seeing his father in spite of the monstrous lie he was told, largely because it proves more convenient to his personal goal of succeeding on the A-levels in maths.

Still, it is significant that the scene of forgiveness coincides with the giving of a gift, and a very special gift: a golden retriever puppy, whom Christopher names Sandy. When his father presents the dog, he says, “Christopher, I would never, ever do anything to hurt you”; we cannot fully accept this, of course, and neither can Christopher – the next line, tellingly, is “Then no one said anything” (219). But the refusal to respond is tantamount here to an acceptance.

Nevertheless, however uncomfortable I and many other readers are with this novel’s ending, and however deceitful I find its final lines, I cannot ignore the extent to which the impossible becomes possible in this scene. Does Christopher’s father deserve his son’s forgiveness? I would argue no, not as a result of this single gesture. But the transmutation seems clear: the dead dog has been reborn; the father’s injustice is nullified; and Christopher embodies the charity of his metaphorical namesake to saccharine effect.

Christopher’s journey prompts us to ask whether what appears at first to be, as Deligny calls it in *Ce gamin, là*, “une capacité innée d’établir la relation à l’autre”³⁹ may only be indicative of a form of being where terms like “the relation” and “the other” are rendered obsolete. This being is pathologized in the form of the autism spectrum, but it is characteristic of the narratives that determine contemporary culture more broadly. The fantasy today is to merge word, image, and flesh into a unified presence.

Still, even in the age of spectral dispersal, there remains excess, remainder, the more-than- and the no-more-one; the autism spectrum is an imperfect attempt to bridge this remainder with the neurotypical’s sense of reality. Deligny says of Janmari, the protagonist of *Ce gamin, là*: “Il tourne sur lui-même, mais si ce fameux lui-même est absent, vacant, cet enfant là tourne

³⁹ “An innate incapacity to establish the relation to the Other” (translation mine).

autour de rien, sur rien, éperdument, perdu” (*Ce gamin, là*).⁴⁰ But is it fair to call the autistic lost, lacking a self, when the observer is the one who seems lost? Christopher gets to where he needs to be, ultimately. The “nothing” around which he turns clearly must be something; whether living humans can put it into words is in doubt.

The line between a form of being that would harness this thing outside of living language and the form of being that Derrida calls “absolute evil”—“(which is, is it not, absolute life, fully present life, the one that does not know death and does not want to hear about it)” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 220)—may be hard to discern. But these authors do not treat autism as an unawareness of and indifference to death; on the contrary, their characters know death better than anyone. Instead, we are dealing with an autobiographical form of address that, in expanding narrative beyond the boundaries of the living human, takes into account the observation Derrida made when he asked: “Could one *address oneself in general* if already some ghost did not come back?” (221).

“I can do anything,” concludes Christopher in the novel’s final line (*The Curious Incident* 221). Does that include speaking to the dead?

⁴⁰ He turns on himself, but if this famous “himself” is in fact absent, vacant, that child turns around nothing, on nothing, utterly lost” (translation mine).

CHAPTER 3 – SPECTRO’S ANIMALS: INTERFACES OF EXTINCTION IN PYNCHON’S *GRAVITY’S RAINBOW* AND ATWOOD’S *MADDADDAM* TRILOGY

Introduction

The autobiographical gesture of speaking to the dead, the dead in oneself, takes on different significance when one assigns this death to an entire species. This chapter aims to deconstruct the concept of *extinction* as it pertains to the apocalyptic imaginaries of Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) and Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003; 2009; 2013).

In Pynchon’s World War II novel, “extinction” features not only in the sense of a disappearing species – although this definition is relevant, given Pynchon’s interest in the possibility of an all-annihilating war – but also in the behaviorist psychological context, where extinction refers to the disappearance or inversion of a conditioned response to a stimulus. A group of Pavlovian scientists seek to understand the causal relationship between the landing sites of German V-2 rocket launches and the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop’s erections. They believe the correlation reflects the residual reactivation of Slothrop’s conditioned arousal response to the fictional “Imipolex G,” a polymer used in the rocket’s insulation, to which Slothrop was exposed during infancy. The possible reactivation of a response previously believed to be extinguished, and which now follows, moreover, a direction inverse to the one previously conditioned (Slothrop’s erections *precede* the launches), prompts the scientists to consider Pavlov’s notion of

a “silent extinction, beyond the zero” (Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* 86); that is, a *reversal* of the conditioned response “beyond” the zero-point at which a stimulus and its absence yield equivalent responses.

In Atwood’s speculative fiction trilogy, “extinction” refers to its more common definition in a context that contemporary readers may find prescient: a pandemic extinguishes nearly all of the human species, leaving behind only a few humans protected from the virus and a set of artificially-produced, immunized neo-humanoids (“Crakers,” named after their creator, Glenn, alias Crake). Both the disease and the immune Crakers are the result of the “Paradise Project,” a campaign of genetic experiments engineered with the intent to manipulate the human species’ instinctual urges: the pathogen is released through a set of pills (branded “BlyssPlus”) that confer maximum libido, protection against sexually transmitted infections, and (unknown to the consumer) permanent sterilization, thereby redirecting humanity’s “misplaced sexual energy” and putting an end to such “external causes of death” as war and overpopulation (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 293). The Crakers, meanwhile, are produced through transgenic splices of various animal genomes into human DNA, yielding such traits as veganism and pacifism. Crake’s ultimate goal, at which he apparently succeeds (or at least comes very close), is to bring about the extinction and replacement of *Homo sapiens*.

The obvious differences between these texts may seem to make comparison between them counterintuitive. Whereas Pynchon imagines apocalypse through a historical-fictional engagement with World War II, Atwood does so according to the generic conventions of dystopian speculative fiction. But as Camus reminds us in his 1948 epidemic novel, *The Plague*, wars and pandemics share an element of randomness that challenges our efforts at sensemaking: “There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people

equally by surprise” (Camus 37). Pynchon and Atwood both refigure the “surprise” of their respective apocalyptic events as something foreseeable or even predestined. Moreover, both novelists consider the potential for mass death inherent in contemporary society’s manipulation of the human as an *animal*, whose instinctual responses can be conditioned and redirected toward the purposes of capital and—a target of satire for both writers—the technocratic state.

When juxtaposed, these two texts provoke an inquiry into the relationship between the two forms of extinction. What happens, these texts wonder, when the stimulus overloads the subject’s capacity for response and becomes inhibitory in its effect? What role does the extinction of desire play in the extinction of life, and can the two processes be separated? The answer, I will attempt to show, lies in how Pynchon and Atwood both write extinction, in all its multiple definitions, as an “interface” between human and animal—that is, a medium that at once connects and divides the beings it places in contact.

I. Pynchon’s Interface

i. Reversals-of-Process and the Ultraparadoxical Medium of Trauma

The word “extinction” appears in the epigraph to Thomas Pynchon’s 1973 novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*, a quote attributed to V-2 rocket designer Wernher von Braun: “Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death” (1). The epigraph, which opens the narrative as though to situate the text itself inside a space of “existence after death,” marks the ground against which readers must compare all following figures of “extinction.” Whenever the Pavlovians of *Gravity’s Rainbow* consider “extinction” and its aftermath in the behaviorist sense, I argue that the potential “continuity of our spiritual existence” after the death of an organism or a species is under equal (albeit usually

implicit) consideration. My reading of Pynchon's novel will demonstrate this by analyzing the concept of extinction through another concept that Pynchon deploys many times throughout the text, that of the "interface." Previous readers of Pynchon, including Katherine Hayles, Patrick Whitmarsh, and Hanjo Berressem,⁴¹ have offered compelling interpretations of the "interfaces" at work in *Gravity's Rainbow*; so far, however, the interface's relationship with "extinction" has yet to receive attention.

The word "interface" first appears to denote the changing cortex of a dog's brain during the process of *transmarginal inhibition* – that is, behavioral *extinction with reinforcement*; "Dog Vanya," a subject at the White Visitation (the former mental hospital now "devoted to psychological warfare"), is conditioned to produce saliva in response to a metronome. As Pavlov would have predicted, Dog Vanya's conditioned response extinguishes and reverses after a critical point of exposure to the acoustic stimulus:

Now that [Dog Vanya] has moved into "equivalent" phase, the first of the transmarginal phases, a membrane, hardly noticeable, stretches between Dog Vanya and the outside. Inside and outside remain just as they were, but the *interface*—the cortex of Dog Vanya's brain—is changing, in any number of ways, and that is the really peculiar thing about these transmarginal events. It no longer matters now how loudly the metronome ticks. A stronger stimulus no longer gets a stronger response. The same number of drops flow or fall. (80)

The Oxford English Dictionary records the first use of "interface" in 1882, when, in his work *Hydrostatics*, physicist J.T. Bottomley defined the term as "a face of separation...between two contiguous portions of the same substance." Readers of the 21st century, who may well be accessing a digital "interface" to read this chapter, will be more familiar with the definition that

⁴¹ Since I will not have space to discuss Berressem the way I will the other two critics, I will point only to his reading of Baudrillardian "hyperreality" in Pynchon's novel, a concept I will reference extensively in my reading of Atwood. As he writes in *Pynchon's Poetics*, one can find in *Gravity's Rainbow* a reality "already produced according to an earlier imaginary projection based on the structure of operational and economic *simulation*" (45, italics mine).

arose eighty years later, “a means or place of interaction between two systems, organizations, etc; a meeting-point or common ground between two parties, systems, or disciplines; also, interaction, liaison, dialogue” (“Interface, n.”). The Dictionary credits this definition’s first use to media theorist Marshall McLuhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy*;⁴² this means that, as soon as the “interface” entered the discourse of human relationships to technology, it ceased to be merely a plane of “separation” between two parts of a single substance and became, in addition to its earlier sense, a facilitator of mediation or “dialogue” between two discrete “parties” or “systems.”

One could, therefore, argue that Pynchon’s use of the word reinforces the emerging definitional ambiguity to which McLuhan was contributing⁴³. Are the spaces interior and exterior to Dog Vanya’s subjectivity “of the same substance” or fundamentally different? The frequent White Visitation resident for whom I have named this chapter, the Pavlovian neurologist Dr. Kevin Spectro, believes largely the former. His colleague, Dr. Edward Pointsman, who soon takes over Spectro’s duties once Spectro is killed in a rocket strike, remembers his late mentor’s thoughts on the cortical “interface” thus: “Kevin Spectro did not differentiate as much as he between Outside and Inside. He saw the cortex as an interface organ, mediating between the two, *but part of them both*. “When you’ve looked at how it really is,” he asked once, “how can we, any of us, be separate?”” (144).

⁴² The word appears in one of McLuhan’s verbose section headers: “The *interface* of the Renaissance was the meeting of medieval pluralism and modern homogeneity and mechanism—a formula for blitz and metamorphosis” (*Gutenberg* 141).

⁴³ Pynchon mentions McLuhan in a 1969 letter to graduate student Thomas F. Hirsch following the release of *V.*, reprinted in David Seed’s *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Seed 240-43). Seed explains, “Pynchon certainly knew Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* (1964), was probably familiar with his earlier study *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) and also with McLuhan’s later more politically-oriented writings” (262).

If we juxtapose this quote with the first appearance of the cortical interface, the answer to Spectro's question turns out to be that the subject's separateness from its environment is an effect of the interface itself. Moreover, in the case of Dog Vanya, the formation of the "membrane" that "stretches between [him] and the outside" accompanies the moment of extinction, the moment at which the stimulus ceases to obey a predictable correspondence to the response. This view situates an absence at the origin of subjectivation in a manner reminiscent of Freudian primal repression, whereby the subject comes into being thanks to the exclusion of certain unconscious ideas. Freud renders primal repression through the figure of a "shield" that "break[s] through" in response to "an excessive degree of excitation." He writes, "It is highly probable that the immediate precipitating causes of primal repressions are quantitative factors such as an excessive degree of excitation and the breaking through of the protective shield against stimuli" (Freud *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* 94).

Pynchon's shield as interface, however, is no mere lack, but rather an organ of mediational dialogue between two spaces that, previously, did not exist (in the Heideggerian sense of existence as a standing-apart, "ek-sistence"). The causal relationship here defies intuition: the cause of the interface's formation would seem to be a figure from the dog's environment (the stimulus of the metronome, not to mention the human scientist who placed the stimulus), and yet we cannot define any external environment as separate until the interface is already present. To quote McLuhan's theory of media, "effects precede causes" here (McLuhan and Nevitt 11); that is, the extinction of a correspondence between a subject's interiority and its exterior environment is the very threshold that will determine these two spaces.

According to McLuhan, the "electric media" of the twentieth century manifested a cultural "metamorphosis by chiasmus—the reversal-of-process caused by increasing its speed,

scope, or size” (McLuhan and Nevitt 1-2). Chiastic reversals-of-process are a central trope in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, perhaps most famously in what might be called the novel’s central image: the supersonic V-2 rocket, described as “a missile one hears approaching only after it explodes. The reversal! A piece of time neatly snipped out...a few feet of film run backwards...the blast of the rocket, fallen faster than sound—then growing *out of it* the roar of its own fall, catching up to what’s already death and burning...a ghost in the sky...” (49). These lines exemplify the device of *hysteron proteron*, which, by Steven Weisenburger’s count, occurs no fewer than 59 times throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow*; as Weisenburger explains, “Hysteron proteron plays event sequences backward and foregrounds the idea of causality by disrupting it” (Weisenburger, “Hysteron Proteron” 87).

In the case of Slothrop, the V-2 seems to have manifested a reversal-of-process in a conditioned mechanism of desire. On initial speculation, the Pavlovians attribute the link between Slothrop’s erections and the V-2 landing sites to Dr. Laszlo Jamf’s failure to extinguish fully—that is, “beyond the zero”—the infant Slothrop’s response to Imipolex G: “Can a conditioned reflex survive in a man, dormant, over 20 or 30 years? Did Dr. Jamf extinguish only to zero—wait till the infant showed zero hardons in the presence of stimulus x, and then stop? Did he forget—or ignore—the “silent extinction beyond the zero”? If he ignored it, why?” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 86). But the fact that Slothrop’s erections precede the launches, mirroring the reversal of the rocket itself (“Explosion first, then the sound of approach: the V-2” (88)) leads certain “Psi Section” researchers to such paranormal explanations as “precognition” and “psychokinesis”. As the mathematician Roger Mexico, whose belief that Slothrop is a mere “statistical oddity” (87) evidences a perhaps excessive faith in an empiricist epistemology that he

now must question, explains his colleagues' beliefs to Pointsman, "there's a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go" (90-91).

What seems to be at stake, however, is not so much causality as its supposedly linear, sequential temporality. It is Mexico who brings Pointsman to consider whether an "extinction beyond the zero" may indeed be the reason for Slothrop's reactivation-in-reverse. He suggests that Jamf may, through excessive excitation and exposure to stimulus (later revealed to have perhaps taken the form of Slothrop's sexual abuse at the hands of his father), have taken the infant Slothrop's response beyond the equivalent phase into what Pavlov called the "paradoxical" and "ultraparadoxical" phases of transmarginal inhibition. In his *Lectures on Conditioned Reflexes*, Pavlov identifies the former as the period "in which the animal loses its reaction to the strong stimuli, but reacts normally to the weak" (*Lectures* 40) and the latter as that in which "the inhibitory agents have a positive effect, and the excitatory agents a negative effect" (148; see Fig. 3.1).

Time	Conditioned stimulus during one minute	Salivary Secretion in drops during one minute	Remarks
12.29 p.m.	Tactile stimulation of shoulder	1	The dog remains drowsy in spite of reinforcement of the reflexes
12.39 „	Tactile stimulation of thigh	2	
12.50 „	Tactile stimulation of back (inhibitory)	12	

Fig. 3.1. A table demonstrating the "conversion of negative stimuli into positive ones" (in this case, tactile stimulation of a dog's back) during the ultraparadoxical phase (Pavlov, *Conditioned Reflexes* 275).

When Pointsman responds to Mexico's suggestion that the infant Slothrop was pushed into the ultraparadoxical phase, he suggests that this may explain Slothrop's paranoia, and he directly

relates the possible mechanism of Slothrop's condition to the "transmarginal" mechanism earlier demonstrated through Dog Vanya:

Yesterday we got [Dog Vanya] to go ultraparadoxical. Beyond. When we turn on the metronome that used to stand for food—that once made Dog Vanya drool like a fountain—now he turns away. When we shut off the metronome, oh *then* he'll turn to it, sniff, try to lick it, bite it—seek, in the silence, for the stimulus that is not there. Pavlov thought that all the diseases of the mind could be explained, eventually, by the ultraparadoxical phase, the pathologically inert points on the cortex, the confusion of ideas of the opposite. (92)

In Slothrop's reversed, reactivated response (and quite possibly in Dog Vanya's apparent desire for the metronomic signal as well, provided we assume he does not remember the process of conditioning), we see a subject's desire to resolve the lack of an object it cannot remember ever having. This suggests that the subject as an intentional self, a self who can "interface" with its environment as a separate entity, does not exist before the primordial negation. According to Pynchon's rendering of the ultraparadoxical phase, extinction *is the interface* by which dialogue and subjectivity are born.

In the language of psychoanalysis, the rocket's launch, by manifesting as both cause *and* effect of Slothrop's desire, conforms to the reversible temporality of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, translated by Lacan into French as the "après-coup" and by Jean Laplanche into English as "afterwardsness." Freud coins the term in his 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology* to denote the deferred action of repressed traumatic events: "a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma *after the event*" (Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis* 413). Laplanche, however, has argued that the retroactive causality of "afterwardsness" explains not only the retrieval of past traumas but the retrospective self-knowledge required for all subjectivation: "right at the start, there is something that goes in the direction from the past to the future, and in the direction from the adult to the baby, which I call the implantation of the enigmatic message.

This message is then retranslated following a temporal direction which is sometimes progressive and sometimes retrogressive” (Laplanche, *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives* 222). For Laplanche, the “message” in question is sexuality, which the infant receives from its parent as an excess of meaning (he underscores as an example the mutual erogenous pleasure of breastfeeding); translation of the message only begins after the child experiences the rupture of self-knowledge.

However, if my reader will permit the rhetorical gesture, I would argue that the interface of extinction functions as a “message” not only in Laplanche’s sense but in the sense McLuhan evoked in the famous first chapter of *Understanding Media*, where he writes:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology. (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 7)

The retrospective temporality of the translated “message” is the same in the case of media as in the case of desire (which McLuhan himself would likely have identified as a “medium”).

McLuhan depicted his claim that effects precede causes through the metaphor of the “rear-view mirror” (*Medium* 75); since users of radio did not, he claims, apprehend the full effects of the medium until the visuality of film supplemented it, it is fair to argue that a medium that arrives later than and evolves from a preceding medium *causes* the predecessor to manifest its full potential.

In the next section, I further develop Pynchon’s interface of extinction by relating it to the character of Carroll Eventyr, a paranormal “medium” who communicates with specters. I then reintroduce the importance of the “spectral animal” by showing how extinction functions as an interface for the human’s (self-understood) separation from the animal world.

ii. Spectral Foxes: Word and Image at the Interface of Death

The interface turns out to be a medium between more than just the subject and its environment. Carroll Eventyr, a spiritual medium who conveys messages from the dead to the living, positions himself as “an interface between the worlds” (148). First introduced as he conducts a séance for the widow of a deceased V-2 engineer, Eventyr reenters the novel upon Kevin Spectro’s death. Rather than entering into deliberate communication with Spectro, however, Eventyr catches only, as though it is “cryptic debris,” a single word from Spectro’s ghost: “Foxes,” which the reader recognizes from earlier as Spectro’s “generic term for any patient” (48) in his ward:

They gather, thicker as the days pass, English ghosts, so many jostling in the nights, memories unloosening into the winter, seeds that will never take hold, so lost, now only an every-so-often word, a clue for the living—“Foxes,” calls Spectro⁴⁴ across astral spaces, the word intended for Mr. Pointsman who is not present, who won’t be told because the few Psi Section who’re there to hear it get cryptic debris of this sort every sitting... (140-41)

This incidental relay of a voice recognized by neither its living speaker nor his listeners is consistent with Eventyr’s practice of mediumship. Eventyr does not contact spirits directly; to deliver messages, he must receive them through an intermediary guide or “control” spirit named Peter Sachsa, who, while alive, worked as a medium for the Nazis in Weimar Germany.⁴⁵ This relationship, seeming to literalize McLuhan’s observation that “the “content” of any medium is always another medium” (*Understanding Media* 8) makes any of Eventyr’s séances a “four-way entente which oughtn’t, any link of it, be broken” between spirit, control, medium, and listening survivor (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 32). Lacking an audience that will receive the message in the way

⁴⁴ i.e., Spectro via Eventyr

⁴⁵ Sachsa, not himself a Nazi, is later identified as an active member of the German Communist Party who was killed during a street demonstration in 1930.

Pointsman would, Spectro's Eventyr-mediated (and therefore Sachsa-mediated) voice fails to express anything more than a single, contextless word.

Spectro does, however, seem to communicate news of his death to Pointsman through dream imagery. A passage written in the second person describes a recurring dream of Pointsman's, in which, at exactly six o'clock, he observes a round light in the sky and sets out on a path leaving from his childhood home; usually, he takes a right on the path, but on the night of Spectro's death, he goes left. An unrecognizable girl he perceives to be his wife walks beside him; the scene is idyllic, but the light in the sky starts to blink "on and off," giving Pointsman an ominous feeling:

Despite the apparent freshness, recent rain, flower-life, the scene disturbs you...Because of the light's behavior something is going to happen, and you can only wait...Settling a warm kind of hood around the back of your neck and shoulders, you are about to remark to your wife, "This is the most sinister time of evening." But there's a better word than "sinister." You search for it. It is someone's name. It waits behind the twilight, the clarity, the white flowers. There comes a light tapping at the door. (140)

The tapping at the door wakes Pointsman; it's his colleague Gwenhidwy, come to tell him of Spectro's death. The word that has escaped Pointsman, in all likelihood, given the light's status as an "apparition" (139) and the name that reaches him after dream's end, is "spectral."

The narrator then observes a link between the symbolic interface of dreams and the interface of extinction by comparing the state of sleep to the paradoxical phase of transmarginal inhibition: "You slept through the loud squadrons roaring without letup, but Gwenhidwy's small, reluctant tap woke you. Something like what happens on the cortex of Dog during the "paradoxical" phase" (140). This observation immediately precedes Eventyr's spectral utterance of "Foxes."

What is the significance of this rapid succession of interfaces? Within two paragraphs, Spectro's name follows a metonymic path that jumps from the interface of dreams, to the

interface of speech, to the interface of Dog Vanya's cortex, to the interface of ghosts and mediumship. Through it all, the motif of extinction resonates: the extinction of daylight, the extinction of a response, the extinction of a human life. Spectro's transformation from living flesh into the ghostly Word somehow manifests the inversion of correspondence that takes place in paradoxical inhibition. And indeed, his apparent ability to send a light of "warning" (139) into Pointsman's dream reframes the reversal of cause and effect – the same one on display in the anticipatory mechanism of desire and the retrogressive narration of trauma – in terms of a dialogue between the dead and the living. The dream-image and the name it signifies stand in for the interface of communication writ large; and analogously to how the cortical interface divides up and retroactively differentiates the interiority of the subject and the exterior environment, the interfaces of image and speech retroactively announce, in the manner of a warning for what has already taken place, the separation between the living and the dead.

In attributing this metonymic chain of interfaces to a broader interface of "communication," I draw on Patrick Whitmarsh's reading of Eventyr's mediumship in "Specters of Communication." He argues that Pynchon frames dialogue with the dead "as an analogue for advanced communication and media technologies of the twentieth century" (Whitmarsh 527). Eventyr's sense that he is "a victim of his freak talent" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 147) lays the groundwork, Whitmarsh argues, for the fragmentation and uncertainty experienced by readers and characters alike as the novel reflects on the subjectivating effects of "textual media, filmic media, and postmodern nightmare, all of which appear intertwined with each other" (Whitmarsh 534). Perhaps the clearest articulation of such effects in *Gravity's Rainbow* arrives when filmmaker Gerhardt von Göll (a.k.a. "Der Springer") finds that the subject of a propaganda film he directed for the Allies, a group of (he believed fictional) African Herero laborers working for

the Germans, seems to have materialized from his art into reality: "Since discovering that Schwarzkommando are really in the Zone, leading real, paracinematic lives that have nothing to do with him or the phony Schwarzkommando footage he shot last winter in England for Operation Black Wing, Springer...is convinced that his film has somehow brought them into being" (394, qtd. in Whitmarsh 534). Whitmarsh does not cite McLuhan (he opts instead for Niklas Luhmann's systems theory), but the dictum that effects can precede causes is implicit in the link drawn between media and mediumship: "In contrast to the intentionalist and thereby causal reading of communication, Pynchon's text threatens an inverse model. That is, interacting human agents do not produce communication; communication produces interacting human agents... Spiritual communion stands in for mediatized communications: media become mediums" (527).

I prefer to focus on the metaphor of the interface rather than that of communication (though the latter certainly relies on the former) because the structure of the interface can only bring together (i.e. bring into communion, mediate between) what it already divides. Katherine Hayles attends to this quality of the interface in her book *The Cosmic Web*, where she argues that Pynchon's novel navigates the effects of media in such a way as to taunt its readers into searching for a hidden "reality" behind the text: "on one side the Word, on the other side reality" (Hayles 185). As she notes, any attempts to access this reality behind the interface demand analysis according to the interface's own terms:

The narrative, like the celluloid strip of film, is an interface that creates through fragmented words (as the film does through color and light) a similitude of continuous reality. If we think of an interface as a barrier inserted between us and the "real thing," we may imagine that if only we could penetrate it, we could get back to the reality whose image we see. But that "reality" is itself a reconstruction. Just as the "reality" of a film derives from actors moving through a script, so the "reality" of the verbal reconstruction derives from cognitive processes that transform immediate perceptions into verbal abstractions. Return by this route is thus impossible, since what we Return to is only

another reconstruction, not the original field of life itself. One meaning of the interface, then, is that “reality” exists on neither side, so that penetrating the interface merely takes us from one kind of reconstruction to another. (179)

Left unsaid by Hayles (though I believe it is implicit in the “field-model” critique that underlies her broader project) is the inherently textual nature of not only our reconstructed reality but what she calls “the original field of life itself.” There is, in other words, no less of a symbolic interface between life and death than there is between linguistic reconstruction and a so-called pure experience of “life.” A Return beyond such an interface would require a departure not only from “verbal abstractions” but from perceptions as a whole.

This, indeed, is the result of Eventyr’s journeys beyond the metaphorical veil. Peter Sachsa possesses Eventyr’s consciousness entirely; after a séance, Eventyr himself “can recall nothing” (save, perhaps, for some ephemeral bodily impressions, “not words, but halos of meaning around words his mouth evidently spoke”) (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 148). And when the Psi Section researchers try to apprehend and control Eventyr’s talent, they find nothing but voids of meaning – evidence of brain lesions, but nothing to explain the mechanism of mediumship and possession. Eventyr himself, meanwhile,

has to read about [his gift] in the notes of others, listen to discs. Which means he has to trust the others. *That’s* a complicated social setup. He must base the major part of his life on the probity of men charged with acting as interface between what he is supposed to be and himself. Eventyr knows how close he is to Sachsa on the other side, but he doesn’t *remember*, and he’s been brought up a Christian, a Western European, believing in the primacy of the “conscious” self and its memories, regarding all the rest as abnormal or trivial, and so he is troubled, deeply. . . . (156)

The interface of experimentation, that is to say the textual media on which it depends, induces a split between “what [Eventyr] is supposed to be” and his supposed essential self. But this self, now that Eventyr has only the interface, is forever barred from view.

The irretrievability of the lost self is clear as soon as Sachsa controls him for the first time: Pynchon describes Eventyr's initiation into mediumship through an image of fading light, evoking a form of extinction (as "extinguishment") similar to the blinking light that signified Spectro's death in Pointsman's dream. Here, however, the "light at the edge of evening" is a metaphor for Eventyr's connection to his lover, Nora, whom he feels "beginning to recede" from him. In contrast to his sense of passive victimhood, Eventyr wonders if he may have intentionally, without altogether knowing it, "called up" Sachsa in order to refortify the link of desire:

Had he felt her, even then, beginning to recede . . . called up the control from across the Wall as a way of holding on? She was deepening from his waking, his social eye like light at the edge of the evening when, for perhaps a perilous ten minutes, nothing helps: put on your glasses and light lamps, sit by the west window and still it keeps going away, you keep losing the light and perhaps it is forever this time . . . a good time of day for learning surrender, learning to diminish like the light, or like certain music. This surrender is his only gift. Afterward he can recall nothing. (148)

The extinction of desire opens a void that the dead Sachsa comes to fill. Eventyr's possession is at once his "surrender" to a story from another man's past. The love affair, after a brief renewal of interest on the occultist Nora's part, dies; Eventyr's relationship thus becomes, as we learn from the notes on Sachsa's life recounted in the transcripts, the double of Sachsa's own: "If there are analogies here, if Eventyr does, somehow, map on to Peter Sachsa, then does Nora Dodson-Truck become the woman Sachsa loved, Leni Pökler?" (221). The extinction of desire, which calls forth its substitution from beyond "the Wall," proves to be the interface by which Eventyr and Nora enter into a new dialogue; however, this interface retroactively divides them, as they find themselves playing opposite roles in a script written by the dead.

The interface of mediumship, in the nonlinear causality it imposes on both desire and language, bears a great resemblance to the interface of technical violence, a frequent site of

contact between human and animal in Pynchon's novel. I explore this interface in the next section.

iii. The Light of "*Species We Will Never See Again*": Extinction as a Process of Technical Determinism

Why is "Foxes" the word Spectro uses to refer to his patients? And why is it the single word his spirit manages to convey through the medium's interface? He never explains this for us, but the word's metonymic significance implies a comparison between the Pavlovians' process of scientific inquiry and hunting. The exemplary subjects at the White Visitation, dogs, are often the intermediary predators in foxhunting; for the Pavlovians, however, they are prey. When Pointsman catches a new canine test subject in a bombed-out house, he thinks of it as his "quarry" (42). The fox's status as a frequent target of hunters' underlies its role as a metaphor for the object of knowledge – and, sometimes, the object of lust; the latter sense is made evident, Herman and Weisenburger note, when "Pointsman thinks about...[orphaned] girls as war spoils" (Herman and Weisenburger 86): "Pointsman's own Fox waits, out in the city, a prize of war" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 49).⁴⁶

Spectro's calls of "Foxes" therefore implicate the Pavlovians' search for cause-and-effect in various forms of predation (e.g. hunting, sadistic desire, and even, through homonymy, the extraction of a mineral "quarry," a process that becomes relevant in the next paragraph). It then becomes clear that a predatory, animal drive compels the very attitude that allows the Pavlovians to distance themselves from their animal subjects; they are humans, with the apparently unique

⁴⁶ Georg Schmundt-Thomas also draws a comparison with "the Duke's night-hunt for Jutta's little boy, his fox, that ends in cannibalism in John Hawkes's nightmarish novel about Germany, *The Cannibal*" (Schmundt-Thomas 91).

capacity for reason and linear thinking, but this capacity presents itself as the human's particular manifestation of brute animal nature. To think causally is to engage in predation.

Once it is made visible, the predatory epistemology that constitutes and justifies the human's alienation from animal nature inevitably forces the human to confront the animal. The point where they meet is the interface of death, of extinction; more specifically, the interface of death as something intrinsic to the causal thinking that drives the human's project of technological advancement. The ghost of Walther Rathenau, the German Jewish businessman and Weimar statesman who organized the trade relations with Soviet Russia and the United States that led, according to Pynchon's account, to the rise of "the cartelized state" (167), invokes this interface during a séance Sachsa leads for a group of Nazis affiliated with pharmaceutical- and dye-manufacturing conglomerate IG Farben: "Consider coal and steel. There is a place where they meet. The interface between coal and steel is coal-tar. Imagine coal, down in the earth, dead black, no light, the very substance of death. Death ancient, prehistoric, species *we will never see again*." The creation of synthetic oil through coal-tar derivatives will appear, Rathenau warns his listeners (who hold the séance in 1930, about three years before the founding of the Third Reich), to be the sublime dialogue promised by the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment between "perpetual night" and the "fiery, bright" light of "shining steel" (169). As Joseph Tabbi observes in his reading of this scene, Rathenau frames "mauve, the first new color on Earth" as the "transcendent signifier" of a process that links dye to coal to oil, as though synthetic spectra manifest the spectral presence of fossilized species. In practice, however, the extraction of coal-tar and the fuel it provides for the cartel's growth "is not resurrection" (Tabbi 84): "this is all the impersonation of life. The real movement is not from death to any rebirth. It is from death to death-transfigured" (*GR* 169). IG Farben's eventual use

of slave labor from Auschwitz in their manufacture of synthetic oil will verify Rathenau's claim; death transfigures from the fossilized remains of extinct animals to the human genocide of the Holocaust.

Rathenau's attribution of the military-industrial cartel to the life-imitating artifice of "Death the impersonator" poses a challenge insofar as it implies an alternative to "structures favoring death." Is there a force behind "life" that is separate from or in excess to "death-transfigured"? Rathenau, who may not know himself, leaves this ultimate question unanswered. What it is fair to say, however, is that the technical interface of fossil fuel extraction at least presents (in the sense of a Heideggerian "revealing" or "unfolding" – words Rathenau uses (169))⁴⁷ the appearance of a boundary between life and death. Once again, the interface seems to manifest retrogressively, as the effect of a division that it appears to precede. Rathenau's listeners and readers cannot help but leave the séance with a morbid sense of technological determinism: The human's role as technical animal and, therefore, Death's servant (or, even, the incorporation of Death itself) manifests the very process of "life" from which this role seems to grow more and more distant. In terms of the Pavlovian predatory epistemology, one can read Death here as a predator superior to even the human.

A similar tone of life-negating determinism underlies the novel's exploration, some episodes before the Rathenau séance, of the dodo bird's anthropogenic extinction. When Rathenau dismisses "cause and effect" as the discourse of a "secular history" that obscures the "truth" of a transcendental, technological "process" (169), he establishes a correspondence

⁴⁷ One can compare Rathenau's description of death's transmutation into light to Heidegger's account of technical *alētheia* in "The Question Concerning Technology": "*Technē* is a mode of *alētheuein*. It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another" (Heidegger 13).

between the interface of coal tar extraction and the interface of colonization and environmental destruction, which the reader has encountered in the analeptic story of 17th-century Dutch adventurer Frans van der Groov (ancestor of Katje Borgesius, Dutch double-agent working for the White Visitation). The terrifying, problematic notion Rathenau raises – that the human enacts violence on its environment for reasons it cannot comprehend in the moment and that only present themselves by way of a posttraumatic “afterwardsness” – recalls and reinforces Frans’s sense that he and the other colonists are “systematically killing off the native dodoes [of Mauritius] for reasons he could not understand” (110).

Over his thirteen years on the island, Frans and his countrymen come up with justifications that range from the proto-Darwinian (“And the stupid, awkward bird, never intended to fly or run at any speed—what *were* they good for?— unable now even to locate his murderer, ruptured, splashing blood, raucously dying...” (110)) to divine obligation:

To some, it made sense. They saw the stumbling birds ill-made to the point of Satanic intervention, so ugly as to embody argument against a Godly creation. Was Mauritius some first poison trickle through the sheltering dikes of Earth? Christians must stem it here, or perish in a second Flood, loosed this time not by God but by the Enemy. The act of ramming home the charges into their musketry became for these men a devotional act, one whose symbolism they understood. (112)

Here it is the “musketry” that serves as the transcendental signifier of technically-mediated Death. The interface of extinction takes the shape of a firearm; the human subject and the animal object therefore meet on opposite ends of a medium that drives them apart irrevocably. Indeed, the whole religious narrative only seems to supplement and render symbolic the unrepresentable truth of technical violence: “as for faith...[Frans] can believe only in the one steel reality of the firearm he carries” (113).

There is, however, one part of the episode that indicates Frans may not be a total slave to the killing machine. At one point, Frans – hunting alone, “insomniac,” and tormented by

“loneliness” – “[sits] all day staring at a single white dodo’s egg in a grass hummock.” He is prepared to “destroy the infant” as soon as it emerges, but, after much waiting, he relents because of ghostly “voices” in his head that he senses are “warning him...scolding, angry that he couldn’t understand”:

The voices...spoke the words of sleepers, singly, coupled, in chorus. The rhythms and timbres were Dutch, but made no waking sense...Each hour he sighted down the barrel. It was then, if ever, he might have seen how the weapon made an axis potent as Earth's own between himself and this victim, still one, inside the egg, with the ancestral chain, not to be broken out for more than its blink of world's light. There they were, the silent egg and the crazy Dutchman, and the hookgun that linked them forever, framed, brilliantly motionless as any Vermeer...He should have blasted it then where it lay: he understood that the bird would hatch before dawn. But a cycle was finished. He got to his feet, knee and hip joints in agony, head gonging with instructions from his sleepwalkers droning by, overlapping, urgent, and only limped away, piece at right shoulder arms.

“It was then, if ever,” writes Pynchon, indicating Frans’s ultimate failure to see his “weapon” as an “axis” of the human and the animal’s shared rotation rather than a simple force of destruction. Nonetheless, the scene of conflict appears, for a moment, as a fiction, “motionless as any Vermeer.” Ghostly, apparently “ancestral” voices (though who is to say they are not voices from the future?) succeed in compelling Frans to view the scene from outside and exit (111).

When he exits, of course, he still finds himself in another level of the same colonial system. Rather than heeding the “words of sleepers” to their logical conclusion, he seeks solace in the “drunken, university hysteria” of his fellow Europeans. It is the words of the waking that seem to constitute the system from which Frans cannot escape; Pynchon frames the island as an acoustic network of entrapment, within which the “frequencies” of human language stand in violent contrast to the surrounding ambiance: “Tradewinds moving up-slope to chill their nights' sweating, *sky* lit half crimson by a volcano, rumblings under their feet as deep as the bats' voices were high, all these men were caught in the spectrum between, trapped among frequencies of their own voices and words” (112). The narrow “spectrum” of human language is what somehow

makes the technical violence of the colony an inevitability. The dodo's apparent exemption from this spectrum is what makes, in Frans's view, a total exit from conflict impossible. He writes in a letter, "Alas, their tragedy is to be the dominant form of Life on Mauritius, but incapable of speech"; the narrator continues, "That was it, right there. No language meant no chance of co-opting them in to what their round and flaxen invaders were calling Salvation" (113).

In formal terms, the structure of Frans's story brings attention back to my broader theme of metalepsis. The technique is a dominant one in *Gravity's Rainbow*; I have already cited one example in the use of second-person narration in Pointsman's dream. With Frans, the technique reflects the notion of an ancestral chain, as his point-of-view both emerges from and recedes back into his descendant Katje's without warning. And within his story, when he refuses to shoot the hatchling, Frans seems to cross a threshold determined by one interface of conflict only to find himself still enmeshed in the interface of narrative, the archetypal example of which here is the Christian eschatology that underlies colonization and the hunt to extinction. Technical interfaces and the communication (violent or otherwise) that they enable occupy a level enmeshed within this eschatological narrative. (I will return to both eschatology and metalepsis toward the end of the chapter by way of Atwood.)

Frans fantasizes a way out of the anthropocentric structure when he envisions a sort of Franciscan "Conversion of the Dodoes," in which he grants the birds the "Gift of Speech" and assimilates them into "rational discourse" and the "eternal life" offered by "His Word." Frans reckons that "if they save us from hunger in this world, then beyond, in Christ's kingdom, our salvations must be, in like measure, inextricable. Otherwise the dodoes would be only what they appear as in the world's illusory light—only our prey. God could not be that cruel" (113). The "Word" serves here as the ultimate interface of extinction, the ultimate concealment of the

predatory struggle in which the human and the animal find themselves. This is not necessarily to say that Pynchon frames the Word as a fiction, or argues that the concealment is untrue; the Word may be, as religious narrative is often professed to be, mere metaphor, unseen entelechy working retroactively.

However, the colony that the Word inspires fails, as an inevitable result of resource depletion. Were the voices warning Frans of a self-destructive process he and the other colonists could have avoided? Do the words of sleepers that emerge in the process of extinction offer an alternative to colonialism and anthropocentrism? If such an alternative exists, how does it respond to afterwardsness, and the challenge it poses to what Eventyr considers the “Christian...Western European” notion of linear causality and conscious, individual agency?

iv. Negative Entropy Beyond the Zero: Suicide and the Aardvark

To reframe the above questions in the novel’s own terms, what might lie “beyond the zero” of self-annihilation, maximum disorder, and extinction? Is it nothingness, or is it life? Some readers have argued that Pynchon answers with the former through “the Zone,” an absurdist rendering of postwar occupied Germany.⁴⁸ And indeed, Pynchon defines the Zone as a militarized, globalized region of absolute chaos, where what the Pavlovians call “ideas of the opposite” dissolve to the point where life and death lose distinction (“Ghosts used to be either likenesses of the dead or wraiths of the living. But here in the Zone categories have been blurred badly” (308)), and inhabitants can “listen in to traffic from the Other Side, hearing about the future (no serial time over there: events are all there in the same eternal moment and so certain

⁴⁸For instance, John Johnston, who writes, “According to the novel’s figurative topography, the Zone is what lies “Beyond the Zero” of Part 1” (Johnston 78).

messages don't always "make sense" back here: they lack historical structure, they sound fanciful, or insane)" (637).

But the Zone is not, I argue, "beyond the zero." It is, to hark back to the V-2's parabolic trajectory, beyond the extinction marked by *Brennschluss*, the moment when fuel is cut off and the rocket must obey the laws of gravity, but it is not beyond the extinction marked by the rocket's landing; the Zone approaches this extinction, it brings the zero into view – it could even be *at* the zero – but it is not *beyond* it.

I remind my reader of Dog Vanya, and the interface that takes form on the cortical membrane as extinction is attained. This occurs at the equivalent phase, where no correspondence is apparent between stimulus and response, but what follows in the paradoxical and ultraparadoxical phases is a new correspondence, a reversal of the former one. The interface permits not the mere annihilation of meaning but, rather, its reversibility. To speak of what lies beyond the zero is to speak of the region where the rocket's parabola, having slammed into the ground, reverses sign.

As I noted earlier, psychoanalysis, with its view of the subject as constituted by lack, offers one model of interpreting the presence effected by absence, the reality that emerges when the positive becomes negative. And the framing of life as a "negative" form extends beyond psychoanalysis. Physicist Erwin Schrödinger wrote of life as a form of "negative entropy," a homeostatic, self-reproducing order that works against the disorder continually increasing in its environment: "a living organism continually increases its entropy -or, as you may say, produces positive entropy -and thus tends to approach the dangerous state of maximum entropy, which is of death. It can only keep aloof from it, i.e. alive, by continually drawing from its environment

negative entropy...What an organism feeds upon is negative entropy” (Schrödinger 71).⁴⁹

Schrödinger interpreted life as an open system engaged in a process of exchange. Organisms emerge through tendencies toward increasing complexity and metabolic sustenance, and although the individual tends inevitably toward death, life as a structure is based on renewal and inheritance. As Pynchon well knows, the second law of thermodynamics observes that the universe tends toward increasing entropy over time, but open systems within the universe can maintain or even increase order in contrast with their surroundings. (Laplanche’s work in particular can be used to apply this notion to psychoanalysis; as Figure 2 shows, one can compare, on the one hand, the negentropic exchange of an organism in homeostasis to the constancy principle, and on the other hand, the general entropic tendency of the greater system to the “zero principle” of the death drive).

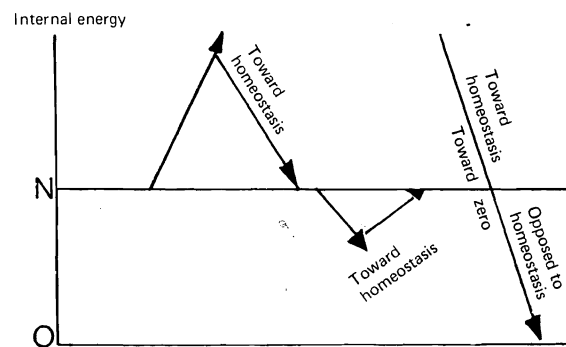


Fig. 3.2. Laplanche’s visualization of how the “constancy principle,” at work in an organism seeking to maintain an energy level N, functions in conflict with the “zero principle” of the death drive (Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* 114).

⁴⁹ Pynchon’s interest in entropy is well-attested. His second published story, “Entropy,” alludes to the concept as a metaphor for what takes place at a party gone wrong; the story ends with a character holding a dying bird in his arms, while another smashes a window in anger. The two of them “wait...until the moment of equilibrium was reached...and the hovering, curious dominant of their separate lives should resolve into a tonic of darkness and the absence of all motion” (“Entropy” 292). For more on entropy and its relation to life throughout Pynchon’s oeuvre, see Daniel Simberloff’s “Entropy, Information, and Life: Biophysics in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon” (*Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, vol. 21, no. 4, Summer 1978, pp. 617-625).

Schrödinger's view of life as a system based on negentropy has inspired theorists of technics and media – most notably, Vilém Flusser (whose work I will discuss in relation to Atwood) and Bernard Stiegler.⁵⁰ Technically-mediated communication, they argue, is the human's way of ordering and structuring its environment in a manner that transcends the confines of the animal body and the reproduction of organic matter. Stiegler, reading the work of anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan through the lens of Derridean *différance*, brings into relief the paradoxical, retrogressive temporality of the technical interface through his account of the “corticalization” that takes place when the prehistoric human learns to manipulate flint, which Stiegler identifies as “the epiphylogenetic vector” of cultural transmission and “the first reflective memory, the first mirror” of the human brain (Stiegler 142). In a description that supports my interfacial reading of the mediated division between subject and environment, Stiegler writes,

“the human invents himself in the technical by inventing the tool—by becoming exteriorized techno-logically. But here the human is the interior: there is no exteriorization that does not point to a movement from interior to exterior. Nevertheless, the interior is inverted in this movement; it can therefore not precede it. Interior and exterior are consequently constituted in a movement that invents both one and the other: a moment in which they invent each other respectively, as if there were a technological maieutic of what is called humanity. The interior and the exterior are the same thing, the inside is the outside, since man (the interior) is essentially defined by the tool (the exterior). However, this double constitution is also that of an opposition between the interior and the exterior—or one that produces an illusion of succession.” (141-42)

⁵⁰ Léon Brillouin coined “negentropy,” an abbreviation of negative entropy, in his 1953 article, “The Negentropy Principle of Information” (*Journal of Applied Physics*, vol. 24, no. 9, September 1953, pp. 1152-1163). For Flusser's thoughts on negentropy in particular, see his essay “What is Communication?”, in which he contends that “the thesis that human communication is a process directed against the general entropic tendency of nature” and “the thesis that human communication is an artistic technique directed against the solitude unto death” “make the same assertion” (*Writings* 6).

Stiegler argues that this illusion of succession comes from an “originary forgetting” of pre-technical Being, the form *Dasein* took before technics.

Perhaps, then – and this is the point on which I will conclude my reading of Pynchon’s novel – the space for an alternative to technical determinism and maximum entropy, i.e. humanity’s self-destruction through the interface, lies in a practice of remembering that would stand in place for that originary forgetting. This practice must not, Pynchon knows, be one born of a *Völkisch* nostalgia for a nonexistent past, nor can it require a “palingenetic” “rebirth” from decadence, as Roger Griffin describes the “mythic core” of fascism (Griffin 32). Rather than targeting a return to life without the interface, it must embrace the interface’s reflective capacity, and it must embrace the inevitable process of exchange between order and disorder.

To judge such a practice in its present form fully is impossible, since any such practice gestures toward a future that is beyond a horizon of the actual and the representable. Still, Pynchon shows his readers the possibility of such a practice during one episode in particular, where he introduces the “Erdschweinhöhlern” (literally, the aardvark-cave-ones), a subgroup of the Schwarzkommando Hereros who live in the underground caves of Nordhausen. A faction of the Erdschweinhöhlern known as the “Otukungurua” or “the Empty Ones” complicate the significance of their ancestral aardvark “totem animal”, opting not for its traditional symbolism of “fertility and life” but rather a “program” of “racial suicide.” They see themselves not as “living and human” but as “the inanimate and the rising,” hence the *Otu-* prefix (as opposed to *Oma-*) in their self-designation: “Revolutionaries of the Zero, they mean to carry on what began among the old Hereros after the 1904 rebellion failed. They want a negative birth rate... They would finish the extermination the Germans began in 1904” (320-21). The narrator describes the

Otukungurua as “prophets of masturbating” who “can guarantee a day when the last Zone-Herero will die, a final zero to a collective history fully lived” (323).

Enzian, whose point-of-view largely focalizes the narrator’s presentation of the Otukungurua, leads the opposing faction of the “Erdschweinhöhlern”; he is “troubled with” their support for abortion and sterilization, and he views it as a disturbing outcome of colonial logic. However, as a “Halfbreed” with a European father, Enzian seems himself to collaborate with the colonial project through his belief in “the Rocket” as a “force” with qualities of “direct revelation,” which, when brought to its “final shape,” will guide his people to an “Eternal Center”: “What Enzian wants to create will have no history... Time, as time is known to the other nations, will wither away inside this new one. The Erdschweinhöhle will not be bound, like the Rocket, to time. The people will find the Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place” (321, 319, 323). As Joseph Ombindi, leader of “the Empty Ones,” helps Enzian to understand, this “Eternal Center can easily be seen as the Final Zero. Names and methods vary, but the movement toward stillness is the same” (323). The narrator even makes an implicit case for the Otukungurua’s suicidal “program” when he points out how destructive it is to the European colonial system that places them in the position of desiring “the Final Zero”: “How provoking, to watch one’s subject population dwindling like this, year after year. What’s a colony without its dusky natives?” (321). The Otukungurua, in embracing suicide as “all the Deviations in one single act” (listed as examples are “bestiality,” “pedophilia,” “lesbianism,” “coprophilia and urolagnia,” and “fetishism”), provide a reflective mirror to a logic that frames the colony as the location where European colonizers can act out their primal, “animal” urges: “Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his own shit”

(322). By reclaiming these urges as their own, the Otukungurua provoke a fundamental question: Which must go extinct first?: The lives of the colonized, or the colony itself? Suicide, Pynchon suggests, follows an uncertain, revolutionary logic when directed at the collective rather than the individual.⁵¹ The difficulty lies, of course, in choosing and naming the collective one consigns to disorder and extinction. To choose wrongly would be to choose the extinction of life itself.

But in the case of the Otukungurua, Enzian notes, it is as though naming “racial suicide” as the act to subsume all other acts of desire creates an excess of uncertainty and deferral that prevents the suicide from taking place: “by Gödel’s Theorem there is bound to be some item around that one has omitted from the list...it’s easy to see that the “suicide” might have to be postponed indefinitely!” (325). Indeed, the resistance that the suicidal program elicits from Enzian could be considered part of the excess.

The Otukungurua, in naming and commemorating a “collective history” that they write as already finished, paradoxically gesture toward a future beyond the colony; by opting for “tribal death” rather than “Christian death” (322), they acknowledge both the impossibility of the eschatological “return” that Enzian seeks and the certainty of transformation beyond the horizons of narrative. This does not, granted, mean an escape from narrative or its determinist logic; rather, it would seem to *transform* the entropic parabola into its negative reflection, such that the interface of extinction reveals the emergence of a space for negentropic order. This is what happens when the story of Enzian and the Zone-Hereros concludes: Rather than escape the Rocket and technological determinism entirely, they find themselves on a different side of a perpetual “struggle”; the 00001 rocket that Enzian builds is the “good Rocket” that can “take us

⁵¹ Joanna Freer’s reading of the Schwarzkommando narrative points to “Pynchon’s essential respect for [Black Panther Party leader] Huey P. Newton’s concept of revolutionary suicide” (Freer 171), i.e. Newton’s notion of sacrificing oneself for the sake of changing intolerable conditions.

to the stars,” in contrast to the “evil Rocket for the World’s suicide” (741). The retroactive effect of this interface, the good Rocket, is the constitution of a new history, “a Diaspora running backwards, seeds of exile flying inward in a modest preview of gravitational collapse, of the Messiah gathering in the fallen spark” (752). A technical interface so radical as space travel would surely, Enzian is optimistic enough to believe, constitute the interiority of a global humanity that would resist the final extinction.

II. Interlude: Parabolas and Sinewaves

Despite the apparent benefits of the Otukungurua’s attunement to their animal totem’s way of being, some sense of technological determinism remains. The Rocket remains the Eternal Center, suggesting some degree of truth (perhaps in the manner of self-affirming prophecy) to the beliefs of “Gnostics who have been taken to the chambers of the Rocket-throne” and “Kabbalists who study the Rocket as Torah, letter by letter” (741). The best that can be done is to change the Rocket’s function. I use this word deliberately, as it evokes the terms of parabolic descent and transformation so central to Pynchon’s project.

Sometimes, Pynchon suggests, one just finds oneself on a way down a “scheduled parabola” (323), a negative slope. One must think quickly about which mirrors to grasp at as the descent accelerates, for these will be the interfaces that remain when the parabola completes and, hopefully, swings back, beyond the zero, in something resembling sinewave, toward ascent. And the living beings with whom one interfaces, human and animal, are the most obvious and most life-affirming choices. In pushing negation to its extreme end, the Otukungurua transform the descent into an inverse function of ascent. When one thinks in terms of metabolic exchange

between open systems that form a single whole, one can imagine that these mirroring parabolas do not simply halt when they reach the x-axis.

Carl Jung, whose work has been identified by Collado-Rodríguez, Cowart, and Weisenburger as a major influence on Pynchon's fiction, writes: "The curve of life is like the parabola of a projectile which, disturbed from its initial state of rest, rises and then returns to a state of repose" (Jung 8: 406).⁵² By referring to life as an "energy-process" (8: 405), Jung allows us to map biographical narrative onto a function of order or negative entropy.

Pynchon's portrayal of the colony – as well as, I will show, Atwood's vision of contemporary dystopia – substitutes the life of the species, race, or civilization (the collective, in short) onto this parabolic function. If one assumes that a parabolic curve of negative entropy exists for any self-sustaining living system, such that the apex marks the state of maximum order or liveliness, then the zero, the return to the x-axis, marks death or extinction. It also marks the point where the derivative reaches a maximum, which is to say a maximum rate of decrease in order, which is to say a maximum *acceleration* of entropy.

The question then becomes (as it has been all along), what happens once the parabola reaches the zero? If one speaks of individual death, what Jung called "that unproblematical ending of individual existence" (8: 404), one might say nothing. But in order for the function to be truly parabolic, it must accelerate further, beyond zero, toward infinite entropy. In the case of the entire universe, understood to be a closed system, this is indeed what happens per the second law of thermodynamics.

⁵² Weisenburger's discussion of Jung will feature later in this chapter; for the other two critics' arguments on the Jungian elements of Pynchon's work, see Francisco Collado-Rodríguez's "Meaning Deferral, Jungian Symbolism, and the Quest for V. in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*" (*Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 56, no. 13, May 2015, pp. 255-269) and David Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Southern Illinois UP, 1980). As Cowart puts it, "Jung's system provides one thread to guide the reader through the labyrinth" of mysticism in *Gravity's Rainbow* (Cowart 99).

And yet this solution neglects the process of biological “exchange” altogether, refusing to account for the parabola’s origin, where disorder turned to order. The inevitability of such exchange is more evident when one speaks of species extinction, whereby, often, an ecological niche opens up for a new species to take the vanished one’s place. For us to take seriously, as Pynchon does, the notion that “all [Nature] knows is transformation” rather than “extinction,” one must speak of a transformation imposed on the parabolic function itself, such that life changes its sign, permeates the boundaries of the open system we call the *observable* universe and lurks unseen, underground, spectrally metabolizing new stories from the old (see Fig. 3.3). Beyond the zero, the entropic parabola decelerates, ceases its descent at an opposite vertex, at which point the energy of the dead enters into new formations, concretizes, accelerates back toward zero, like souls in transmigration. So long as something lives, this is the way the function will go, a metempsychotic sine wave, in continuous reincarnation (see Figs. 3.4 and 3.5). At least, this is all one can hope in a world where extinction is inevitable.

Technological determinism has its limits, as does any determinism; Pynchon relates a technological eschatology to religious narrative in the novel’s closing pages, using the Tarot card of the Tower (drawn by the sadistic Nazi Weissman, figured by Pynchon as Enzian’s evil “Twin” (741)) as an illustration. Some see in the Tower card “a Gnostic or Cathar symbol for the Church of Rome, and this is generalized to mean any System which cannot tolerate heresy: a system which, by its nature, must sooner or later fall. We know by now that it is also the Rocket” (762). Technocratic, theocratic society operates as though it is a closed system, which, as thermodynamics dictates, is what ironically leads to its collapse. In truth, however, the boundaries are open, which is what offers the possibility of a new future. Tellingly, Weissman’s “future card, the card of what will come, is The World” (764).

I will further explore the permeable boundaries of technocracy and theocracy, as well as what may lie beyond those boundaries, through my reading of Atwood's speculative fiction trilogy.

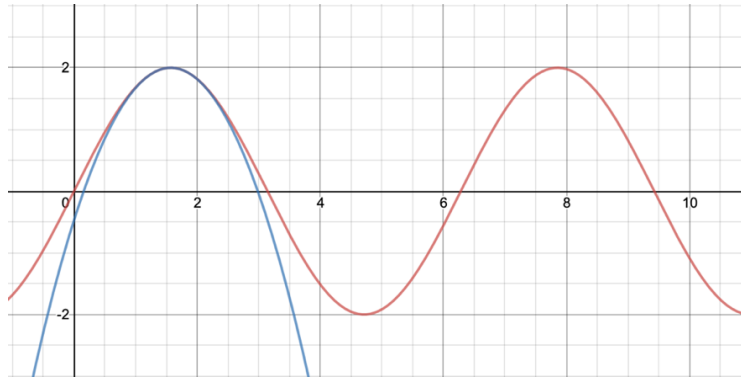


Fig. 3.3. A sine function $f(x) = 2 \sin(x)$ mapped together with the parabolic function $g(x) = -\left(x - \frac{\pi}{2}\right)^2 + 2$. Note the initial resemblance between the two functions above $y = 0$.

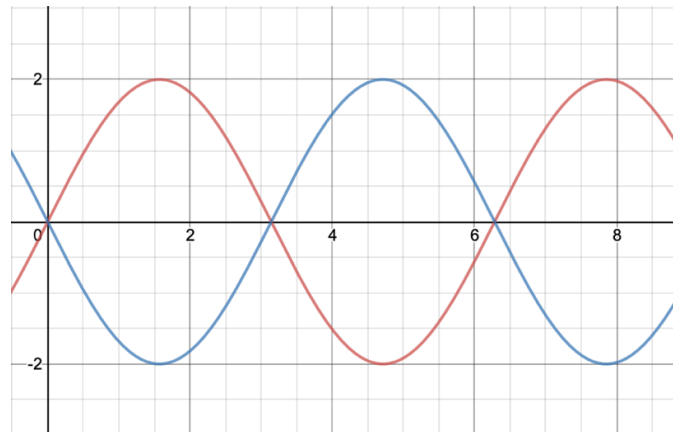


Fig. 3.4. Inverse sine functions reflected against one another. Note the chiasmic meeting-points at the x-axis. One can imagine, drawing on Pynchon, that the red curve signifies humanity, language, form, or life, while the blue signifies animality, imagination, formlessness, and death. The two operate symmetrically, reversing their polarities and changing signs at those intersections where they happen to meet.

III. Atwood's Interface

i. *MaddAddam's* Pandemic: COVID-19 and the Hyperreal Interface of Extinction

Like most post-apocalyptic fiction, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy starts at the end. It takes time, however, for the end to reveal a beginning. Jimmy, the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake*, the first novel in the series, wakes to a world where, to his knowledge, he may very well be the last representative of *Homo sapiens*. Lying on the beach, where the only marker of time's passage is "the tide coming in...the rhythm of heartbeat," he reads the "blank face" of his broken wristwatch: "zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 3).

On the parabola of societal death, the trilogy starts on the x-axis: order has disintegrated at an accelerating rate for some time now, and the potential for chaos to increase even further in this timeless, post-pandemic world is clearly still there. Atwood's trilogy thus provides us at least with a model for what happens to the human species "beyond the zero" of civilization's collapse, if not the absolute annihilation of the human.

Unsurprisingly, the post-historical return to a state of nature is an encounter with violence, a disordering of meaning; throughout *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy incants his favorite words and quotations to himself, hoping to counteract the near-disappearance of all text and all archives, but more and more he finds "blank spaces in his stub of a brain, where memory used to be" (4-5). Only by reading the text, however, will we discover whether the fragmented signifiers of language can coalesce into something new, whether entropy continues to accelerate in true parabolic fashion or decelerates and transforms into something more sinusoidal and periodic. The fact that Jimmy is not completely alone on the beach, but rather in the company of the

“Crakers,” neohumans engineered by the same mastermind who plotted the pandemic extinction event, is a promising sign. Indeed, the fact that Atwood presents the aftermath in the form of a serial narrative, which follows the three-part orderly logic of a beginning, middle, and end, should itself be a promising sign.

These questions already had evident, enormous implications for those who read *Oryx and Crake* on its release in 2003. Published during the first months of the Iraq War, *Oryx and Crake* parodied and amplified such emerging real contemporary issues as climate change, the proliferation of gaming culture and the Internet, international sex trafficking, and the rise of the biopolitical, plutocratic military state. As readers have observed, the novel’s largely analeptic narrative demonstrating how Jimmy got to where he is now is “less about the future” and more “about the fears and anxieties we experience in the present day” (*Sobriquet Magazine*).

Readers in 2020 (and beyond), however, cannot help but encounter the world-reflecting elements of this speculative text in a fundamentally new way. A devastating viral pandemic has taken place; COVID-19 may not cause violent hemorrhagic death in all of its sufferers the way Crake’s pathogen does, but it has greatly disturbed the world order that was so undeniably present and seemingly permanent in 2003, to such an extent that one could be forgiven for approaching Atwood’s text as either mystic vision or predictive programming. In a 2011 article on *Oryx and Crake*, Katherine V. Snyder writes:

The future as imagined in dystopian speculative fiction must be simultaneously recognizable and unrecognizable, both like and not-like the present...In order to grasp the caution offered by the tale, we must see the imagined future in our actual present and also recognize the difference between now and the future-as-imagined. Thus, the reader of such fiction must sustain a kind of double consciousness with respect both to the fictionality of the world portrayed and to its potential as our own world's future. (Snyder 470)

This is true, but only until the reader discovers the event foretold has already occurred. At that point, the tension between the two worlds snaps, and the double consciousness collapses. The text acquires the characteristics of what Baudrillard called “contagious hyperreality,” the space where distinctions between originals and their copies lose all meaning (*Simulacra and Simulation* 22). The fictional pandemic is more real than the real one, which cannot help but appear somehow unreal – even, for some, disappointing, or fabricated – next to the one Atwood and many others have imagined during the twenty-first century.⁵³ Simultaneously, the fictional catastrophes may provide a model for the actual one, such that an ultimate apocalyptic narrative gathers momentum and grows difficult to escape, displacing the narratives that frame the pandemic as a resolvable situation.

While I am not the first reader to invoke Baudrillard in reference to *Oryx and Crake*,⁵⁴ the context in which the novel might be read as an element of the very hyperreality it critiques is a newly emergent one. Baudrillard observes the potential for art to precede reality in his discussion of the 1979 film *The China Syndrome*, a fictional rendering of a nuclear power plant disaster released just twelve days before an actual (and arguably overdramatized) meltdown took place at the Three Mile Island facility near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. When such an apparent programming of narrative takes place, the very sign of catastrophe follows the patterns of contagion, incurable insofar as “one no longer knows which is the effect and which is the symptom” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 54). Baudrillard takes McLuhan’s theory of media to its

⁵³ Other texts that could be subjected to a hyperrealist reading in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic include such novels as, among others, Stephen King’s *The Stand* (1978), Octavia Butler’s *Clay’s Ark* (1984), Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* (2014), and Ling Ma’s *Severance* (2018); and in film, Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* (2002), Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children of Men* (2006), and Steven Soderbergh’s *Contagion* (2011).

⁵⁴ See in particular Sima Farshid and Behnam Moradzadeh’s “Capitalism and Fabrication of Hyper-reality: A Baudrillardian Reading of Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*” (*The International Journal of Literary Humanities*, vol. 11, no. 1, February 2014, pp. 1-8).

terminal endpoint; once media saturate society to the point where one can no longer identify an original reality, the retrogressive causality that seems to characterize technical advancement comes to characterize all mass culture.

Snyder does note the potential for retrogressive causality and blurred narrative boundaries in Atwood's text when she compares the reader's double consciousness with that of the protagonist's "traumatized consciousness." Drawing on Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as a "repeated suffering," distinguished by "a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment" (Caruth 10), Snyder notes "how the trauma of the protagonist's early losses, his delayed incorporation of unmourned losses"—such as that of his mother, who runs away from the corporate biotech compound where Jimmy was raised when she learns of his father's participation in nefarious bioengineering conspiracies—"sets the stage for the re-enactment of cataclysmic trauma on the global stage" (Snyder 473). Atwood therefore exposes the same logic of traumatic "afterwardsness" that we located in the spectral presences of Pynchon's world at war and his novel's reliance on retroactive attributions. Writing in 2011, however, Snyder cannot foresee the global trauma of 2020, after which point any reader engaging with Atwood's novel risks entering the same traumatic economy of "repeated suffering" that we might have once hoped such fiction served to deter.

I would argue that the coronavirus, more than any catastrophe in human history up until now, has laid bare in so-called real time the porousness between fictional narrative and mediatized spectacle. Does this mean that apocalyptic fiction is inherently irresponsible, or an exercise to be avoided? Not necessarily, but the genre's stakes are clearly higher now. How does one rebuild a sense of doubleness that seems, at least in relation to the sign of the pandemic, its event, forever collapsed? Reading after the event – or even more simply, as is perhaps the case

with this text, *an* event – is a very difficult exercise; it requires one to navigate the trauma as though its boundaries are traversable, metaleptic. It requires a discernment between the parts of the text that are past and the parts which remain in suspense, a discernment between COVID-19, (*a* significant pandemic) and *the* pandemic envisioned by Atwood.

That which I have called the “interface of extinction” provides us, I will argue in the second half of this chapter, with not only the explanation for extinction’s seeming inevitability, but also the mechanism for an escape, or at least an interference.

ii. Post-Historical Gamification: Extinction as Simulacrum

Two quotations from other works of fiction provide the epigraphs for *Oryx and Crake*. The first, from Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, primes the reader to approach Atwood’s trilogy not as a series of “strange improbable tales” but as “plain matter of fact [related] in the simplest manner and style” (Swift 483). Atwood thereby situates her speculative narrative directly in the place of reality. The second epigraph, from Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, invites comparisons between the post-apocalyptic condition and the destabilized temporality of interwar modernism: “Was there no safety? No learning by heart the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?” (Woolf 183). More than just referring to the potential future where civilization has collapsed, however, this quote also conveys, “in the simplest manner and style,” the ecstasy of the peri-apocalyptic present. Hyperreality, as simulacrum, produces a space of signifiers without precedents, a present unhinged from historical context. As Jimmy’s memories of his aesthetically confused childhood home at the OrganInc compound demonstrate, even the attempts to reproduce history for purposes of present consumption further erase the boundary between present representations and their assumed

historical originals: “they lived in a large Georgian centre-plan with an indoor swimming pool and a small gym. The furniture in it was called *reproduction*. Jimmy was quite old before he realized what this word meant – that for each reproduction item, there was supposed to be an original somewhere. Or there had been once. Or something” (26).

Atwood focuses attention on the role contemporary media have played in the construction of twenty-first century hyperreality: in particular, the absorptive interfaces of reality television, streaming sites, and videogames. Jimmy’s adolescent friendship with Crake develops through a shared interest in violent simulation games like “Kwiktime Osama” and “Three Dimensional Waco,” which transform the collective traumas of terrorism into fictional vehicles for personal fantasy. On the Internet, they anesthetize themselves to violence and sadomasochism by watching the naked broadcasters on the “Noodie News,” visiting “animal snuff sites,” or watching the (perhaps fabricated, perhaps not) “live coverage of executions in Asia” on “hedsoff.com” (81-2). And as is consistent with the often-ubiquitous effects of new media, the gamification and normalization of violence carry over into the nondigital space of a trading card game called “Blood and Roses,” in which players exchange the “human atrocities” and “human achievements” of various ancient and modern civilizations for points: e.g. “one *Mona Lisa* equalled Bergen-Belsen, one Armenian genocide equalled the *Ninth Symphony* plus three Great Pyramids” (78-9). Entire histories thus become commodities that can be divided up and treated as equivalences.

One of the most debilitating effects of Jimmy’s post-historical relation to a gamified present is a dramatic foreshortening of not only past but future horizons. Jimmy’s anxiety as he wanders the postapocalyptic landscape, that he is a “castaway” in time as well as space, is an anxiety familiar to a contemporary writer like Atwood, who wonders whether the intensities of

the digital image will destroy the nuances of text and reading: “even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who’ll come along later...and learn his fate. [Jimmy] can make no such assumptions: he’ll have no future reader, because the Crakers can’t read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past” (41).

Atwood therefore amplifies the role that digital media and gamification have played in the society that arrives after what Fukuyama called “the end of history” (Fukuyama). Her view on the relative danger of the hyperreal image is consistent with not only Baudrillard’s but media theorist Vilém Flusser’s, who argues that the invention of photography and the technical image signals a rupture in human history as great as the rupture marked by alphabetic writing. Whereas alphabetic writing, in Flusser’s account, allows for the recording of “events” in “linear, processual” form and the development of historical consciousness, the photographic medium both elevates the event to the status of a divine “happening” and, in contrast to the ancient representations of painting, directly invites the subject to participate in transcendence (Flusser, “Television Image”). Flusser writes, “All events are nowadays aimed at the television screen, the cinema screen, the photograph, in order to be translated into a state of things. In this way, however, every action simultaneously loses its historical character and turns into a magic ritual and an endlessly repeatable movement...”. This loss of historical, causality-based consciousness, described by Flusser as “the fulfillment of the ages, in which action and agony go endlessly round in circles,” leads to our contemporary “apocalyptic perspective” (*Towards a Philosophy of Photography* 20).

Flusser was at times optimistic about computation, speculating that it might transform users into personal programmers of their own lives, who treated images as communicative elements, sophisticated conceptual signs. Atwood, however, having seen and foreseen the

trajectory of networked digital culture, presents a society that has fallen victim to what interface theorist James Ash calls “envelope power.” In his book *The Interface Envelope*, Ash explains how videogames and algorithmic interfaces engulf their users into technical “envelopes,” “localized foldings of space-time that work to shape human capacities to sense space and time for the explicit purpose of creating economic value” (Ash 3). Atwood’s exposition of contemporary capitalism, a system that cannot but destroy itself, shows how these “foldings of space-time” capture users’ imagination, blinding them not only to alternative futures but even to the inherent precarity and unsustainability of the present one. Derrida, though not writing of videogames or reality television, observes this tendency in neoliberal society when he attacks Fukuyama and “those who celebrate the triumph of liberal capitalism and its predestined alliance with liberal democracy only in order to hide, and first of all from themselves, the fact that this triumph has never been so critical, fragile, threatened, even in certain regards catastrophic, and in sum bereaved” (Derrida, *Specters* 85).

iii. Literary Zoonosis: Alex the Parrot, Extinctathon, and the Animal Contagion of Spectrality

Perhaps none of Atwood’s fictional horrors so consummately realizes the terminal condition of post-historical society as “nitee-nite.com,” an “assisted-suicide” streaming interface where users can “pay big bucks for a chance to...snuff themselves in glory...” Whereas Crake finds the site “hilarious,” Jimmy finds it disturbing. He thinks back to Alex, the (real) African gray parrot raised by animal psychologist Irene Pepperberg, whose famous experiments involving the possibility of avian language find their way into Jimmy’s childhood in the form of old DVDs: The “planned departures” broadcast on the assisted suicide sites “made [Jimmy]

uneasy: they reminded him of Alex the parrot saying *I'm going away now*. There was too fine a line between Alex the parrot and the assisted suicides and his mother and the note she'd left for him. All three gave notice of their intentions; then all vanished" (84).

Eerily, although Alex the parrot was still alive upon *Oryx and Crake*'s publication, he died in 2007, to the surprise of his trainers, at the relatively young age of 31. Even before *The Year of the Flood* was published, it was possible for readers to identify with Jimmy's relation to Alex. What would appear to be (and probably is) mere tragic coincidence takes on portentous significance in the light of Jimmy's unease; when Alex's planned departure becomes our past, the future where our own planned departure takes place would not be far behind. Can a novel kill a bird? Or can a bird kill himself by way of a novel? Regardless, Alex, as an image on DVD or YouTube, is as spectral to us as he is to Jimmy.

Spectral animals haunt the text's fictional media in other ways. The interface most central to the plot of Atwood's entire trilogy is an "interactive biofreak masterlore game" named Extinctathon, in which players exchange clues and try to guess the names of obscure extinct species. When players log on, the screen (a screen seen by many characters over the course of the trilogy) reads, "EXTINCTATHON, Monitored by MaddAddam. Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones. Do you want to play?" (80). As Jimmy later learns, the game's deceptive simplicity is a smokescreen; "MaddAddam" designates a group of eco-anarchist hackers and bioengineers who communicate via a bulletin system encrypted within the Extinctathon interface. Crake, whose alias comes from his Extinctathon codename, "Rednecked Crake" (a still-extant species of bird native to Oceania), joins their ranks by becoming an expert of the game, an "Extinctathon Grandmaster." Sharing the MaddAddamites' interest in shutting down "the machinery...the whole system" of society (217), he eventually hires many of the

Grandmasters as technicians to work with him on the BlyssPluss and Paradise Projects, which leads finally to the pandemic extinction event.

As some of them explain when they appear in the sequels, the MaddAddamites do not expect their work to lead to the complete or near-complete annihilation of the human species. They do, however, seem to desire the destruction of corporate oligarchy regardless of collateral damage, as demonstrated by the effects borne out by their “initiatives” even before Crake recruits them. The MaddAddamites’ strategy depends largely on infiltrating the bioengineering activities of companies like “CorpSeCorps,” the most visible products of which throughout the trilogy are transgenic hybrids like “pigoons” (pigs engineered to grow “human-tissue organs” (23) that are immune to infection and can be reaped for transplantation later) and “rakunks” (raccoon-skunk hybrids largely sold as “pets” (51)). As Crake reveals his involvement with MaddAddam to Jimmy, a series of corporate bulletins streams across the Extinctathon interface: “A tiny parasitic wasp” transmits a lethal “modified form of chicken pox” to a population of “ChickieNobs,” headless chickens bred as supposedly humane alternatives to their cephalous counterparts; mutant rodents destroy the wiring of vehicles and the electrical infrastructure of major cities; “coffee bean crops [are] menaced by a new” pesticide-resistant “bean weevil”; and an asphalt-eating “microbe” turns “several interstate highways to sand” (216).

Although the virus that triggers the pandemic is the deliberate invention of a single human, Atwood provides these earlier images of zoonotic infestation, triggered by both corporations and those who resist them, as warnings of what will come. *Zoonosis*, the transmission of disease from animals to humans, sometimes along a path of multiple vectors, has entered the popular lexicon with the arrival of COVID-19, believed to have started in bats and possibly spread to humans through an intermediate reservoir species, such as pangolins. (There

are, of course, those who dispute this official narrative, perhaps because of how frequently fictional pandemics are started in laboratory environments—another example of science fiction’s ability to infect hyperreality, and the high stakes of reading novels like Atwood’s.) Atwood is likely aware of insights made by biologists like Jacob Lorenzo-Morales, who attributes “the emergence of new zoonotic pathogens in human populations” to “the increased contact between humans and animals” (Lorenzo-Morales xi); in addition to MaddAddam’s acts of bioterrorism, *accidental* zoonoses are clearly on the rise in the preapocalyptic world. Jimmy’s “earliest complete memory” is “of a huge bonfire...an enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs” killed and cremated to prevent an unspecified pathogen from entering the corporate compound bubble. “They had to be burned,” Jimmy’s father explains to his five-year-old son, “to keep it from spreading” (Atwood, *Oryx* 15-16; 19).

But viral disease is not the only vector of zoonotic transmission in the novel. In this section, I frame zoonosis as a metaphor that conveys the contagious effects that animals themselves seem to have in and on this text. From the line of influence Jimmy draws between Alex’s intention to depart and the final testimonies of nitee-nite.com’s suicidal users, to the acts of self-naming Crake and the MaddAddamites perform in homage to the species lost through human activity, language itself functions as a contagion that carries death back from its animal reservoir into the human sphere. The language of images, moreover, seems to accelerate the transmission, as do interfaces of artificial self-mastery. The dead animals, when named and granted phantomatic presence through the viral media of streaming sites, videogames, and CRISPR gene editing, overwhelm the system that relies on their expurgation; the livestock we see burned, sacrificed outside the corporate gates, come surging back as ghostly pathogens.

Agents who believe they resist extinction work in its interests. The whole simulacrum becomes an undead menagerie of fossils.

Jimmy's mother introduces the danger of disease to her child in terms that, tellingly, evoke Derrida's definition of specters as phenomena on the thresholds of (in)visibility: "A disease, she said, was invisible, because it was so small...a disease got into you and changed things inside you. It rearranged you, cell by cell, and that made the cells sick"; disease, she explains, is why Jimmy should keep his fingers away from his nose and mouth, and why he "should always wash [his] hands" (20-21). The threat of disease, in other words, is what structures the customs of civilized society; it is what separates the humans from the animals. At the same time, this civilized society brings humans and animals into closer and closer contact, up until the point that the virus that will destroy the human species emerges.

Although Crake releases the virus as an ultimate act of sabotage against the system, we know from flashbacks to his and Jimmy's childhood that his action is only the final catalytic step in a process that has accelerated since long before their births. Crake should be, in many ways, a perfect subject of the system. He thinks of everything in numbers, reducing even gestures of flirtation to "a geometrical problem" (74). Thanks to his expert understanding of mathematics, computers, and genetic engineering, he gains admission to the prestigious "Watson-Crick Institute" (which, readers of this dissertation's previous chapter may be intrigued to learn, has the nickname of "Asperger's U.," thanks to the large number of students there who are "Demi-autistic, genetically speaking; single-track tunnel-vision minds, a marked degree of social ineptitude" (193); the placement of Crake on the autism spectrum would trouble me more if it were not such a perfect example of autism's function in discourse, an affliction of those who are better at being human in every respect except for that of being human, i.e. belonging to the

species). Unfortunately for *Homo sapiens*, Crake's understanding of the system is what prompts him to turn against it, to see "The whole world"—both now and forever—as "one vast uncontrolled experiment" in need of a radical reboot (228). Crake's hacker mindset primes him to attack the experiment according to its own parameters: he gains the authority to annihilate the system from the inside by appearing to bring the system to its apotheosis. At the Paradise compound, Crake presents investors with the promise of a perfectly controlled society, a society free of the "misplaced sexual energy" that causes war, contagious diseases, and overpopulation (293). But within the Trojan horses of sustainable population levels (offered through the BlyssPlus pills) and designer babies (offered through the Crakers) lie, respectively, the complete annihilation and replacement of humanity.

Crake, therefore, embodies an autoimmune mechanism in the corporate body of control; he, like the virus, is an emergent product of the process he puts to an end. This process, up to and including the cartoonish label given to the virus as the pandemic proceeds, "JUVE , Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary" (341), follows a path of increasing acceleration all the way to its negation. For this reason, I suggest that Atwood's trilogy (as well as *Gravity's Rainbow*) demands to be read according to an *accelerationist* paradigm. Since accelerationism is so important to understanding the zoonoses of these novels, I should take a moment to explain the theory.

iv. Atwood's Accelerationism: Zoonosis as Abreaction

Steven Shaviro defines accelerationism as "the argument that the only way out is the way through. In order to overcome globalized neoliberal capitalism, we need to drain it to the dregs, push it to its most extreme point, follow it into its furthest and strangest consequences" (Shaviro,

No Speed Limit 2). The idea finds support in classical Marxism; in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx foresees “a certain stage of development” in capitalism where “the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production...From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution” (Marx, *Preface* 7-8). Shaviro identifies a contemporary lineage of accelerationist thought that begins in the 1970s with Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (as well as Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy*, although I will not have space to discuss that text here). Marx’s 1848 declaration of support for the capitalist “Free Trade system” as a tool that “hastens the Social Revolution” (Marx, “Speech on the Question” 466) finds resonance in Deleuze and Guattari’s “revolutionary” call “[t]o go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization...Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to “accelerate the process,” as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet” (*Anti-Oedipus* 239-40).

Those who have taken up Deleuze and Guattari’s call for deterritorialization apply the concept not only to capital’s movement across geopolitical borders, of which Marx spoke, but also to the expansion of libidinal intensities brought about by the opening of digital frontiers. A particularly influential cluster of accelerationists emerged in the mid-1990s to early 2000s through the Cybernetic Cultural Research Unit, a theorist collective based at the University of Warwick. Alumni of the collective range from leftists like Sadie Plant and the late Mark Fisher to (most influentially in recent years) the ultra-right neoreactionary Nick Land. Despite their striking disagreements on the direction capitalist democracies will and should take, their shared background in cybernetics and complex systems theory leads them to a common diagnosis of contemporary civilization: the desiring-machines of capitalism are in a runaway feedback loop,

to such an extent that neoliberal democracy will destroy itself (with respect to either, as Land believes is inevitable, its democratic values, or, as Fisher urges, its capitalist imperatives).

Viral metaphors infect the cyberpunk architecture of contemporary accelerationist theory. Land, in a text he wrote prior to his embrace of hypercapitalism, provocatively describes “the history of capitalism” as “the invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely from its enemy’s resources. Digitocommodification is the index of a cyberpositively escalating technovirus...a self-organizing insidious traumatism, virtually guiding the entire biological desiring-complex towards post-carbon replicator usurpation” (Land 338). Regardless of the extent to which one takes this statement literally, it is clear, as Snyder has observed, that Atwood in some sense explains the emergence of the JUVE virus through the retrogressive temporality of a “self-organizing insidious traumatism.” Whether one attributes virality to the commodity form itself or to the mechanism that may destroy it (or both) is another question. Baudrillard, who rivals Deleuze and Guattari in his influence on contemporary accelerationism, writes in 1990 of the HIV pandemic as “a defensive abreaction on the part of the species against the danger of a total promiscuity, a total loss of identity through the proliferation and speed-up of networks” (Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* 67). Just when society appears to have committed to the ever-accelerating “spread of flows, circuits and networks,” Baudrillard claims, an autoimmune mechanism, like a virus, will “protect us from something even worse” than the “new and lethal pathology” (66).

Baudrillard’s word here, “abreaction,” offers insight into not only the relation between trauma and virality in Atwood’s text but also a similarity between Atwood’s take on acceleration and Pynchon’s. The “Abreaction Ward” in St. Veronica’s Hospital is where Pointsman and Spectro hold their first discussion on the apparent reversal of conditioning and causality they

observe in the erections Slothrop experiences prior to V-2 launches. Weisenburger attributes Pynchon's interest in abreaction to his broader interest in the retrogressive temporality of trauma. Jung, as Weisenburger notes, defines abreaction as a "dramatic rehearsal of the traumatic moment, its emotional recapitulation" (Jung 16: 129-30).⁵⁵ Abreaction, when "freely negotiated" between analyst and patient is a form of post-traumatic catharsis (Jung 16: 137); but as Pynchon, following Jung, observes, it can have destructive consequences when triggered outside of a healthy therapeutic relationship (Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 45).

Whereas Pynchon and Jung use the term in reference to the human trauma of war, Baudrillard uses the term to evoke a trauma experienced on the part of "nature", hence his description of "Natural disasters" as themselves abreactions, "a rejection by nature of the operational dominance of human agency." Baudrillard attributes this "rejection," which he equates with the various autoimmune "phenomena" of contemporary society—"viral pathologies, terrorism, drugs, delinquency"—to "a singular kind of energy, a visceral energy which has replaced negativity and critical revolt" (Baudrillard, *Transparency* 71). Atwood's extinction narrative similarly attributes societal collapse to "visceral energy," most explicitly when Jimmy, reflecting on his childhood consumption of violent and hypersexualized media, asks himself: "When did the body first set out on its own adventures?" The result of desire's deterritorialization is a decoupling, Jimmy conjectures, between the visceral libidinality of the body and "its old traveling companions, the mind and the soul, for whom it had once been considered a mere corrupt vessel or else a puppet acting out their dramas for them, or else bad company, leading the other two astray." The body, rebelling against the "sublimation" required

⁵⁵ Weisenburger, I would imagine inadvertently, misquotes Jung, substituting "reversal" in place of "rehearsal."

by human society, “cut[s] to the chase” of desire and “dump[s] culture” entirely (Atwood, *Oryx* 85).

The terminal acceleration of zoonosis, then, is the final stage of nature’s revolt against culture, the body’s revolt against the mind. I am reminded here of Agamben’s chiasmic summation of the post-historical condition: “The total humanization of the animal coincides with a total animalization of man” (Agamben 77). The problem with this, Atwood speculates, is that this animalization may leave no place for the human at all.

v. Anthroponosis: Atwood’s Eschatology and the Inversion of the Simulacrum

If the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the apocalyptic narrative of *Oryx and Crake* into a condition of hyperreality, where does it leave the sequels, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*? The former novel, released in 2009, follows events largely contemporaneous with those of *Oryx and Crake*, although here the point of view alternates between two women, Toby and Ren. The two have very different backgrounds and temperaments – Toby being the more independent and Ren being the more sensitive – but their lives intertwine thanks to their shared experiences in the God’s Gardeners cult, a group of anarcho-communist vegetarians (some of whom participate in MaddAddam’s initiatives) who live away from civilization and spend their time preparing for “the Waterless Flood,” a Biblical catastrophe that turns out to be, as the survivors decide retroactively, the pandemic:

A massive die-off of the human race was impending, due to overpopulation and wickedness, but the Gardeners exempted themselves: they intended to float above the Waterless Flood, with the aid of the food they were stashing away in the hidden storeplaces they called Ararats. As for the flotation devices in which they would ride out this flood, they themselves would be their own Arks, stored with their own collections of inner animals, or at least the names of those animals. Thus they would survive to replenish the Earth. Or something like that. (*The Year of the Flood* 47)

As people who attempt to stand outside the dominant narrative by treating its apocalyptic conclusion as at once yet-to-come and already predestined, the God's Gardeners offer many reasons for identification to those, like myself, who critique Atwood's trilogy in the contemporary moment, who seek a way out of the apocalyptic simulation. The challenge is for the reader to disidentify, to find the flaw in the logic of predestination. To draw a comparison with *Gravity's Rainbow*, is there a way to do what Frans van der Groov failed to do: step outside the structure of eschatology entirely, even as parts of it manifest in one's immediate surroundings?

Atwood's 2013 finale picks up where the other novels end, offering a glimpse into what life will be like going forward for the remaining humans and the Crakers. Toby is the main focalizer of *MaddAddam*, but large sections of the book are narrated by Toby's love interest, Zeb, a God's Gardener introduced in the previous novel, who here relates his adventures as one of MaddAddam's creators (the other being his adoptive brother, Adam One, who also founds the God's Gardeners). A young male Craker, named Blackbeard, also carries a significant voice in the novel; Toby, who entertains the Crakers every night with stories of the world from before their creation, takes him on as a protégé and teaches him (perhaps contrarily to Crake's wishes for his invention) to read and write.

I suggested earlier that, going forward after COVID-19, readers of these texts will need to navigate them through a metaleptic approach, in order to avoid either situating them wholly within a transcendent hyperreality *or* ignoring the manner in which fictional traumas can inform real ones. The sequels offer an opportunity for us to do this: What alternatives do they offer to the first installment's narrative of apocalyptic acceleration, a narrative that seems to resemble reality to the point of equivalence? How do body, mind, and soul relate in different ways? Do

they achieve a new coherence by the end? Can we interpret zoonosis such that it offers a space for humanity? Do we at least know what form of humanity we want to preserve?

If *Oryx and Crake* describes the accelerating descent of a parabola that signifies the human social order, *The Year of the Flood* describes the ascent of an inverse function: the organization of a revolutionary order that reflects and amplifies the entropic factors of anthropocentrism and corporate oligarchy. It is not insignificant that Crake's brief appearance in the novel is as a liaison between the God's Gardeners and the corporate state: he transports the cancer cells collected from Toby's mentor, the beekeeper Pilar, to a lab for biopsy testing. If Crake, as viral agent, is the abreaction whereby feedback circuits of capital turn against themselves, the God's Gardeners show us the process of acceleration from the perspective of an element that attempts to expel itself from the system but nonetheless works within it, showing us how porous and vulnerable the boundaries always were.

Whereas hyperreal consumer culture demonstrates the body's "adventures" away from "the mind and the soul", the ecological commune shows us what these "old traveling companions" are up to in the absence of their corporeal partner. It shows us, moreover, a process inverse to the semiotic zoonosis of biopolitics, that of a religious *anthroponosis*: Adam One and the Gardeners reinterpret Biblical narrative in such a way as to extend the human's function as a "[reflection] of the divine" to all animals; at the group's "Festival of the Arks" celebration, for instance, Adam One delivers a homily arguing that God's Covenant with Noah, which is at once a Covenant with "every living creature", proves that animals have their own forms of sense and language:

No one can make a Covenant with a stone: for a Covenant to exist, there must be a minimum of two live and responsible parties to it. Therefore the Animals are not senseless matter, not mere chunks of meat. No; they have living Souls, or God could not have made a Covenant with them. The Human Words of God affirm this: "But ask now

the beasts,” says Job 12, “and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee ... and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.” (91)

The Gardeners prepare for a postapocalyptic reconciliation between the species by working to reverse “the Fall of Man,” which they understand to have been a “multidimensional” process: “The ancestral primates fell out of the trees; then they fell from vegetarianism into meat-eating. Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology; from simple signals into complex grammar, and thus into humanity; from firelessness into fire, and thence into weaponry; and from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching” (188).

The Gardeners, in their resistance to these supposed multiple “falls,” actually end up resembling the neohuman Crakers, who are themselves vegetarian, unaware of complex representational systems, immune to violence, and on a predictable sexual clock. Unlike the Crakers, however, the Gardeners frame their resistance to human exceptionalism within the religious discourses that justify the exceptionalism. As we learn from Zeb’s narration in *MaddAddam*, Adam One forms the Gardeners as an oedipal act of defiance against his father’s “Petrobaptist” “Church of PetrOleum”, Atwood’s thinly veiled jab at the anti-environmentalist brand of evangelism that emerged around the turn of this century: “The Rev had nailed together a theology to help him rake in the cash. Naturally he had a scriptural foundation for it. Matthew, Chapter 16, Verse 18: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”” (*MaddAddam* 112). (One is reminded here of the religious significance attached to the extraction of coal-tar in Pynchon’s novel.)

The Gardeners’ position within religious discourse is what makes them both so effective (the CorpSeCorps, under Petrobaptist influence, declare the Gardeners “off-limits” out of an unwillingness “to eviscerate anything with God in its name” (*Year 48*)) and so dangerous. Adam One does not necessarily believe in his eschatology, and he admits to Toby his tendency “to

sometimes say things that are not transparently honest...for the greater good” (184). Although he respects science, he believes a “strictly materialist view...is far too harsh and lonely for most and leads to nihilism.” He only keeps “God in the story” to assure the threat of “a penalty.” The unwillingness, or perhaps inability, to address the contradictions between the materialistic and the religious (seen, for instance, when Adam One refuses to resolve whether the Biblical Adam had canine teeth, or why God gave “animal-skin clothing” to the first humans) is what allows the latter to obtain a hyperreality, up to and including the fulfillment of an eschatology (241). Even when Toby leaves the Gardeners and is no longer “sure she believe[s] in the Waterless Flood...she believe[s] in it enough to take the rudimentary precautions” (265). Toby’s thought process is relatable to those of us who revolt against apocalypse to such an extent that it seems inevitable: “*We’re using up the Earth. It’s almost gone. You can’t live with such fears and keep on whistling. The waiting builds up in you like a tide. You start wanting it to be done with. You find yourself saying to the sky, Just do it. Do your worst. Get it over with*” (239).

Any account of the virus as a religious telos makes it difficult for the characters to avoid a sense of predestination and helplessness. The alliances they forge with other species open a space for potent critical revolt, but the space remains embedded within a deterministic hyperreality that ends in humanity’s autoimmune self-destruction. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “We form a rhizome with our viruses, or rather our viruses cause us to form a rhizome with other animals” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 10). The “or rather” here suggests the irresolvable ambiguity of which Atwood is all too aware. Do the God’s Gardeners contribute to the Waterless Flood? Or is the Flood, the virus itself, the “cause,” a message they receive from the future? It is impossible to say. Regardless, the Flood is coming, and indeed is already here.

The extent of the danger posed by the God's Gardeners depends on one's perspective; if a revolution that triggers human extinction is somehow necessary or inevitable in order for life to persist, one could take the accelerationist stance and argue the manipulation of religious narrative toward apocalyptic ends is somehow ethical from an ecological perspective. This would allow for an acceptance of death, which Jung argues is necessary for "life's fulfilment," at least on the scale of the individual: "From the middle of life onward, only he remains vitally alive who is ready to die with life. For in the secret hour of life's midday the parabola is reversed, death is born...The negation of life's fulfilment is synonymous with the refusal to accept its ending. Both mean not wanting to live, and not wanting to live is identical with not wanting to die" (Jung 8: 407). Adam One expresses a similar sentiment in one of his sermons: "Just remember, dear Friends: What am I living for and what am I dying for are the same question" (Atwood, *Year* 326).

On the other hand, one could use the same deterministic logic to argue narrative itself implies a future audience, and that the human's tendency toward literature is itself a manifestation of an ecological spirit that must persist. For example, although Ren's socialization among the Gardeners leads her to distrust the written word ("They told us to depend on memory, because nothing written down could be relied on. The Spirit travels from mouth to mouth, not from thing to thing"), she nonetheless records her thoughts on paper when she believes the pandemic has left her alone on Earth ("any writing I might do is safe enough, because those who would have used it against me are most likely dead") (6). Toby, in *MaddAddam*, also decides she needs the written word, as her performances of oral narrative for the Crakers grow more complex and dependent on ritual (she must wear Jimmy's baseball cap and wristwatch to assume his former position as storyteller, for instance (*MaddAddam* 38)). She also keeps a journal, which

attracts Blackbeard's interest and leads her to teach him how to write and read. When she explains what reading is, she does so in terms compatible with the Gardeners' language of voice and "Spirit": "Now...you have to draw the letters. Each letter means a sound. And when you put the letters together they make words...You need to be the voice of the writing...When you *read* it. *Reading* is when you turn these marks back into sounds" (202) Although the fate of *Homo sapiens* is in doubt at the end of the trilogy – we do not even know whether human/Craker hybrids are fertile or, as one character speculates, "sterile" like mules (207) – the survival of writing, in spite of Crake's intention, suggests that some element of humanity is fated to remain as a vocalization of ecological "Spirit."

This, I think, is the only responsible claim one can make if one writes and reads literature through a lens of ecological catastrophe. Derrida writes of nuclear proliferation as the trace of an "ineffaceable trace," an ultimate event of annihilation, which all literature seeks to deter indefinitely, although he could just as easily have written of extinction by pandemic: "Literature and literary criticism cannot speak of anything else, they can have no other ultimate referent, they can only multiply their strategic maneuvers in order to assimilate that unassimilable wholly other" (Derrida, "No Apocalypse" 27). There are, as I have pointed out, dangers to a hyperreal reading of apocalyptic fiction, but a benefit is that it allows us to "assimilate" real tragedies into the tragedies of the text. The COVID-19 pandemic both is and is not the pandemic from Atwood's trilogy. It will not, in itself, annihilate humanity, but we can treat it nonetheless as an extinction and an inversion of old correspondences, an opportunity to see what order might emerge beyond the zero.

vi. **Spectral Potentials: Interspecies Mourning and the Vision of a More-than-Human Future**

In his final work, the unfinished introduction to a book that he would have entitled *Acid Communism*, Mark Fisher, a reader of Atwood's, challenges a character in her 2015 dystopian novel *The Heart Goes Last*, who claims that "The past is so much safer...because whatever's in it has already happened" (Atwood, *Heart* 189). Hoping for a reactivation of the revolutionary energies of the 1960s, Fisher responds: "The past has to be continually re-narrated, and the political point of reactionary narratives is to suppress the potentials which still await, ready to be re-awakened, in older moments" (*K-Punk* 756). Adam One and the Extinctathon Grandmasters no doubt conjure such potentials through their interfaces of extinction, whether those interfaces be sermons or videogames. "The time of the Naming is not over," says Adam One during his sermon on what he identifies as "the first moment of Human language": the Biblical Adam's "calling out the Names of the Animals" (*Year* 13-14).

However, whereas the naming of dinosaurs and animals killed at the hands of humanity seems to conjure a divine retribution, the "demoli[tion]" of "the Human Species" (424), the alliances the characters form with living animals seem to activate potentials that tend toward altruism and survival. The events leading to the climax of *MaddAddam* demonstrate this most explicitly: When a trio of escaped Painballers (convicts who, before the pandemic, played a deadlier, gameshow version of paintball against one another) rape and possibly impregnate one of the surviving Gardener women, a band of pigeons approach the humans with an offer of interspecies truce if they work together to stop the perpetrators; Blackbeard, as a Craker, has a form of telepathy that allows him to communicate with and translate for the pigeons, who explain that the Painballers have attacked them as well. With Blackbeard's aid, the humans and the pigeons coordinate a journey back to Crake's lab, where they capture the Painballers in a

deadly final fight. The two species solidify their pact during the Painballers' trial, as they share a vote on the criminals' ultimate fate.

The pigeons are not the only living animals in Atwood's trilogy to interface with humans, however. Bees, which the beekeeper Pilar tells Toby "are on good terms with the unseen world, being the messengers to the dead" (*Year 100*), also serve as examples of a kind of interspecies communication that transcends words. Lacking any need for Craker translation, Toby speaks to the bees after Pilar, terminally ill, poisons herself and asks Toby to take over her role: "Bees...I bring news. You must tell your Queen...Pilar is dead...She sends you her greetings, and her thanks for your friendship over many years. When the time comes for you to follow her to where she has gone, she will meet you there" (181). Later, in *MaddAddam*, Toby tells the Crakers of her "helper," Pilar, "who took the form of a plant, and now she lives with the bees" (*MaddAddam* 164). The plant in question, an elderberry bush on Pilar's grave, is the site of a psychedelically "Enhanced Meditation" Toby performs soon thereafter. "*I know you're here, in your new body,*" Toby says to the bush. "*I need your help*" (222). When Toby asks for a "message" from Pilar that will "signal" the course of action the group should take in response to the Painballers, a pigeon sow and her farrow cross in front of her. "She was here," says Blackbeard to Toby, meaning Pilar. This is the "vision" that leads to the interspecies alliance (223).

Toby then tries to explain the vision to Zeb, offering a seemingly more rational, if not necessarily more correct, alternative to Blackbeard's belief that Pilar literally "put on the skin of the pig" and "spoke to" Toby:

I was communicating with my inner Pilar, which was externalized in visible form, connected with the help of a brain chemistry facilitator [i.e., mushrooms] to the wavelengths of the Universe; a universe in which – rightly understood – there are no coincidences. And just because a sensory impression may be said to be 'caused' by an

ingested mix of psychoactive substances does not mean it is an illusion. Doors are opened with keys, but does that mean that the things revealed when the doors are opened aren't there? (227-28)

Although Toby and Blackbeard differ on whether the vision has its origin in Toby's brain or the soul of Pilar herself, they agree on what I would call the fundamentally hauntological element of interspecies dialogue. Speaking to animals (or plants) is a method of speaking to the dead.

Fisher describes Derrida's hauntology as "the agency of the virtual, with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing" (Fisher, *Ghosts of my Life* 18). Atwood prompts her readers to consider the virtual (but still, perhaps, real) existence of nonhuman communication. Perhaps neither "Crake's Frankenpeople nor pigs engineered with "human neocortex tissue" (*MaddAddam* 19) are necessary for us to talk with animals. Perhaps we can already do so if we unlock the potentials of *mourning* – not the "failed mourning" (*Ghosts* 22) of a simulated "nostalgia" (25), as Fisher identifies the hauntology of dead capital, but a mourning that accepts and embraces the dead as, potentially, present.

vii. Posthuman Metalepsis: Extinction and the Music of Survival

The Crakers' mode of telepathic speech with the pigoons may elude the human brain, but it tracks somehow with the transmission of meaning that takes place in writing, as Blackbeard explains when the narration switches to his point-of-view in the trilogy's final pages: "I am Blackbeard, and this is my voice that I am writing down to help Toby. If you look at this writing I have made, you can hear me (I am Blackbord) talking to you, inside your head. That is what writing is. But the Pig Ones can do that without writing. And sometimes we can do it, the Children of Crake. The two-skinned ones cannot do it" (376). As I have observed, the persistence

of writing beyond the possible extinction of *Homo sapiens* suggests that, in Atwood's view, the practice is the part of humanity that a supposed planetary "Spirit" may want to keep, whether the animals we call humans are around to perform it or not. The total extinction of *Homo sapiens* remains in doubt as the story ends, however; Atwood does not foreclose the possibility of reproduction among the few surviving humans, and it is also unclear what traits the human/Craker hybrids may (if fertile) be able to pass on to their own offspring.

The kind of society the new interspecies alliance will build remains in doubt as well. Despite the encouraging signs of a culture that emphasizes mutual care and sustainable living, there are signs that the Gardener ideals of veganism and nonviolence may not be practical in the new environment. The sentence delivered by the human/pigeon jury in the trial of the Painballers is one of execution, for example, which indicates already the survivors' willingness to break their own rules for the sake of community integrity. Moreover, when Zeb leaves their region of the woods to investigate the source of a smoke plume some distance away, he vanishes. When the smoke plume vanishes as well, the group assumes he and a group of unfriendly humans have killed one another in a confrontation. Toby, after wasting away with depression for many weeks, vanishes into the forest where Zeb went, perhaps (it is implied) to poison herself as Pilar did.

The ending is a grim conclusion to a series of victories for the survivors, casting doubt on the possibility of a lasting utopia in the post-apocalyptic world. Blackbeard, having absorbed the mythology of reincarnation taught by his mentor, chooses to believe Toby "went to find Zeb, and that he is in the form of a Bear, and that she too is in the form of a Bear, and is with him today. That is the best answer, because it is the happiest; and I have written it down. I have written down the other answers too. But I made them in smaller writing" (390). The trilogy's closing lines make clear that the Craker form of writing retains the function writing has for humans;

Blackbeard grants the largest script to the version of reality he prefers to record. He records the more tragic interpretations as well, but in a manner that grants them less visible importance.

Atwood leaves it unsaid which interpretation(s) readers of the generations to come will accept.

In any case, Blackbeard gets the final word. The trilogy's closing lines offer a striking example of metafictional metalepsis. The pages we have just been reading belong to "the Story of Toby," and they have been written in "this Book" that belonged to Toby (that is, as explained a few pages earlier, Toby's journal, "the Book that Toby made when she lived among us" (385)): "This is the end of the Story of Toby. I have written it in this Book. And I have put my name here – Blackbeard – the way Toby first showed me when I was a child. It says that I was the one who set down these words. Thank you. Now we will sing" (390). Atwood writes these lines in such a way as to blur the boundaries of both Blackbeard's writing and Toby's journal: Are only the final couple of chapters meant to come from the pages of Toby's journal? Or is "this Book" in fact the entire book we have been reading? And if so, does that Book contain only *MaddAddam*, or the trilogy as a whole?

One could read Blackbeard's parting words – "Now we will sing" – as a metafictional indication of a continuity between the third installment and the second. As *The Year of the Flood* closes, a delirious Jimmy runs into Toby and Ren; he gestures toward "the sound of many people singing" and shouts, "You can't kill the music!...You can't!" (*Year* 431). Music, indeed, stands in for a kind of proto-writing throughout the Crakers' story; "Singing and dreams" are the phenomena so "entwined" and "hard-wired" into the human brain that Crake cannot remove them from his invention despite his best efforts (*Oryx* 352). Song is important for the Gardeners, too; Atwood punctuates *The Year of the Flood* with musical homilies, demonstrating the medium's power as a tool of co-creative mythmaking. Perhaps it is here, in the sinewaves of

song, where the interface between human and animal, human and posthuman finds its most potent form. It is as close as anything may come, or yet come, to a universal language that transcends the divisions between species.

Conclusion: Interference and the Metronome

By invoking music as a form of writing that would allow humanity to transcend extinction, I return to the image with which this chapter began: the metronome, clicking in predictable rhythm, producing the barrier that divides human from animal. What kind of rhythm would dissolve this barrier, or at least deconstruct and rebuild it? Would a writing that imitates song divert its reader away from the entropic parabola, revealing the reversals and rehearsals necessary for human and animal survival? I cannot fully answer these questions here, since I am not sure Pynchon's and Atwood's books manifest such a writing. However, they gesture toward it, and they give indications of how to find such a writing.

I wrote earlier that Atwood's trilogy provides us "with the mechanism for an escape, or at least an interference." When it comes to escaping a narrative that ends in disaster, *interference* is itself the mechanism. As Benjamin writes, "progress has its seat not in the continuity of elapsing time but in its interferences—where the truly new makes itself felt for the first time, with the sobriety of dawn" (Benjamin 474).⁵⁶ Practices of mourning and anticipation, grounded in the present but with an attunement to the potentials of past and future alike, introduce such interferences. These practices are within our control, or we at least must believe that they are.

⁵⁶ I was reminded of this quote thanks to its inclusion in Casey Jergenson's 2019 article, "Negative Utopianism and Catastrophe in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy" (*Utopian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 486-504). I recommend readers consult the article for more on not only how Benjamin could be read together with Atwood's trilogy (Jergenson 490-491) but also how Atwood navigates the space Mark Fisher calls "capitalist realism," "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (*Capitalist Realism* 2, qtd. in Jergenson 489).

This is what one practices when one reads apocalyptic fiction at the moment the world—or at the very least *a* world—is ending.

Quantum theory tells us of the waveform that, beyond our perception, manifests with every particulate body. When one writes of history, one's proper waveform interacts with the waveforms of past life; when one writes of the future, one chooses which waveforms one will bring into presence. One cannot see these waveforms, but one can imagine the function to which they would belong. And in moments of relation, moments of interfacing with the other, the other whose sinewave may look vastly different than one's own – it may have a different amplitude, or a different periodic frequency, as one could playfully say in the case of an animal with a radically different lifespan, or even in the case of a technical object that interacts with living matter – one brings about interferences that cause a phase shift for both bodies (see Figs. 3.5 and 3.6). In other words, one can travel in time, so long as one brings the universe along for the journey.

As Pilar tells Toby, “time is not a thing that passes...it's a sea on which you float” (*Year* 101). The interface of extinction allows us to navigate that sea, even as it inundates us. The terrain that remains when the deluge passes demands new desires, reversals and inversions. The human that we were is gone, but if we withstand the waves, the human that we are and will be will stay afloat. Hold your breath; reach up toward zero.

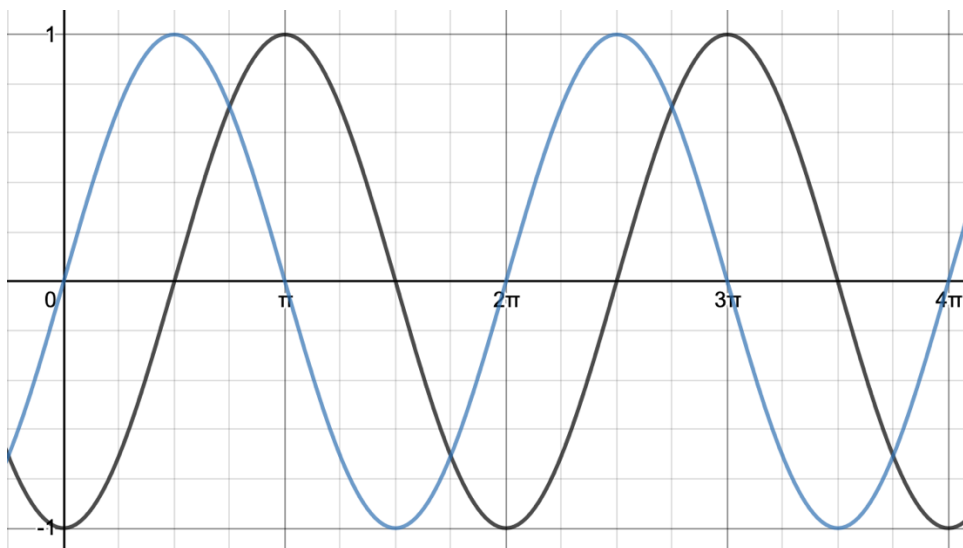


Fig. 3.5. An illustration of phase shift, or horizontal displacement. In blue, $f(x) = \sin(x)$, and in black, $g(x) = \sin(x - p)$, where p (for phase shift) $= \frac{\pi}{2}$.
I imagine the x-axis here as an axis of time.

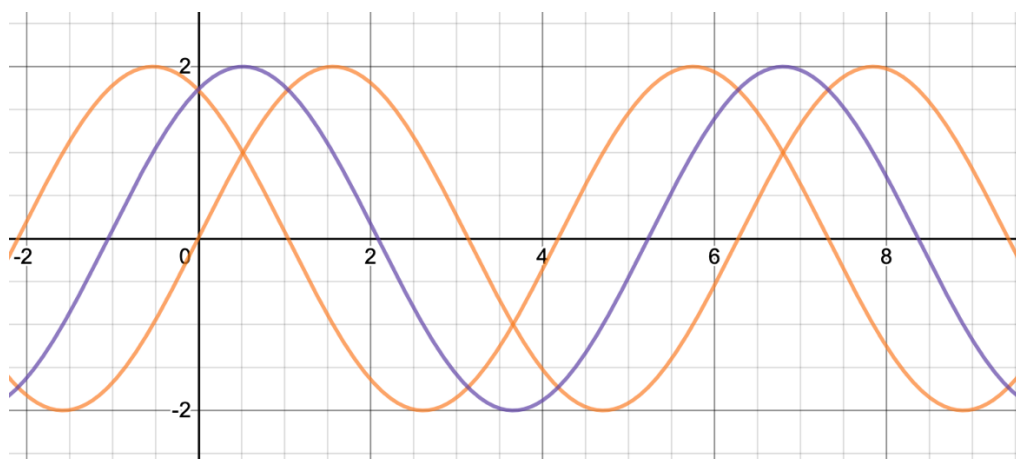


Fig. 3.6. Interference between the two functions in orange $f(x) = 2 \sin(x)$ and $g(x) = 2 \sin\left(x + \frac{2\pi}{3}\right)$ yields the function in purple, $f(x) + g(x)$. Contact between waves can thus produce an apparent phase shift by way of interference.

CHAPTER 4 – SPECULAR ANIMALS: APPARATUSES OF IDENTIFICATION IN CONTEMPORARY WILDLIFE DOCUMENTARY

Introduction

In this chapter, I continue the discussion of spectrality by exploring how contemporary wildlife films frame the animal as a *specular image* for the human viewer. In making this claim, I draw on the Lacanian model of identification, a frequent source of inspiration for ideological critiques in film theory. I argue that, although these films have transformational potential in their capacity to make the human viewer imagine nonhuman modes of being in the world, they cannot avoid assimilating the viewer's perspective to that of the filmic apparatus. The result is a simple reframing and reinforcement of the anthropological divide between a technically capable human, whose relation to the environment is an active, agential one, and a mute, objectified animal, whose relation to the environment is passive, and who is available for viewers' consumption.

Lacan first examines specular identification through the mirror stage, the moment when the child recognizes itself as an image seen by others. Lacan describes the mirror stage as a kind of Hegelian "drama," "a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual's formation into history." According to the terms of this drama, the infant's "jubilant assumption of his specular image" initiates a rupture or gap between the "insufficiency" of a retroactively imagined "fragmentation"—"*le corps morcelé*" of the helpless newborn—and the "anticipation" of an

ideal future self (*Ecrits* 97). The gap between the self and the ideal ego is therefore both what permits the subject's self-recognition and what prevents the subject's sense of wholeness or totality. Once the subject recognizes itself as an image, it then desires to supplement its self-image through images provided by others. The Symbolic order of language or ideology—the “big Other” (as opposed to the “little other,” or the alter-ego)—mediates how subjects relate to images and thus to other subjects.

The Lacanian model of specular identification has inspired some of film theory's most influential figures, including Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, and Laura Mulvey. Their work, which I discuss later, situates the symbolic register of the cinematic *apparatus*, or, in French, *dispositif*, in the place of an ideological big Other. What distinguishes the film (or television) screen from the mirror, however, as these thinkers point out, is that film encourages the viewer to identify not only with the characters (in this case, animals) on screen but also with an imagined, transcendental subject who occupies the position of the camera. In other words, the moving image reflects the gap inherent in subjectivity, and it does so by collapsing the reflected image and the apparatus of reflection onto a single plane of identification. Consequently, film implies a radical and potentially dangerous inseparability between the big Other of ideology and the ego-ideal of the image as little other. If one takes this inseparability into account when analyzing the rhetoric of wildlife documentary, one finds that one can only identify with the animal on screen by identifying with the technical apparatus that frames the image. These films therefore threaten to subordinate human and animal alike to a structure of technical mastery that could annihilate them both.

In the first half of this chapter, I analyze a dialectic of disclosure and concealment at work in the 2016 BBC documentary series *Planet Earth II*. I draw here on not only Lacanian but

also Foucauldian and Deleuzian contributions to contemporary thought on the apparatus. I argue that the series's "making-of" segments in particular are exemplary of Lacanian identification insofar as they serve to conceal the apparatus rather than exposing it. I then conduct a review of the contemporary critical literature around wildlife film and the animal image more broadly. In the second half of the chapter, I discuss a set of five documentaries produced and/or directed by French filmmaker Jacques Perrin. I argue that the style of filmmaking on display in these films is in a sense more honest and effective than the BBC Natural History Unit's style, insofar as they reflect the apparatus back on itself and force viewers to situate themselves in a more complicated relation to the image than one of jubilant identification.

Although no practice of producing documentaries, I argue, can entirely avoid inflicting a certain symbolic violence against animal subjects, there is nonetheless a value in viewing these films and thinking through them. I end both of my analyses by evoking Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of "becoming-animal." The structure of becoming, in its reliance on multiplicity and assemblage, is inherently anti-dialectical in nature. If one learns to see the apparatuses of identification in these documentaries properly, one can enter into a "line of flight" that transcends the filmic structure and the conflict between human, animal, and apparatus.

My intent here is not to add to the volume of texts that pit Lacan against Deleuze (and Guattari) in order to argue for one thinker's supremacy over the other.⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari

⁵⁷ For an example of a work that does this in favor of Lacan (and Hegel), see Slavoj Žižek's *Organs Without Bodies*, which calls Deleuze "secretly Hegelian" (69) and finds in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* "a rather ridiculous simplification, if not an outright falsification, of Lacan's position" (80). I would disagree. See also Žižek's critical contention elsewhere that "Deleuze/Guattari do to Lacan what Carl Gustav Jung did to Freud. Remember that for Jung also, the Freudian unconscious was not yet the deeper 'real' unconscious, the impersonal domain of collective archetypes: it remained caught in the superficial social and familial web" ("Review" 662). For a work that opposes the thinkers to the benefit of Deleuze, see Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body*, which accuses Lacanian film theory of denying cinema's enjoyments and its capacity to affect the viewer by way of Deleuzian intensities. Shaviro claims, perhaps misleadingly, that Lacanian film theory emphasizes the "radical separation" between self and Other to such an extent that it denies the reality of the filmic image: "I have been arguing throughout this book that the cinematic apparatus perpetuates the object rather than absents us from it...In Lacanian theory, I am never able to

would not themselves have any interest in such a project, having written *Anti-Oedipus* as an elaboration of Lacan's work rather than a refutation of it. Rather, my goal is to highlight the anti-dialectical potential that underlies the very structure of the dialectic. Only in aspiring to the realization of a becoming-animal in all its purely differential multiplicity can one overcome the anthropological divide in a way that still preserves the animal's radical otherness—both to us and to itself. These films guide us to think of passage, the crossing of a threshold that occurs with becoming, as a possible resolution of the dialectic – or, as Derrida might say, “a certain possibility of the impossible,” (*Aporias* 11) for dialectical thought precludes any total resolution of the dialectic. The challenge is to avoid equating this crossing and this resolution with the finitude of death.

I. Animal Viewpoints: Recognizing the Apparatus of the BBC's *Planet Earth II*

i. The Apparatus: Closeness and Distance

When one visits the BBC's website for its 2016 documentary series *Planet Earth II*, one will see the following blurb atop a photograph of a lemur: “Experience the world from the viewpoint of animals themselves. From spellbinding wildlife spectacle to intimate encounters, *Planet Earth II* takes you closer than ever before.” This marketing pitch implies a contrast with the series's 2006 predecessor: Whereas the first *Planet Earth* somehow could not avoid a “distance” from animals, such that the “viewpoints” represented were merely those of humans with cameras, the sequel benefits from new technologies and new filming practices to such an extent that audiences can now actually “occupy” the perspectives of numerous other species. The

coincide with myself; but such a law of separation also keeps Otherness at a safe distance, replacing its intense, exciting, and intolerable proximity with a more manageable gap” (*The Cinematic Body* 258). I would contend that Lacan and Deleuze's positions are reconcilable precisely because this separation is no more negativity than it is the positive affirmation of the subject's self-knowledge.

unprecedented physical “closeness” of the cinematographic apparatus to even the smallest of insects is what permits the viewer to “experience the world” in the same way they do.

While David Attenborough’s narration in the documentary itself does not establish this equivalence between physical proximity and subjective experience to the same extent, he does promise similar novelties. Soaring above the Alps in a hot air balloon, he opens the first episode, “Islands,” with the following introduction:

Looking down from 2 miles above the surface of the Earth, it’s impossible not to be impressed by the sheer grandeur, and the splendor, and power of the natural world. Ten years ago, in a television series called *Planet Earth*, we revealed many of those wonders. But today, much has changed. We can now show life on our planet in entirely new ways. Bring you closer to animals than ever before. And reveal new wildlife dramas for the very first time. But that’s not all: Our planet has changed, too. Never have those wildernesses been as fragile and precious as they are today... (*Planet Earth II*)

There is no direct mention of “animal viewpoints,” but the appeal to “closeness” remains.

Moreover, we learn about the authority of a designated “we,” which here includes Attenborough and the rest of the documentary’s production crew.

Regardless of whether you assign priority to the online marketing pitch or the premise narrated for us in the series, this is the “we” who either “takes” or “brings” “you,” the viewer, into an “entirely new” relationship with animals. As for the animals themselves, they are just the scripted players in “wildlife dramas,” dramas that have changed in tandem with both the “planet” that is their theatrical stage and the apparatuses used to present this stage to humans. Although the planet is very different than it was ten years ago, “our” ultra-high-definition cameras have managed to keep up with it; whether the *animals* occupying both the planet and the cinematic frame are any different now is never addressed. Neither, for that matter, is the question of any changes that might have taken place to you, the viewer.

The entire success of *Planet Earth II* depends on the premise that both “you” and the animals “we” “reveal” to you are passive to forces beyond your control. If you the viewer could effect change, or if the animals could represent their own “viewpoints” such that they could effect change, then there would be no reason for “us” at the BBC to bring “you” the viewers and “them” the animals “closer” to one another. Proximity of bodies and proximity of destinies are the “changes” required to resist the changes occurring in the natural world, and we who control the cinematic apparatus are equipped to bring those changes about.

Now, let us compare the “we” that presents itself at the beginning of the series with the “we” that appears at the very end of its last episode, “Cities.” In a somewhat jarring turn toward the rhetoric of a tourism advertisement, Attenborough reflects on the extensive “urban greening” measures enacted in the city-state of Singapore and asks: “Is this a vision of our cities of the future? It could be possible to see wildlife thriving within our cities across the planet. We, after all, are the architects of the urban world.” Attenborough then appears in person on screen for the first time since the first moments of the series and, facing the camera, says:

Now, over half of us live in an urban environment. My home, too, is here in the city of London. Looking down on this great metropolis, the ingenuity with which we continue to reshape the surface of our planet is very striking. But it’s also sobering; it reminds me of just how easy it is for us to lose our connection with the natural world. Yet it’s on this connection that the future of both humanity and the natural world will depend. It’s surely our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth.

In other words, you the viewer now get to be a part of the “we” from which you were formerly excluded. Thanks to all your hard work watching the six hours of “our” broadcast, we the BBC now welcome you as one of the “architects of our urban world.” How did we grant you the awesome “responsibility” to “create a planet” with us? By returning to you your “connection

with the natural world,” which you had “lost” prior to the “intimate encounters” with animals that we promised and delivered.

A ruse gives itself away here. You the viewer are initially led to believe that your intimacy with the animal will allow you to “experience” the world *as* the animal. By the end, you learn that what you’ve really been experiencing is a “connection” *with* the animal, which relies not on shared subjectivity but rather a clear asymmetry between you as subject, or rather “we” humans as subjects, and animals as objects. The “we” of *Planet Earth II* is thus a rhetorical device of both inclusion and exclusion: we have included you in humanity, but we have excluded the animals from you and the humanity of which you are a part.

In analyzing this series further, I will demonstrate that this dynamic of human inclusion and animal exclusion, as something that works through a “device,” goes beyond the verbal rhetoric of Attenborough’s coda. By the final minutes of this series, the devices that form what I shall designate the “cinematographic apparatus” (cameras, editing software, and television or computer screens would be the obvious examples) have already addressed the viewer through what we might call their own “rhetoric,” a rhetoric that depends upon the visual frame. The “closeness” of animals on screen requires the intervention of apparatuses that will only include their nonhuman “viewpoints” according to specific technical capacities, while excluding them in all other respects.

What I hope will become clear over the course of this reading is, first, that the rhetorical “we” is itself an apparatus; and second, that its dual function of inclusion and exclusion is also the function of the visual apparatuses of this series. I suggest that understanding these two related types of apparatus will allow us to understand how *Planet Earth II*, as the work that they yield, can itself be recognized as an “apparatus.” The “we” is always divided from itself; in classical

Lacanian fashion, a third party defines the message traveling from “we” to “you”; this third party is the Big Other of green capitalist ideology, visualized through the utopian urban planning of Singapore and the productive apparatus of nature documentary itself.

By invoking the “apparatus” as a guiding concept, I am specifically deploying the meaning conveyed by the French *dispositif*, a term with two distinct theoretical uses, which arose in different disciplinary contexts but have since come to share a significant relevance to the study of visual media. The first, which pertains to the technologies used specifically in cinema, emerged out of dialogues concerning ideology in film theory during the 1970s; Jean-Louis Baudry was the originator of this sense in his 1970 essay, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” which I will discuss momentarily. The second sense of the apparatus is more global and comes from the sociological work of Michel Foucault, although theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben expand on it and offer their own definitions.⁵⁸

In a 1977 interview, “The Confession of the Flesh,” Foucault explains that his notion of *dispositif* encompasses three related ideas:

What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. [...] Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogenous elements. [...] Thirdly, I understand by the term “apparatus” a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment

⁵⁸ I should note that the English “apparatus” is a translation of the French *appareil* in the case of Baudry’s essay, which had as its original title “Effets idéologiques produits par l’appareil de base.” The apparatus as *dispositif* is, however, the focus of Baudry’s 1975 essay, “Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l’impression de réalité.” Moreover, the 1970 text contains a reference to “La disposition des différents éléments—projecteur, « salle obscure », écran,” which bears a strong resemblance to the definition that *dispositif* acquires in both Baudry’s later essay and other media studies texts that relate to “apparatus theory.” For more on these two terms, as well as the subtle distinction Baudry himself makes between them in “Le dispositif,” see: Kessler, Frank. “The Cinema of Attractions as *Dispositif*.” *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, edited by Wanda Strauven, Amsterdam UP, 2006, pp. 57-69.

that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. (Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh” 194-5)

The Foucauldian *dispositif* is an instrument in service of power (*pouvoir*), both as an “ensemble” or “formation” and as the network of relations underlying this formation. Because of its inherent “heterogeneity,” however, the *dispositif* is not a “formation” in any static sense of the word; its shape and its instrumental purpose are as dynamic as the relations of “power” they serve. It is this dynamism that Foucault acknowledges when speaking—as he does in much of his work on the nature of power—of a “strategic function” that responds not to the machinations of individuals, but rather to an “urgent need” that sets off such machinations. Further, because a “need” is specific to a “given historical moment,” a *dispositif* and the function it serves are always in flux; indeed, the *dispositif* itself might produce the need that then requires it to function differently. Therefore, an analysis and critique of the “apparatus” as both cinematic precondition and instrument of power must identify not only the “urgent need” to which *Planet Earth II* responds, but also the subsequent “urgent need” that only manifests its “urgency” by way of the *dispositif* itself.

My reading of *Planet Earth II* proceeds in three parts, each of which focuses on a particular scene in the series and an element of the apparatus. I will start with the most freely available elements of this documentary’s “strategic function,” those which constitute its particular form of “cinematographic apparatus.” As I have observed, the filmmakers establish “closeness” as the imperative driving this sequel to a series that, in the views of many, was already quite impressively “close” to its own “wildlife dramas.” While reviewing the new forms of optical and technical “closeness” on display in *Planet Earth II*, one should remember that, in getting closer to something, one must always *distance oneself* from something else. What do the various new technologies exploited in this series approach, and from what do they move away?

ii. The Hidden Eagle: The Apparatus and the “Making-Of” a Transcendental Subject

As in the 2006 predecessor, each episode of *Planet Earth II* concludes with a 10-minute “Planet Earth Diaries” segment. In these “making-of” segments, members of the production crew identify themselves and expound upon their innovative ways of addressing the challenges involved in such an ambitious project. The segments of the sequel series display many of the recently developed gadgets that permitted greater physical proximity to animals large and small alike: new high frame-rate cameras, smaller cameras, stabilizing rigs in lieu of tripods, and aerial drones.

Curiously, however, the “Diaries” installment that I find to be the most “awe-inspiring” of the series (and I believe many other viewers would agree, given the degree of effort shown to be required of crew members) does not boast of any very new technologies at all. At the end of the second episode, “Mountains,” we discover (or think we discover) the work that went into filming scenes meant to simulate the mid-flight viewpoint of Golden Eagles, birds in the Alps that can steep dive toward Earth at nearly 200 miles per hour. The filmmakers addressed the challenges of visually conveying such speed by strapping a professional paraglider onto the back of a cameraman, the two of whom would then swoop down close to the slopes together. While the original intent was for the paraglider to film the scene himself through “a specially designed helmet camera,” the need for him to turn his head in order to navigate led to shots that were shaky and thus unusable. To capture the final, usable product, the cameraman used a conventional handheld camcorder that, unlike the helmet camera, would have been readily available to the crew of the 2006 *Planet Earth* series.

But although this mere feat of human athleticism and ingenuity may be what the episode itself portrays as responsible for its simulations of eagle flight, an *IndieWire* interview with producers Mike Gunton and Elizabeth White reveals the importance of a technical innovation that the BBC chose not to reveal on television: The “Mountains” episode includes a short POV sequence that does not, in fact, result from the paraglider’s efforts, but rather from “a Go Pro-like camera” attached to the back of a real Golden Eagle. Once you know to look for it, you can easily recognize this sequence a bit over 10 minutes into the episode, where, as Gunton puts it, “you see [a real eagle’s] head twitching, you see its eyes going” (Nguyen, ““Planet Earth II’ Producers Reveal...””).

The eagle’s omission from the “Diaries” exemplifies a strange dialectic of disclosure and concealment at work throughout the series, particularly with respect to the roles that animals play in their own representations. On the one hand, we can interpret the choice to attach a camera to an eagle to be among the most successful attempts at representing something reasonably close to the “viewpoint” of an animal. At the same time, we can find something quite deceitful in the omission of both this decision and the eagle involved from the ritual of supposed disclosure performed during the making-of segment. One can speculate as to reasons for this absence—perhaps, as Gunton suggests in the interview, he felt that exposing the use of a “trained” eagle would lend to the endeavor an appearance of inauthenticity; or, perhaps, he was concerned about ethical complaints from animal rights groups. More relevant to my analysis, though, is understanding how this eagle’s concealment—which is the concealment of his quite evident disclosure on-screen—functions on the level of identification with an “apparatus.”

Baudry’s essay provides a useful way of framing this question. Comparing the projection of cinema to Plato’s allegorical cave, he argues that the success of visual media’s resemblance to

“reality” depends on the viewer’s identification with an illusory, “transcendental subject” occupying the position of the camera. Citing Jacques Lacan’s portrayal of the helpless child who joyfully recognizes his reflection in the mirror for the first time, Baudry argues: “The “reality” mimed by the cinema is thus first of all that of a “self.”” More than just what the mechanical apparatus of the camera discloses, though, this “mimed self” is an integral part of the apparatus responsible for its disclosure: “the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees; this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay.” Importantly, the camera’s self-disclosure—that is, its ability to disclose a viewing subject as a “self”—is at once its self-concealment, for there would be nothing “transcendental” about this mimed self if we could see its internal mechanism. This dialectic, Baudry informs us, is what connects the cinema to the Freudian “psychic apparatus of substitution”; “substitution,” like the production of subjectivity through visual media, “is only possible on the condition that the instrumentation itself be hidden or repressed” (Baudry 45-6). The camera itself stands in the place of a Lacanian big Other/*grand Autre*.

How can we apply Baudry’s psychoanalytic model of the ideological apparatus to the form of technical disclosure that takes place during the “making-of” segment? This might appear to be of limited bearing when we consider that Baudry, valorizing the self-reflexive Soviet montage of Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*, believes “specular tranquility and the assurance of one’s own identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism, that is of the inscription of the film-work” (46). But we do not need to dispute this claim if we suppose that whatever “revealing” might take place in the “Planet Earth Diaries” concerns something other than the true “inscription of the film-work.”

As the Eagle's absence from the "Mountains" segment suggests, the human filmmakers only choose to reveal certain aspects of their apparatus—namely, those that allow them to play the role of omnipotent subjects, whose "responsibility" for the natural world is synonymous with nature's objectification. In contrast to Vertov's film, the "Diaries" segments of *Planet Earth II* are not self-reflexive so much as self-producing, in two interconnected senses. First, the segments seem literally to "produce" themselves: beyond some editing, very little work is needed to develop them, since all they do is record the acts of recording that serve the construction of a larger work (the series as a whole). Second, the segments, just like traditional narrative films in Baudry's assessment, "produce" a self who views them: There is, after all, a camera that records the various cameras and the humans using them, and it is with this unseen camera—not with the "spectacle" of filmmaking that it records—that viewing subjects identify.

What this affords the spectator is the possibility of feeling as though his/her/their self is the "god" responsible for "inscribing the film-work." Indeed, we should remark on how this particular feeling of "technical omnipotence" compounds the experience of power inherent in today's apparatus of consumption, which is now very different from the classic "*salle obscure*" described by Baudry. 21st-century theorists of film such as Cathrin Bengesser have discussed how the affordances of the digital age—home viewing via television or computer, greater variety of programs, image-editing software, the potential even to alter the files in which these programs are stored—provide a certain access not available to the passive viewer imagined by Baudry (Bengesser, "Spectator, Player, 'Modder'"). Rather than dealing with the somehow "empowered" viewer that Bengesser optimistically imagines, however, we are confronting through *Planet Earth II* the concealment necessary for this sense of empowerment. We cannot separate the cameras that record the "narrative" content of this documentary from the camera that

records these cameras for the purposes of a “making-of” disclosure. The ten concluding minutes of each episode effect a radical transformation of the fifty that precede them. Through these showcases of exclusively human actors, the apparatus of *Planet Earth II* gives away its function—a function of which the filmmakers themselves may not even be conscious: Rather than bringing you “closer to animals than ever before,” *Planet Earth II* brings you closer to technology, and the humans who see through it, than ever before.

It is worth invoking here the contrast drawn in 1994 by information theorist Philip Agre between older and newer “models of privacy”; the wildlife documentary’s transition from film to serial television reflects a shift from technologies of “surveillance,” which rely on “visual metaphors and devices from historical experiences of secret police surveillance,” toward technologies of “capture”—the quintessential examples of which would be algorithms and other digital methods of data collection—which rely on “linguistic metaphors and...the deliberate reorganization of industrial work activities to allow computers to track them in real time” (101). Within the paradigm of surveillance, there at least appears to remain a possibility of separating the target of representation from the language of representation; as Oluwatosin Oyewole writes, “the assumption” is that the technologies are “non-disruptive.” The paradigm of capture, in contrast, “involves intervention and reorganization of...activities” to such an extent that the target seems to contribute to its own tracking (Oyewole). By masking the apparatus within the very language of filmmaking that they claim to demystify, the making-of “Diaries” capture viewer and animal alike within the technologies of which they are supposedly independent. One can go so far as to draw a comparison between the viewer’s entrapment in a symbolic register of anthropocentrism, the animal’s entrapment in a specular substitution, and the reorganization of time that a serial presentation of nature imposes on the viewer’s attention. Media theorist Pooja

Rangan makes such a comparison in her 2017 book *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary*; in critiquing a YouTube video of an elephant engaged in painting a self-portrait, Rangan writes, “Agre’s analysis of capture offers a valuable rubric through which to understand the metaphors of enlightenment and liberation driving the discourse of animal art.” Rather than serving as a “means of superseding the structures of entrapment that characterize our relations with animals,” gestures meant to liberate the animal’s “selfhood” should be seen “as a trap” into a particularly rigid form of selfhood (165). Media of capture like YouTube and serial documentary television determine the structure of this form.

To frame this entrapment another way, the “Diaries” are no more the revelation of this production’s internal mechanism than they are the mechanism itself. It is not so ridiculous to wonder if, on an unconscious if not conscious level, the profit-driven producers at the British Broadcasting Corporation, having noticed the devices made available to them over the last decade, might have just wanted to make a show about these new devices, with no very strong interest in discovering whether there in fact were any “new dramas” in the “natural world.” New technologies promise to satisfy their and the viewer’s shared desire to “get closer,” to “experience” the world in “entirely new ways”—even though they never fully do so. For if, as Baudry proposes in his allusions to psychoanalysis, these technologies are apparatuses of “substitution” just as much “psychic” as they are “material,” we now have to ask whether the conscious desire for proximity that accompanies their use could itself be substituting for some other, less consciously recognized motivation.

To understand this motivation, one need only remember the BBC’s refusal to credit the trained Golden Eagle, whose head appears on screen so briefly and in such poor focus that I initially believed it to be a computer-generated image rather than a flesh-and-blood creature. The

desire to “get closer” to the animal, which I have argued is substituting for the desire to get closer to technology and the human mastery it signifies, substitutes for an even stronger, less conscious desire to *move away* from animals. I approached something resembling this same desire earlier in my reading of David Attenborough’s flexible, yet ultimately human, “we”. The mechanism of the “Diaries” segments, the larger mechanism of this series that the segments purport to reveal (but are themselves partly responsible for producing), is an apparatus in service of the human’s self-definition against the animal.

But from what “animal” does the human unconsciously move away? An animal who is present, who can be seen in its corporeal state, something definitively external to the human self? No. The animals that the producers and viewers of *Planet Earth II* are escaping are the animals that *they are themselves*. This animal within the human is not a definite presence like the fauna on camera, but rather an *absence* that marks the human’s limits *as* presence. Derrida notes this when he deconstructs the assumed “absence of a response in the animal-machine” that one finds in Descartes and Lacan (“The Animal” 124).

As Oxana Timofeeva affirms in her 2012 *The History of Animals*, which provides a comprehensive account of the transformations that the animal’s quandary has undergone in philosophy from Aristotle to Heidegger and beyond, “classical philosophical discourse” frames the animal within a dialectic of “inclusion” and “exclusion” – much like the one I noted earlier through the shifting “we”: “The discourse of exclusion starts with the ethical and ontological predominance of the ‘human’, whereas the discourse of inclusion insists on the affinity of all levels of being. But these two discourses are related and their function is the same: to establish or to conserve a certain order of things” (Timofeeva 14). *Planet Earth II*, while not a primarily “philosophical” text, nonetheless unites these two discourses in presenting an order based on

human “responsibility” toward the animal. Both the cinematographic and narrative apparatuses of “closeness” in this series only “include” animal “viewpoints” within their fields of representation by seeking to “exclude” the animal from the community of subjects who can represent themselves and thus affect how these apparatuses function.

iii. Animals in the Gap: The “Mystery Vandals” of “Grasslands”

And yet, the animals are there.

That Golden Eagle has a real head that we see “twitching” in various directions, real eyes with a superhuman range of vision that the lens on its back cannot come close to duplicating. To reword Derrida’s famous thoughts on his pet cat, this eagle “isn’t the figure of [an eagle]. It doesn’t silently enter the [frame] as an allegory for all the [eagles] on the earth” (Derrida 374). We cannot exclude him, nor any of the other countless animals who command the human lens in this documentary, from the *dispositif* that absorbs the viewer into its self-producing mechanism.

I would like to turn now to the “Diaries” segment at the end of the fifth episode, “Grasslands.” Here, we will see an example of what happens when an animal’s presence within the apparatus is impossible to efface. I am referring to the sequence in which several animals “outsmart”—to quote a word used by producer Chadden Hunter—the humans who attempt to record them through a “camera trap” disguised amid some tall grass.

Early in the segment, the filmmakers erect over 100 scaffold poles on which they can position several remotely-controlled, motion-detecting hidden cameras, with the objective of surreptitiously filming overnight any of the large grassland mammals who live on the Indian subcontinent—ideally, a local species of rare tiger. The following morning, Attenborough narrates to us, “the crew have a whodunnit mystery on their hands”: some anonymous, imposing

creature has bent a scaffold pole down to the ground and obliterated the camera. Soon, the same thing happens to a second camera. An exasperated Chadden Hunter then complains: “I’ve never actually been anywhere where the animals go after your equipment and destroy it more than here.”

How do he and the crew respond? By deciding to stage the destruction all over again, only this time with the addition of a small security camera that will reveal the “mystery vandals.” With this method, they at last discover what they believe to be the culprit: a sloth-bear, whom they can watch dismantling the camera trap by using what Hunter calls his “fingernails” (i.e. his claws) to tear away at the lens. But “the” culprit is merely “a” culprit; they then learn from other security cameras that tigers and, indeed, elephants have also been “outsmarting” them. Ultimately, they only get their desired tiger footage by abandoning their unnecessary technology and resorting to “traditional,” human-guided filming techniques. Shrugging off the rather embarrassing failures of both human and machine, Attenborough ends the segment with a jocular tone in his voice: “it’s good to know there are still wild places where animals like to keep their secrets.”

I focus on this segment not simply because of what the animals are doing, although that is quite remarkable, but chiefly to underscore the effect that these animals have on the humans trying to watch them without being seen. Even before the camera traps are destroyed, a unique anxiety has taken hold of the filmmakers, who always walk with armed guards into the habitats of these large and dangerous mammals. More than any other “Diaries” installment, the one in “Grasslands” portrays animals as a threat, something that could challenge the human at any moment. The challenge that arrives is not the one they foresee, however; it enacts its violence not on the human’s “biological” body but its mechanical one. The animal’s attack on technology is

in a way a more unnerving threat than the attack on human life, for its impact extends beyond individuals and shakes the entire apparatus of human self-production. Grappling with the unseen beasts in their midst, the filmmakers must refashion this apparatus by way of anthropomorphic language: The animals are “going after” the humans; they are “vandals” who act consciously as such; their claws are “fingernails”; they are trying to prevent us from knowing their “secrets.” To treat the animals as humans, as others who can see our deceit for what it is, is the most reliable way we know to assert our difference from them.

These anthropomorphisms are all quite silly, of course. Without entirely ruling out the possibility that these animals have some degree of “knowledge” about what a camera “is,” if only to the extent that they might recognize it as an object that has popped up in their habitats before, it is evident that this knowledge differs vastly from ours. Any conscious awareness of “going after” the camera as a camera is extremely unlikely; more plausibly, these camera traps are emitting frequencies of sound or light (spectra) inaccessible to humans but unsettling to the animals destroying them.⁵⁹ What the animals see is neither what we see nor what we can imagine they see.

But this is the exact nature of the threat they pose. When the filmmakers gather in front of their computer screen, to watch as the sloth-bear looks directly at the lens that he then destroys with his claws, they do not see themselves being seen. What they are seeing, and what provokes their anthropomorphizing anxiety, is the presence of something spectral that they *cannot* see and that *cannot* see them – at least, not in the sense of “seeing” they would take for granted.

This segment is just one particularly obvious example of the many scenes where the animals of *Planet Earth II* draw either the cameraman or the viewer at home (or both) into a

⁵⁹ For a scientific study that corroborates this, see: Meek, Paul D., et al. “Camera Traps Can Be Heard and Seen by Animals.” *PLoS ONE* 9(10): e110832, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0110832>.

relation of visual discordance. We can identify this discordance with the famous Lacanian “gaze,” a notion central to Baudry’s apparatus theory, as well as Derrida’s work on the animal. The gaze, the recognition that one can be seen—not as subject, but as an object “for another”—denotes that certainty of self which the visual relation necessarily “eludes” (Lacan 73). To identify such elusion with the scene we are analyzing, we should underscore Lacan’s remark that the gaze one encounters “is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” (84). The “imaginary” quality inherent in the Other’s gaze contrasts with the Real but unimaginable nature of the look. These animals really do “look at” the camera, and at whatever humans wander into their habitat, but we do not fully know what about these objects captures their attention, nor how this attention relates to an unperceived subjective experience. The emotions and intentions that we attribute to their looks, even if not exclusive to humans in all respects, are not theirs but ours; as imaginary responses, these attributions allow us to avoid, or at least postpone, the anxiety of knowing that what they see in us is something we will never see in ourselves.

Nonetheless, the anxiety remains, hence the sense of chaos that all the quirky music in the BBC’s catalogue and all of David Attenborough’s jovial cadences cannot suppress completely. We can see that Chadden Hunter is about to lose his patience, that nobody in the crew understands what they are up against, and that they are slowly realizing (I admit I may be projecting a bit here) that “Grasslands” will be the least interesting episode of the series. Yet despite all their obvious anxiety—or rather because of it—they continue smiling and joking about how humanly devious these animals “going after” them are.

The humans do “defeat” the animals and get what they want in the end of this confrontation—though perhaps it would be more accurate to say they settle for what they can

get. Nonetheless, might the resistance of the animal's gaze to the apparatus of the camera trap also be a resistance to the larger apparatus of the human's self-production? Timofeeva provides us with an opportunity to approach this latter, more abstract resistance through the figuration of a "break." Comparing the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion to the function of Agamben's "anthropological machine," Timofeeva proposes that "The human being recognises himself in the animal as it does in the mirror." However, Timofeeva clarifies that this is not a mirror of total identification; it is closer to Lacan's mirror, which divides the infant's world in two: "this mirror-machine is a two-way thing. Recognition goes along with misrecognition. Man recognises himself in the animal until the common anthropomorphic world breaks up into two parts and the mirror stands between him and his other, and a gap or lacuna necessarily opens through this break-up" (Timofeeva 14-15).

If we observe that the camera functions similarly to such a Lacanian "mirror-machine," as Baudry and other apparatus theorists of film allow us to, we can deduce that a project like *Planet Earth II*, which so compels its human viewer to absorb an unimaginable animal "viewpoint" into his own, will lead to the emergence of a "gap" proportionate in size to the degree of reflection (which is to say, identification and the self-reflexivity that comes with the "misrecognition" inherent in any identification) that the camera permits. Does such a gap, when large enough, halt the apparatus that produced it? This is what Agamben's prediction of an end to the anthropological machine would suggest, as Timofeeva acknowledges. Yet, the total elimination of this apparatus would eliminate not just the human's difference from the animal, but the possibility for each to identify with the other as well, thereby annihilating the animal's capacity for self-definition no less than the human's. Rather than searching for a halt in the

apparatus, what Timofeeva encourages us to do in response to the “lacuna” is “to investigate whether the very same machine can work differently” (15).

iv. Becoming-Apparatus: The Turtle’s Escape

By the end of her book, Timofeeva comes to decide that, although the “oblivion” opened by this machine serves the constitution of the human’s “being” as a unique “negativity,” the choices made by animals themselves have the ability to affect this machine and thus alter the kinds of “negativity” and “being” it yields. The powerful last paragraph of her book refigures the barrier of the “mirror-machine” as a set of “gates” erected by the human, which read: “Truth. Animals are not allowed.” Gates, however, can of course be broken through; Timofeeva contends that animals can “cross” these “gates of truth” exactly because they alone “do not know that they are not allowed to enter [them].” In the words of her hopeful final lines: “The animal will find its escape route precisely there where there will be apparently no escape. And, potentially, on this route, it will find something else. So, nevertheless, freedom?” (157).

We have already witnessed the alteration of the apparatus in one *Planet Earth II* scene where animals unwittingly “break through” a boundary meant to contain them; the hint now of an “escape to freedom” provokes us to look at another, this one contained in the “Cities” finale. In this sequence, which I would easily select as the most affecting of the entire series, hundreds of newly hatched Hawksbill sea turtles, mistaking the lights at the edge of the city for the reflection of moonlight on the sea, crawl straight toward their deaths on an open motorway. As Attenborough’s narration explains, the explosive proliferation of urban artificial light over the last century and a half has widely disrupted the ingrained behavioral patterns of many animals. In the case of sea turtles, who hatch on the beach and must crawl down to the ocean to survive,

urban light outshines the glow of the full moon on open water, with tragic consequences for these animals whose instincts impel them toward the brightest horizon.

The viewer watches as one disoriented hatchling turns around and heads in the wrong direction. The frame then expands to reveal that “80 percent” of the turtles are facing the blinding lights of the city; those who manage to survive the ambushes of lurking crabs waddle past the upper edge of the beach and onto concrete pavement. The shots of carnage that follow are heartbreaking: one hatchling gets trapped in a plastic cup; a car’s tires run straight over several turtles crossing the road; dozens trapped inside a storm drain pile on top of one another hoping to escape. The last shot is of one solitary and aimless turtle who, despite surviving all these obstacles, shows visible exhaustion, and thus has a “slim” chance of making it through the night.

This sequence at first seems like the last place where we should look for the animal’s “escape route,” for the only “freedom” these turtles seem to obtain is that which belongs to death. But these bewildered creatures whose struggles are now a part of the popular imagination did indeed “find something else” when they trespassed the boundary between sand and sidewalk. By stumbling blindly into the lights of the city, they also stumbled into a film shoot. This by itself is obvious, but, in being recorded, they found *access to* the camera’s mechanism of reflection and identification. Thus, rather than simply “finding” this mechanism, they determined its function. Just as the Golden Eagle and the grassland “vandals” succeeded, however briefly, to usurp the cinematographic controls of an anthropocentric apparatus, so these doomed turtles assumed a trajectory that managed to bring both camera and viewer along with them. One can invoke here Derrida’s thoughts on death as that which crosses “the borders of truth” (Aporias 1): “Who will guarantee that the name, the ability to name death (like that of naming the other, and

it is the same) does not participate as much in the dissimulation of the “as such” of death as in its revelation, and that language is not precisely the origin of the nontruth of death, and of the other?” (76). It is the unknowing and unspeaking animal who disrupts and multiplies the “as such” of death.

This sequence, like the whole of this series, does not demonstrate how the humans at the BBC “bring you closer to animals than ever before”; it demonstrates, rather, how the animals themselves bring you closer to an unexperienced part of *yourself*, a part of your being that you never recognized as unrecognizable. The turtles’ eyes, with pupils we see dilating in response to the headlights of oncoming cars, gaze at the camera that approaches them, continuing to move us away from, and yet *farther into*, ourselves. The lens that follows their lead, simulating the turtle “viewpoint” through soft-focus, low-angled shots, magnifies those elements of our experience that we neglect—elements that help to constitute the apparatus of which we are an inextricable part: we see to what extent the lights of skyscrapers conceal the world beneath them; we see just how steep a drop the inches separating the curb from the road can be; we recognize Being’s “oblivion” in the darkness of the sewer. And yet, despite these moments of identification, the turtles continue crawling away from the camera, and their being continues to recede from us, until finally, in their mass death, they draw us straight to the edge of nothingness. The overbearing sadness we feel while watching this nothingness substitutes for the anxiety of being exposed to the “gap” separating “us”, the human and the living, from “them”, the animals and the dying.

The movement that these animals caused in the apparatuses of self-production ricocheted far beyond the moment we first saw them in December of 2016. Social media users shared their reactions of horror to this sequence following the broadcast of “Cities.” They directed their

sadness and anger at not just the filmmakers, who had apparently done nothing to prevent these tragic deaths, but also, more tellingly, themselves, taking to heart their “responsibility” as constituents of the human “we.”⁶⁰ To assuage their audience’s concerns, the BBC’s @BBCEarth Twitter account issued a statement: “Every turtle that was seen or filmed by the #PlanetEarth2 crew was collected and put back into the sea.” It is quite difficult to believe this tweet entirely; we are at least very much led to believe we are looking at dead bodies in certain shots. Still, the desire to intervene and assume responsibility for the animal here is striking (Furness, “Planet Earth II filmmakers defy convention...”).

I discussed many of the reasons to be cynical about this desire for “responsibility” toward the beginning of this essay; one can certainly deepen this cynicism by observing the difficulty of translating social media sympathies into decisive offline action. Nevertheless, perhaps we now might be able to situate this desire within a larger, “social” apparatus that would exhibit the flexibility of a Foucauldian *dispositif*, a mode of subjectification that humans cannot monopolize and make inaccessible to the animals that wander into its mechanism. This would not, however, be a purely “discursive” apparatus outside of which nothing “meaningful” exists, and from which one “cannot escape,” at least in the sense that Foucault evokes when describing the inner workings of power in *The History of Sexuality*. Rather, this apparatus would contain its own “escape route,” or rather “routes,” which when followed would lead out toward a new apparatus that, if not entirely different from the previous one, would at least “work differently,” as Timofeeva says.

⁶⁰ For one of the many examples of Twitter users alluding to a human “we” in their reactions to this scene, see @andygmckay’s tweet: “Whether #planetearth2 team put turtles to sea or not is besides the point. Stuff like this happens. We need a systematic response” (@andygmckay).

Deleuze's contribution to the Foucauldian notion of *dispositif* helps us to envision how such an escape and such a "newness" would present itself:

We belong to social apparatuses and act within them. The newness of an apparatus in relation to those which have gone before is what we call its actuality, our actuality. The new is the current. The current is not what we are but rather what we are in the process of becoming – that is the Other, our becoming-other...In each apparatus we have to untangle the lines of the recent past and those of the near future; that which belongs to history and that which belongs to the process of becoming (164).

The *dispositif* is not the static ground of being, but rather the fluid state of "becoming." How "current" are the images of these deceased turtles who live on in "archival" form? To what extent is their actuality "our actuality"? What part of them "belongs to history," and what part "belongs to the process of becoming?"

It is useful here to return to Agre's notion of capture. On the one hand, social media are arguably the paradigmatic technologies of capture, insofar as they reduce subjectivities to the linguistic metaphors of likes and follows. On the other hand, the fact that turtles can enter into this discourse suggests the animal's participation in a more active form of "capture," not unlike the one Deleuze and Guattari reference in their discussion of the becomings-animal that take place in Kafka's fiction: "The act of becoming is a capturing [*une capture*], a possession, a plus-value, but never a reproduction or an imitation" (*Kafka* 13). (I will return to "becoming-animal" in my discussion of Perrin's films.)

We must conclude that the "actual" apparatus of *Planet Earth II* is not the technological one whose function it served "strategically." The animals of this series "become" something, both during and after the time we spend filming them or viewing them on screens. But so do we. In "becoming-Other," do I and the turtle become the same thing? No and yes. No, because what is "Other" to us cannot be the same and is itself always in a process of becoming a different "Other"; the turtle's "becoming-human" is not identical to my "becoming-turtle." But from a

certain “viewpoint,” yes, for our “becomings-Other” will converge within the “newness” of the apparatus that continually produces us both.

Maybe, then, the viewer of this program really does end up “experiencing the world from the viewpoint of animals themselves,” albeit not in the way that the BBC envisioned. The human who suffers watching the deaths of animals does not experience the world as those particular animals do, but rather as the animals who the human is, has ceased to be, and is forever becoming. The horror of seeing what our urban technologies are doing to animals is in part the horror of knowing we are doing this to ourselves. Are “we” humans not already blind and confused in the face of so much light? By the time Attenborough delivers his words of warning, this documentary has brought to view a world that threatens to be just as cruel to us as our machines have been to animals. The so-called “natural world”, for which “we” humans are supposedly “responsible”, is an apparatus beyond this “we,” indeed the very apparatus that produces this “we” and thus reveals its fragility.

As individual constituents of the “we” whose limits escape us, we are not “responsible” for an apparatus that we cannot control—except, that is, to the extent that we can see the apparatus at work in ourselves. How do we recognize and take responsibility for the apparatus in ourselves? By misrecognizing it, in an act which requires recognizing the animal Other, whose viewpoint our viewpoint is becoming but is not.

We and the animals are apparatuses in ourselves. We will only escape the apparatus that condemns us both by looking toward the apparatuses we are becoming together.

v. Spectrality and Spectacle: A Review of the Literature on Wildlife Films

The problem remains, of course, that *Planet Earth II* and many documentaries like it present an artificial, “captured” version of the so-called natural world. Media scholars have noted this artificial quality as largely characteristic of the wildlife documentary genre. As Derek Bousé writes, “How film and television depict the natural world often has far less to do with science or real outdoor experience than with media economics, established production practices, viewers’ expectations, and the ways each of these influences the others” (1). The risk of giving audiences an inaccurate perception of animal life is all the greater when productions pride themselves on filming those parts of the planet least accessible to the majority of people: “because we may have little or no experience of the worlds they depict, we may have nothing against which to weigh the images, or by which to assess their fidelity to reality, and may end up simply accepting them, like advertising, on their own terms” (7). Moreover, as Cynthia Chris observes, wildlife films have reflected and amplified the ideologies of those humans who produce and view them, “at times extending interpretations of animal behaviors to humans, as sociobiology and its disciplinary offshoots [enter] the discourse of wildlife filmmaking” (x). The result is the fantasy image of “a pleurably ordered, harmonious, resilient natural world” (202) that provides a “comforting” alternative to the world of humans. As Jean-Baptiste Gouyon writes in his study of David Attenborough’s long career of films with the BBC, “Nature becomes the outcome”—rather than the mere setting—“of filming” (7).

Critics like Jonathan Burt and Steve Baker note how animal images mark sites of indeterminacy where humans can project their fantasies of cohesion in film and visual art more generally. As Burt writes, “Although the animal on screen can be burdened with multiple metaphorical significances, giving it an ambiguous status that derives from what might be

described as a kind of semantic overload, the animal is also marked as a site where these symbolic associations collapse into each other. In other words, the animal image is a form of rupture in the field of representation” (Burt 11). Recognizing the problematic reduction of the living animal to a site of rupture does not mean that we should stop watching films with animals or enjoying animal images, but rather that we should recognize how, as Baker writes, “Culture shapes our reading of animals just as much as animals shape our reading of culture” (4). Indeed, for this very reason, one has a responsibility to think through these images “in the conviction that any effective cultural strategies on behalf of animals must be based on an understanding of contemporary cultural practice” (5).⁶¹

The dangers of a fantasized false cohesion are at least partly intrinsic to the very medium of the moving image. As Baudry and others might lead us to suspect, the transcendent apparatus of the cinematic eye allows viewers of wildlife films to identify with a superhuman perspective, an agency capable of both separating itself from and mastering the nonhuman world. To put this as Bousé does, “although wildlife films may show us things we might really have been able to see, they typically do so in ways we could never see them, and in which nobody ever has seen them directly, including the people who film them” (11). And as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, two of film theory’s earliest authoritative voices, remind us, the moving image’s resemblance to its referent affords the medium a uniquely “realist” ontology. Documentary, which claims its goal is to inform viewers of some truth, amplifies the stakes of Bazin’s argument that, when viewing films, “we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography

⁶¹ For more of the most recent intersections between media studies and critical animal studies, see the essays in the following two collections: Pick, Anat, and Guinevere Narraway, editors. *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human*. Berghahn Books, 2013; and George, Amber E., and J.L. Schatz, editors. *Screening the Nonhuman: Representations of Animal Others in the Media*. Lexington Books, 2016.

enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction” (Bazin and Gray 8). *Planet Earth II*, in particular, with its rhetoric of closeness and access, exploits the viewer’s awareness that, as Kracauer writes, “there are different realities or dimensions of reality, and our situation is such that not all of these worlds are equally available to us” (Kracauer 297).

When offered the chance to avail oneself of a previously unseen nonhuman reality, the viewer experiences the kind of “scopophilia,” or fetishistic pleasure of looking, first applied to film in Laura Mulvey’s work on the patriarchal male gaze. According to Mulvey’s psychoanalytic explanation of “the voyeuristic-scophilic look,” “pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him” (6) reinforce the “fetishistic representation of the female image” to such an extent that film “fixates the spectator and prevents him from achieving any distance from the image in front of him” (18). But as *Planet Earth II*’s concealment of the anthropological machine shows, the viewer’s immersion in the image renders invisible, and thus unquestionable, the division between active (male, human) subject and passive (female, animal) object. Gregg Mitman’s discussion of the role played by voyeuristic pleasure in the consumption of wildlife films makes this clear: “In nature as spectacle, the animal kingdom exists solely to be observed, objectified, and enjoyed...This voyeurism precludes any meaningful exchange because we remain at a physically and emotionally safe distance, far removed from the shared labor of animals and humans, whose interactions have made such vicarious experiences possible” (Mitman 206).

While I do not want to belabor the language of fetish and castration in the specific dynamic of human-animal relations, I do find relevant Freud’s notion of the fetish as a substitute that, in serving as both “a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against

it” (“Fetishism” 154), allows one to hold “incompatible assertions” (157). In this case, “castration” would stand in for a threatened loss of mastery over nature; the “fetish” in question would be the magnified, digitally manipulated image of the animal body that, made visible by way of human technology, is no longer a threat to human superiority; and the “incompatible assertions” would be the competing beliefs that, on one hand, the human has already conquered the animal through technology; and on the other, the animal still remains to be apprehended by the same technology. Antoine Traisnel, whose book *Capture* reminds us of the role animals played in defining the purpose of photographic apparatuses during the 19th century, and whose work I will bring up again later in relation to Deleuze and Guattari, helps us to understand these competing beliefs as “a shift from the hunt regime...which targets individual animals” “to the capture regime...[which] attempts to seize something intangible, something presumably inherent to all animals: vitality, motion, states of change.” “Capture,” a term Traisnel deploys at least partly in conversation with Agre, “names the modern imperative to apprehend animals at the historical moment when they are receding from everyday view” (*Capture*).

According to the argument John Berger makes in “Why Look at Animals?,” a key text for Traisnel and some of the other contemporary theorists in animal film studies whose work I have already cited, the fetish serves the role once played by the totem. Berger argues that such post-19th century sources of fascination with animals as zoos, picture books, and pet shops, which may appear to bring humans and animals into greater proximity, in fact signal the marginalization and gradual disappearance of the radical otherness found in spaces where animals are free. “Animals,” Berger contends by way of Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau, “first entered the imagination as messengers and promises” (Berger 4). Totems and sacrificial rituals, through which animals were granted “magical” powers, carried a “metaphoric” significance

commensurate with the extent to which humans depended on animals for their physical survival. Animals and humans had “parallel lives,” playing an equal part in “the transmigration of souls.” They were treated as “distinct,” but honored because they were “ambiguous,” “both like and unlike man,” and thus a potential window into the human’s origins: “Animals came from over the horizon. They belonged *there* and *here*. Likewise they were mortal and immortal. An animal’s blood flowed like human blood, but its species was undying... This — maybe the first existential dualism — was reflected in the treatment of animals. They were subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed” (6-7).

One can debate the veracity of Berger’s historical account of “existential dualism,” but he suggests a compelling alternative to the metaphysical impoverishment that has been attributed to the animal since Cartesian dualism: “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” (11). With Cartesian dualism, and its split between the automatism of the animal body and the freedom of the human soul, we also get a rupture, attributed by Berger to Buffon, between the “innocence” of the “receding [prehuman] past” and the “anguish” of the human’s efforts at transcending animality in the present, resulting in a sort of “nostalgia” (12). This nostalgia, through a process of “cultural marginalisation” that is slower and “more complex” than that of the animal’s “physical marginalisation” outside of the urban center, has since been “co-opted into the *family* and,” most relevantly to my argument, “into the *spectacle*” (15). Disney films, animal picture books, and zoos—as well as, I argue here, wildlife documentaries—signal this marginalisation into spectacle.

The difference between a zoo and a wildlife documentary is that, when one visits a zoo (at least, the kind of zoo that Berger describes), one often experiences a sense of disappointment, and, seeing the unhappy, listless animals huddled on the edges of their cages, asks oneself, “Why are these animals less than I believed?” (23). One thus becomes aware that one is “*looking at something rendered absolutely marginal*; and all the concentration [one] can muster will never be enough to centralise it” (24). With wildlife films, in contrast, the filmmakers are able to center the animal within the frame, at least creating the convincing appearance of an innocent Nature. There is, therefore, an opportunity for self-knowledge and reflection at the zoo that is lacking when viewing a film like *Planet Earth II*, where the animals appear to be about as *central* in our perception as they could be, short of a direct encounter in their immediate habitats. This is not to single out *Planet Earth II* or the other films produced by the BBC Natural History Unit as particularly unethical examples of the genre.⁶² Nor do I want to neglect what Burt calls the “transformative potential of the animal film...the ethical potential of animal films cannot necessarily be mapped onto their truth value. There is, in other words, constant vacillation between the relative advantages and disadvantages of detachment from or attachment to animals” (165). The extent to which a group of struggling baby sea turtles moves a mass audience demonstrates this.

Nonetheless, what is being made central here, as critics of the genre’s inherent artifice like Bousé, Chris, Mitman, and others make clear, is the animal as fetishized image rather than living being. The real, living animal is not only marginalized but hidden from view entirely. We celebrate these animals because we know we may never see them again. As Jan-Christopher Horak writes, “the goal of nature filmmakers becomes the capture of animals, at least in images,

⁶² Chris Palmer, a wildlife film producer who frequently criticizes his own genre, has singled out the *Planet Earth* films as “ethically filmed” and responsibly shot” (184, 220).

so that society and science have a record of what was lost. Every moving image can potentially be the last “living” image of a species, in the truest sense of the word” (459). These animals are, as film scholar Akira Mizuta Lippit writes of the animals in Berger’s essay, “spectral.”

“Modernity sustains,” as Lippit tells us in *Electric Animal*,

the disappearance of animals as a constant state. That is,...animals never *entirely* vanish. Rather, they exist in a state of *perpetual vanishing*. Animals enter a new economy of being during the modern period, one that is no longer sacrificial in the traditional sense of the term but, considering modern technological media generally and the cinema more specifically, *spectral*. In supernatural terms, modernity finds animals lingering in the world *undead*. (1)

Planet Earth II frames itself as a terminus to this sense of modernity: see the animals like you’ve never seen them before, and like you never will again, because this time, it could be the last time. If Lippitt is right that modernity “sustains the disappearance of animals as a constant state,” then *Planet Earth II* demands that its viewers wonder: What comes *after* modernity? What comes when the animals *do* definitively “vanish”?

Berger’s essay suggests one terrifying answer to this question. Writing in 1977, he says, “the marginalisation of animals is...followed by the marginalisation and disposal of the only class who, throughout history, has remained familiar with animals and maintained the wisdom which accompanies that familiarity: the middle and small peasant.” Consistent with the themes of zoonosis I raised in the previous chapter’s reading of Atwood’s dystopia, there is a sense here of transmission, transmitted marginalization, from animal to human. When one disposes of the peasant’s “wisdom,” Berger claims at the conclusion of his essay, one rejects “the dualism at the very origin of the relation between man and animal,” thereby “opening the way to modern totalitarianism” (28). What does this mean? Aside from noting the resemblance between zoos and all other “sites of enforced marginalisation – ghettos, shanty towns, prisons, madhouses, concentration camps” (26), Berger explicitly refuses to “go beyond the limits of...the zoo” in his

analysis (28). But there is an implicit explanation: if the animal's marginalization means its deprivation of the transcendent qualities attributed to the human soul and its reduction to the mechanical body, then it stands to reason that the next step would be a similar reduction imposed upon certain classes of human. And once the human is deprived of the soul, where does transcendence reside?

It resides, ironically enough, in the machine, the apparatus. And this transcendence of the technical is what *Planet Earth II* and similar documentaries reveal, and they reveal it precisely because they conceal it. In fetishizing the animal, the BBC Natural History Unit filmmakers fetishize the means of image production. The making-of segments appear to offer the spectator distance from the spectacle, but hidden by this distance is an identification with the apparatus itself, the camera behind the camera. And as comforting as it is to believe that this camera of a second order will fulfill our desires for transcendence, it does not. Instead, it turns us into animals among other animals, fighting to save the apparatus from the elephant's rage, unaware that we and the elephant both are *captured* by the frame. And when the animal is gone, it will just be us humans, perpetually vanishing, undead in the world of machines. And then we, too, will vanish.

II. Animals Projected into History: Looking into the Mirror of Jacques Perrin's Documentaries

i. The Image: Artifice and Alienation

But that is just one future, one means of granting power to the apparatus. Is there a way to escape what Christian Metz calls "the narcissism of the machine," the "willingness to put the apparatus [*dispositif*] on display" that, as I argue is the case in *Planet Earth II*, "proceeds...from

a naive and rather obscure desire to reconcile a pseudo-political superego with passionate adoration of cinema and its technics” (70)? In Metz’s view, the impossibility of truly “exposing the apparatus” comes from the enclosed nature of what he calls “filmic enunciation”: “A film does not take place between an enunciation and an addressee but between an enunciator and an utterance, between a spectator *and a film*, that is to say, between a YOU and a HE/IT” (15). Whenever such “markers of enunciation” as the cameras used to record a scene “are unmasked...this is not in itself critical or really subversive, because these markers are only accessible in themselves in the statement [*énoncé*] and as statements [*énoncés*]” (64). This is especially evident in nature documentary, the spectacle of which depends on a viewer who lacks access to either the locations filmed or the technics used to film them. As Metz puts it, “If you show a crane to a spectator, it is the first time that he sees it and not the second” (65). So long as “the camera *does not exist* for the viewer” (70) as an object among objects, there is nothing to prevent identification with its transcendent point-of-view.

The films that Metz holds up as exceptions – works like Bergman’s *Persona* (1966) or Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) – manage to deploy the camera’s “real and substantial resources for enunciation” (70) by displacing the apparatus onto technical analogues more familiar to the viewer (mirrors, films within films, or industrial machinery, for instance). As a result, Metz suggests, the viewer experiences a sense of distance and misrecognition that allows one to reflect on one’s own position as the viewer of a film. One can compare this to the “alienation effect” Brecht locates in Chinese theatre, in which the “performer...*makes it clear that he knows he is being looked at,*” distancing the viewer from the play and transforming the spectacle into an object of social critique (Brecht and Bentley 130, italics in original).

What would it mean for a nature documentary to provoke this sense of distance from and misrecognition of the apparatus, a challenge made more difficult by the obvious appeal of encouraging closeness and identification in relation to nonhuman animals? The second half of this chapter seeks to answer this question through readings of five French documentaries affiliated with the filmmaker Jacques Perrin, released over approximately the last three decades: *Le Peuple singe* (1989), *Microcosmos : Le Peuple de l'herbe* (1996), *Le Peuple migrateur* (2001), *Océans* (2009), and *Les Saisons* (2015). Perrin, who produced and/or directed all five films, turned to wildlife filmmaking decades after establishing a career as an actor in and producer of more conventionally narrative films. His most successful films include *Z* (1969, actor and producer), *Black and White in Color* (1976, producer), *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (1989, actor), and *Himalaya* (1999, producer).

Although I do not want to overstate Perrin's authorial role in these five documentaries (particularly those he did not co-direct), his consistent interest in the genre has led to some aesthetic trademarks that I believe are visible in all of the films. These trademarks descend in part from a lineage of French documentarists that begins in the 20s with Jean Painlevé and continues through the 20th century with figures like Jacques Cousteau. Donna Haraway lauds Painlevé's films for their "pleasures of intimacies at surfaces, fast changes in scale, ranges of magnification, and the immersive optics of refraction across varying media" (Haraway 259),⁶³ and one can find similar pleasures with Perrin's work.

First, in contrast to the supposed authenticity of *Planet Earth II*, Perrin's films have received both praise and criticism for their obvious artifice; one could argue that some or all of them qualify more as art films than as true documentaries. Second, the narrative arcs of these

⁶³ For more on Painlevé, see James Leo Cahill's *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* (U of Minnesota P, 2019).

films and the animal dramas that constitute them depend far less on narratorial explanation (this contrasts with Painlevé's narration-heavy films as well) and far more on the connections established between images by way of montage and metonymy. Third – and this is not surprising given the importance of montage – Perrin presents animals less as individuals caught up in linear conflicts with Darwinian resolutions and more as dynamic, metonymic parts of a collective whole. And fourth, even in spite of the contrasts one can draw between the processual movements of these films and what Cynthia Chris calls “televisual forms of nature” (“conflict that melts into happy endings, and drama that...resolves in comfort”), there is nonetheless a clear three-part, even dialectical narrative structure guiding these films, which I will discuss after a brief overview of the five works (Chris 201).

The first of the five films, *Le Peuple singe* (released in English as *The Monkey Folk*), was produced by Perrin and directed by Gérard Vienne, also known for such earlier nature documentaries as *Le Territoire des autres* and *La Griffes et la dent*. Vienne's film structures its examination of nonhuman primates thematically; rather than focusing on individual narratives and scenes of conflict in the manner of *Planet Earth II*, the camera jumps frequently from continent to continent, showing monkeys and apes engaged in activities human viewers will recognize as similar to their own. “Grâce à un montage extrêmement précis,” writes Denis Desjardins in his contemporary review of the film, “Vienne nous fait constamment circuler d'un paysage à l'autre, d'une communauté à l'autre, à la rencontre de babouins du Kenya, d'orangs-outangs de Bornéo, de macaques du Japon et de Java, de chimpanzés, de nasiques et autres ouistitis dans leur habitat naturel. Le peuple singe est le personnage collectif de ce fascinant documentaire” (70).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ “Thanks to extremely precise editing, Vienne lets us constantly circulate between one landscape and another, one community and another, to encounters with baboons from Kenya, orangutans from Borneo, macaques from Japan

The second nature film produced by Perrin, *Microcosmos: Le Peuple de l'herbe* (literally, “Microcosmos: The People of the Grass,” but released simply as *Microcosmos* in Anglophone countries), received considerable attention by critics and audiences alike. Directed by Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou (themselves known also for the later, similarly surreal *Genesis* (2003)), *Microcosmos* offers a close-up view of the world as lived by insects and other miniscule animals. Critics like *Sight and Sound*’s Michael O’Pray lauded the film for “its impeccable micro-cinematography, flying camera and good old-fashioned timelapse techniques,” thanks to which the film serves as “a reminder of how far Hollywood’s sci-fi fantasies lag behind real natural ‘wonders.’” However, whereas *Le Peuple singe* can rely on the standard technical tricks of nature documentary – montage, selective framing, and so on – *Microcosmos* must be more obvious in its manipulation, at times speeding up the growth of a flower, at times slowing down the wings of a fly. As O’Pray observes, “the film is so captivating, even for the sceptic, that one suspects insect antics of such narrative charm are impossible, and that it is all done by computers” (58). Indeed, each of Perrin’s documentaries, it could be argued, has more obviously manipulated elements when compared to the one before.

Le Peuple migrateur (literally, “The Migrating People”; released as *Winged Migration* in the US and *The Travelling Birds* in the UK) is the first of the films directed by Jacques Perrin himself, with Jacques Cluzaud working as co-director. Audiences and critics alike responded favorably to the film, taking pleasure in the illusion of flying together with flocks of various migratory birds as they traveled south for the winter and then back again. Some reviewers, however, took issue with some of the film’s overtly fictional devices: for instance, the child actor who watches the birds at the beginning and the end of the film, or the CGI shots that

and Java, chimpanzees, proboscis monkeys and other marmosets in their natural habitat. The monkey folk are the collective character of this fascinating documentary” (translation mine).

superimpose the birds onto a view of the planet from outer space. *Sight and Sound* reviewer Andrew O’Hehir disparages these devices as “Disneyfied distraction” and “dramatic embellishment,” even as he refers to the film more generally as “an astonishing accomplishment” (60). *Winged Migration* was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 75th Academy Awards.

Those who take issue with artifice in documentary would also have reason to criticize *Océans*, the largest financial investment and likely the most watched of the five films. North American audiences encountered a literally “Disneyfied” distribution of the film, Disneynature’s *Oceans*, which features significantly more narration than the French version and omits roughly twenty minutes of more violent footage. The film opens with a man’s struggle to answer a young boy’s deceptively simple question: “L’océan, c’est quoi l’océan?”⁶⁵ The man and the boy, played by Perrin and his real-life son, make a few dramatic appearances over the course of the film, such as when they walk through a museum full of taxidermized animals and replicas of extinct sea creatures. Perrin himself identifies the characters as “traces” of the “scénario de fiction” that he and Cluzaud wrote as a foundation for the film’s structure (Tobin 38). Apart from such overtly fictional devices, the techniques of montage and panoramic framing that are typical of Perrin’s documentaries are on display throughout the film’s striking undersea sequences.

Finally, Perrin and Cluzaud’s most recent collaboration, *Les Saisons* (*Seasons*), came out to less popular attention than their first two projects but still received some acclaim.⁶⁶ This film makes the least claim to an authentic view of the natural world of the five. The claim that it does

⁶⁵ The Anglophone version, narrated by Pierce Brosnan, translates this as, “What exactly is the ocean?”

⁶⁶ For a harsher critical take that unfavorably contrasts the film’s artificial conceit with the supposedly more sincere artifice of Perrin’s earlier films, see Peter Boger’s “The Truthiness of Nature Films: A Review of Perrin and Cluzaud’s “Seasons.””: “In the end, because Perrin and Cluzaud try to tell a more scientific story than they have previously, they make their film less appealing. Because they ask us to focus on the ecological authenticity of their film we only end up seeing just how staged and “truth-y” it really is” (Boger).

make, however, is arguably even more audacious: despite containing footage of exclusively present-day woodland animals, the film tries to represent, first, an idyllic prehuman state of nature, and second, the changes experienced by nonhuman life as human society began to encroach upon the wild forests. We see, for example, a group of wolves dramatically come face-to-face with a group of domesticated hunting dogs about halfway through the film. But because the artifice is so evident, the viewer becomes aware of an unfamiliar, seemingly prehistoric mode of animal being that still exists in the present day. “Au printemps de ce nouveau siècle, une nouvelle alliance est encore possible,”⁶⁷ opines the narrator over the film’s concluding shot, an eyeline match between a fawn and a young girl (a scene to which I will return later). As *Positif* reviewer Jean A. Gili writes : “Dans cette beauté de l'existant, pour ne pas dire de la création, réside l'espoir d'un monde apaisé, d'un monde peuplé d'hommes à l'écoute de leur environnement” (47).⁶⁸

I will explore each of these films more in the coming pages. My reading will track alongside the three-part structure indicated by Perrin himself in the interview he gave for *Positif*’s Yann Tobin following the release of *Oceans*. Although Perrin and Cluzaud’s crew abandoned the fictional script they wrote as a guide for their project, Perrin claims that they “rediscovered” it (“on l’a retrouvé tel quel”) in the process of post-production that led to the documentary’s final form: “première partie, l'opéra sauvage ; deuxième partie, l'impact humain, de la « mer d'abondance » du XVII^e siècle jusqu'à aujourd'hui, avec la botte du pêcheur, puis la pêche industrielle et la pollution ; troisième partie, l'espoir” (38).⁶⁹ These three parts, I will

⁶⁷ “In the spring of this new century, a new alliance is still possible” (translation mine).

⁶⁸ “In this beauty of the existing, which is not to say the creation, resides the hope of a world at peace, a world inhabited by humans listening to their environment” (translation mine).

⁶⁹ “first part, the wild opera; second part, the human impact, from the “abundant sea” of the 17th century until today, with the fishing boat, then industrial fishing and pollution; third part, hope” (translation mine).

argue, structure Perrin's other documentaries as well. Usually, this is visible in the narrative structure of the films themselves, although sometimes (in *Microcosmos* and *Le Peuple Singe*, the two films Perrin did not direct) the camera itself establishes a three-part *structure of identification* that is analogous to the narrative form.

These structures, I contend, are dialectical, and they offer a new way of interpreting the cinematic significance of the mirror stage, described by Lacan as "a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual's formation into history...a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation" (*Ecrits* 97). As I will explain in further detail, this "drama" of "fantasies" that affect "the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification" proceeds in three parts, starting with "a fragmented image of the body," continuing "to what [Lacan] will call an 'orthopaedic' form of its totality," and concluding with "the finally donned armour of an alienating identity that will mark [the subject's] entire mental development with its rigid structure" (*Ecrits* 97). Although Lacan, following Freud, frames this "rigid structure" as a socially imposed source of repression or neurosis, I am interested in how films like Perrin's documentaries may exploit cinematic identification in ways that yield new, more freeing structures. Such a structure would allow the transmutation of fiction into reality, forcing the anthropological machine (or "mirror-machine," as Timofeeva puts it) to work differently and more sustainably.

ii. A Totality of Fragments: Montage and the Animal Ideal in Océans

I will start by examining how the so-called "opéra sauvage" of Perrin's films maps onto a "fragmented image" that is presented as a mirror to the human viewer. When Perrin refers to a "wild opera" as the first part of a three-act narrative, I understand him to mean the large portion

of his films that he devotes to the beauty of animal life when it is allowed to thrive in an ideal habitat free of human interference (whether such an ideal habitat exists, especially when placed under the lens of documentarist filmmakers, is another question). These “operas” tend to incorporate the techniques of montage and metonymy to which I alluded earlier, and, in contrast to the anthropomorphic vignettes of the *Planet Earth* series, they tend to present animality as a holistic system composed of various interacting parts.

Take, for instance, a sequence in *Océans* that moves in rapid cuts between three vastly different animal collectives: A pod of dolphins; a flock of seabirds; and a shoal of fish. Rather than focusing on them as discrete species with discrete interests, the viewer tracks the animals in a single movement, cued audially through a gradual crescendo of brass instruments, which culminates with their convergence in a scene as jubilant as it is violent. Trumpets blare as the seabirds dive headfirst into the shoal of fish, scooping their prey into their beaks as the dolphins pierce their way into the same foray; the fish, meanwhile, appear not as terrified objects of the hunt but as participants in a dance, shifting in one direction and another, a collective body among other collective bodies. And just when the scene seems to attain some stability as a three-party encounter, new species—sharks, humpback whales, a seal—enter the dance. Finally, the scene ends with a rapid dissipation: it is not that all the fish were consumed (we can see that they were not), but rather that all the participants have simply moved on their way elsewhere. The closing shot focuses on a seabird who has made its plunge just a little too late to catch the last of the fish; the bird gazes at the camera for a moment, as though dazed and disappointed, before paddling back toward the surface.

In contrast to the views of conflict present in *Planet Earth*, the image in Perrin’s work moves too quickly between too many different groups of animals to permit the viewer’s static

identification with any single subject. This does not, however, by any means suggest that Perrin's films seek to prevent the viewer's identification with the animals on screen. As Perrin's collaborator Cluzaud indicates to anonymous reviewer "Benjamin B" of *American Cinematographer*, "the film's [*Océans*] point of view was defined by a desire to identify with its animal subjects." Rather, it suggests that this identification is dynamic, traveling along multiple lines of perspective so as to confound the typical filmic dichotomy between viewing subjects and viewed objects. Cluzaud explains, "The two keywords were 'proximity' and 'dynamism.' We told the operators to seek out the animals' gazes and eyelines. We spent a lot of time and effort to catch an animal's gaze and film it like a character. I think what distinguishes this film in particular is that we are dealing with characters: you experience the animals differently because they are filmed differently" (B 41-42).

Insofar as Perrin's films offer "proximity" to an animal's gaze—the seabird at the end of the sequence just described, for example—they resemble the BBC's documentaries by offering the viewer a similar sense of identification with a cinematic apparatus that transcends the limitations of the human eye. Insofar as the apparatus is presented as "dynamic," however, it promotes identification with a process of movement that displaces the viewer from any position of omniscient perspective. We are thrown into the flow of images without even the guidance of a human narrator. By the time the camera fixates long enough on a single bird's gaze for us to recognize it as the image of a subject, we have experienced such a sense of frenetic fragmentation that we project this onto the bird, such that our sense of identification with the animal depends not on any mastery over the visual object but rather a shared immersion in, and vulnerability to, an environment that we cannot clearly distinguish from the bodies that constitute

it. And it is this vulnerability that fascinates the viewer, fixing the attention and leading to further identification with a transcendent flow of movement.

The effect of montage is crucial to this atypical sense of “dynamic” identification with the animal. One can look to Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein’s influential claim that “montage is not constructed on the *individual dominant* but takes the sum of *stimuli* of all the stimulants as the dominant.” In other words, montage focuses the viewer’s attention not solely on the contents of individual shots (in this case, individual animal subjects) but also on the metonymic associations established between them (in this case, something like collective belonging, orchestral synchronicity, and unwavering movement toward a field of convergence (or, as Deleuze and Guattari would say, a “field of consistency”—more on this in the discussion of “becoming-animal” later). As a result, the viewer can actually obtain more information about each individual shot than if the camera had lingered on a single subject; we cannot identify with the seabird’s confusion without also identifying with its place in the larger frame of its environment. As Eisenstein puts it, “the resonance of the shot as a whole, as a complex unity of all its component stimulants, is taken to be the general sign of the shot” (183).

Lippit, citing Eisenstein’s work to argue that the movements of cinema capture and supplement the movements of animal life, notes that Eisenstein’s “physiological” account of cinema’s “origin...bears the trace of an organic metaphor, an attempt to describe technological animation in animist terms” (193). Eisenstein, employing a curious metaphor of genetic transmission or copulation between shots, attributes the power of the “stimuli” linked together through montage to a “reflex physiological essence” felt by the viewer (Eisenstein 183). And indeed, Lippit is right to lament the potential transformation of real, living animals into lifeless “semiotic facilities” whose purpose is to grant a physiology to the cinematic apparatus (197).

This is the same illusion of simulation or spectrality that thinkers like Berger, Bousé, and Chris attribute to the animal image. I do not want to claim that Perrin's films avoid this temptation entirely. The power of the filmic eye here does exceed that of any organic animal's eye in a potentially misleading fashion; for example, one can point to sequences of flight in *Le Peuple migrateur* where the camera alternates between tracking *alongside* the birds and tracking *above* them. Nevertheless, I contend that Perrin's deployment of montage ultimately resists subordinating the living animal's perspective to that of the apparatus by manifesting the dialectical structure of identification itself.

To show what I mean, I will return to Lacan's framing of the mirror stage as "a temporal dialectic." What is striking about the temporality of the mirror stage is that the sequence of events in the "drama" that materializes with the fantasy of an ideal ego is different from the sequence in which the subject imagines those events. Whereas the "drama" begins with the "insufficiency" of the "fragmented image" that supposedly precedes the mirror stage, the drama itself is not imaginable without the infant's "jubilant assumption of his specular image" (*Ecrits x*). In linear or causal time, the "orthopaedic...totality" of the image comes *before* the anxiety of "le corps morcelé." As Laplanche and Pontalis write, "Lacan sees the mirror phase as responsible, *retroactively*, for the emergence of the phantasy of the body-in-pieces" (Laplanche and Pontalis 251, italics mine). It is only by seeing oneself as an object *for another* that the possibility of insufficiency becomes something one works to avoid. The projective "anticipation" that accompanies the desire to realize an ideal-I only materializes through the retroactive projection of a fragmented state. As Jane Gallop puts it, identification with the image "is the source not only for what follows but also for what precedes. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction" (Gallop 121).

Perrin's films reenact the drama of identification by framing animality as an ego ideal for the human viewer. The identification with a movement that transcends the boundaries of species is "jubilant" at first, as though one recognizes oneself more truly and fully than ever before in the vastness of planetary life. It is not insignificant that the film opens with a shot of Perrin's son gazing at the ocean; to see the world reflected back to oneself as a mirror image is to identify with the perspective of a child. But the feeling of fullness cannot last; a radical alterity haunts all these images just offscreen, as Perrin's narration informs the viewer once the sequence I have described ends: "Au temps des grandes découvertes, la mer était sans limites, les ressources inépuisables...un monde dont [les navigateurs] ne soupçonnaient pas le foisonnement, la diversité, le mystère."⁷⁰ With this statement, the viewer identifies the symphonic beauty it has just witnessed as something of the past, something one is about to lose. One anticipates, without knowing it, the human's arrival as that which will impose "limits" on and exhaust the "resources" of the plethoric sea.

As the film nears the halfway point, the focus starts to narrow, such that the camera spends longer times with individual groups of animals, and the animal world starts to splinter and show signs of disharmony. For instance, we watch as predatory birds snatch up newly-hatched sea turtles one by one—all except a sole survivor—as they flee desperately toward the ocean; we also watch land animals uprooted from their habitats and sent into the sea on trees that float away during a tropical storm. The sense of abundant grandeur persists to some degree; the narration romanticizes the survivors as "involuntary travelers" who, benefiting from "fate," now have the

⁷⁰ At the time of the great discoveries, the sea was without limits, its resources inexhaustible...a world whose proliferation, diversity, mystery its navigators could not suspect" (translation mine).

chance to “lose themselves in the immensity” and “freedom” of the oceans.⁷¹ Nonetheless, at least for this viewer, these scenes provoke a sense of anxiety or even boredom, as though the montage is losing its power of coalescence, and the terror of fragmentation is creeping in. One knows already that one is watching something other than a straight documentary. The film’s opening shot of Perrin’s son sets up a narrative frame, such that one knows the film has posed a question (“c’est quoi, l’océan?”) and has yet to answer it. One wants to appreciate the scenes of stillness that arrive about an hour into the film—shots of whales beneath mountains, their songs gliding into the air—but one has spent so long jumping between continents and species that it would be easy for one to experience a sense of detachment or even disinterest by this point.

And then, without clear warning, a barrier drops between us and the animals. The second act of the film—“l’impact humain”—begins with a montage in which whales, sharks, and turtles trapped by fishing crews look at us from behind meshed nets, sometimes banging their heads directly against the camera. One knows with sudden sharpness that what one had is lost. As the viewer watches whales struck by harpoons, and as the film cuts to Perrin and his son walking through a museum, looking at reproductions of extinct species, one begins, as Perrin says at one point, “to explore the mirror’s other side.”⁷²

⁷¹ In the French, “pour conquérir de nouveaux territoires, la vie saisit toutes les opportunités. Le moindre incident : le hasard. A la faveur d’un orage, sur de frêles esquifs arrachés à la côte, des voyageurs involontaires partent sur les océans, à l’aventure. Ils vont se perdre dans l’immensité, ou bien, au gré des vents et des courants, ils apporteront la vie sur d’autres rivages”

⁷² “Rêve devenu réalité ; explorer l’autre côté du miroir,” as Perrin intones over a shot of a scuba diver.

iii. **Before the Mirror: Seeing the Negative in *Le Peuple singe* and *Le Peuple migrant***

In thinking about how Perrin's films prompt their viewers to experience the "human impact" on wildlife as the "other side" of a mirror, it is useful to make a comparison with the sense of "nudity" and "passivity" Derrida experiences when seen by the animal:

Yes, the wholly other, more other than any other that they call an animal, for example a cat, when it looks at me naked, at the instant when I introduce myself, present myself to it-or, earlier, at that strange moment when, before the event, before even wanting it or knowing it myself, I am passively presented to it as naked, seen and seen naked, before even seeing myself seen by a cat. Before even seeing myself or knowing myself seen naked. I am presented to it before even introducing myself. Nudity is nothing other than that passivity, the involuntary exhibition of the self. (Derrida, *The Animal* 11)

Later in the address, Derrida goes on to compare the "involuntary exhibition of the self" before the animal, the "wholly other," to the experience of standing before a mirror, as one metaphorically does when engaging in autobiographical speech:

And can I finally show myself naked in the sight of what they call by the name of animal? Should I show myself naked when, concerning me, looking at me, is the living creature they call by the common, general and singular name of the animal? Henceforth I will reflect (on) the same question by introducing a mirror. I import a full-length mirror [*une psyché*] into the scene. Wherever some autobiographical play is being enacted there has to be a psyche, a mirror that reflects me naked from head to toe. The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the same mirror? Is there animal narcissism? But cannot this cat also be, deep within her eyes, my primary mirror? (*The Animal* 50-51)

The resonance with Lacan, one of Derrida's main interlocutors in his deconstruction of the anthropocentric *cogito*, is obvious. The animal is the "primary mirror" for Derrida, the purest of reflections, at once prehuman, wholly human, and wholly other-than-human. With this mirror in mind, I will go on now to discuss sequences in two of Perrin's other films, *Le Peuple singe* and *Le Peuple migrant*, which I think go far in pushing their viewers to experience a sense of immediacy, passivity, and nakedness before the animal's gaze.

I will start with the concluding ten or so minutes of *Le Peuple singe*. Whereas *Océans* is something of a Hollywoodized production that overlays the dialectic of identification onto the conventional three-act structure described by Perrin, *Le Peuple singe* is something of a horror film in disguise, both beginning and ending with ominous voiceovers that set a strange tone for the idyllic montages that span most of its 80-minute runtime. The narrator, Michel Piccoli, opens the film with a factual statement that would seem objective and innocuous enough if not for the haunting chimes and bass drum heard behind his low intonations and, immediately after, the nighttime howling of monkeys whose outlines are barely visible under the moon: “Tous les êtres vivants...appartiennent à un seul et immense arbre généalogique. S’ils occupent des branches parfois très éloignées les unes des autres, ils ne partagent pas moins la même origine vieille de près de quatre milliards d’années. Dans cet immense mouvement des espaces et du temps, le rameau le plus proche du nôtre est sans aucun doute celui des singes.”⁷³

After this oddly alienating introduction, the soundtrack softens, and the viewer has over an hour’s worth of reasons to identify with the monkeys and apes on screen. One watches the animals eating, playing, resting, fighting, and mating in ways that resemble the human’s, with Piccoli’s occasional interventions as narrator serving to reinforce the identification; even the differences brought out between species are compared to the differences among humans. The last of these interventions, delivered as a chimpanzee “fishes” termites out of their mound with a modified stick, serves to grant the nonhuman primate perhaps the most privileged and exclusive of human capacities (aside from maybe generative speech, whatever one understands that to

⁷³ “All living beings...belong to a single immense genealogical tree. If the branches they occupy are sometimes very distant from one another, they nonetheless share the same ancient origin of around four billion years. In this immense movement of spaces and times, the branch nearest to ours is without any doubt that of the monkeys and apes” (translation mine).

mean), tool use and technical creativity: “les chimpanzés ne sont pas de simples utilisateurs d’outils. En cas de besoin ils sont aussi capables de les fabriquer.”⁷⁴

It is then during the film’s final sequence, which begins uneventfully with a family of gorillas stripping foliage for food, that the tool or technical object is reflected against the animal as though it is impelled by vindictiveness. It starts with the sound of a helicopter overhead, which prompts the gorillas to look up and then run for shelter. As the sound intensifies, different primates—orangutans, macaques, gibbons, and chimpanzees who are likely thousands of miles apart but brought into a common space through the editing—appear to come out to gaze at the sky before looking for shelter themselves.⁷⁵ A brief silence follows, but their fearful eyes seem to look both directly at and behind the viewer, as though the object that prompts them to hide in the trees and hold their babies closer threatens us, too. The propeller resumes, and then, with an abrupt screeching, the camera cuts to show, for just a second, an electric sawblade scything into a tree. Several more of these quick cuts to sawblades alternate with shots of the primates escaping out of and between trees; they continue to implicate us in the violence with their gaze toward and beside the camera.

As the sequence escalates, two trees crash to the ground. The first falls toward us, placing us in a position where we can identify with the animals’ terror in response to the mechanized destruction of their habitats. The second, however, about a minute later, falls away from us, suggesting that we ourselves have merged with the technical object and given ourselves away to

⁷⁴ “Chimpanzees are not merely users of tools. In case of need, they are also capable of making them” (translation mine).

⁷⁵ Since the sound is continuous, it is at the very least clear that the same helicopter is not flying over all of the primates’ habitats, and it is very possible that the sound effect is a complete fabrication added in post-production. This would be a point of commonality between Perrin’s films and other wildlife documentaries, including the *Planet Earth* films. For more on this practice, see Karen Collins’s article, “Calls of the Wild?: ‘Fake’ Sound Effects and Cinematic Realism in BBC David Attenborough nature documentaries” (*The Soundtrack*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2017, pp. 59-77).

its violence, standing in its place. The screen at last cuts to black, and Piccoli, his voice as haunting as ever, explains, “La disparition progressive de la forêt vierge repousse les singes dans un espace qui risque bientôt d’appartenir à la légende.”⁷⁶ He then concludes the film by quoting 18th century naturalist Georges Louis-Leclerc, Comte de Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle*: “Plus l’espèce humaine se multiplie, se perfectionne, plus les animaux sentent le poids d’un empire aussi terrible qu’absolu. Mais que peuvent-ils contre des êtres qui savent les trouver sans les voir, et les abattre sans les approcher ?”⁷⁷

Although the quote explicitly names the human species, what the camera has shown are not human bodies but rather the apparatuses humans use to amplify their violence. The sawblade is the representative for a de-personified “empire,” the tools of which have the power to “find” subjects “without seeing them” and to “attack them without approaching them.” By placing the human viewer in an indeterminate space between the terrified animal and the unthinking machine, the film’s final montage compels its human viewers to wonder how they, too, are under attack and invasion by a power that transcends the perceptive faculties of any animal, human or nonhuman. The power is spectral, and it turns those who encounter it into specters themselves. This power is the power of the apparatus, be it the sawblade, the camera, or the gun, to track and capture the beings it requires to advance its purpose.

⁷⁶ “The progressive disappearance of the virgin forest pushes the monkeys back into a space that could soon belong to legend” (translation mine).

⁷⁷ “The more the human species multiplies and perfects itself, the more the animals feel the weight of an empire as terrible as it is absolute. But can they do against beings who know how to find them without seeing them, and to attack them without approaching them?” The attribution of this statement, indicated by the blue corner text, to “Buffon / sciences naturelles / 1740” is strange. The statement actually quotes, with slight alteration (substituting “les animaux” for “ils”) two disconnected (and inversely ordered) sentences found on two different pages of Tome VI in Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle* (Buffon 509, 508). The *Histoire Naturelle* did not begin until 1749, and Tome VI was not published until 1755.

The effect of the sequence is one of nakedness, passivity *before* the mirror, i.e. before the mirror even presents us to ourselves as image, such that we can fully appreciate what Derrida means when he says he and his cat “can find [themselves] caught in the same mirror.” The orangutan whose efforts to shield herself and her child dominate the film’s final frames presents herself to us as what Derrida called the “primary mirror,” the (animal, Imaginary) mirror that comes before the (technical, Symbolic) mirror. To put this in more Hegelian terms, the human experiences the truth of humanity, which is to say its particular form of animality, in the possibility of its own negation. The form of Being shared by human and animal comes to know itself through the shared threat of annihilation when subjected to the violence of the technical “empire.”

Ending as abruptly as it does, *Le Peuple singe* seems to trust its viewers to have identified with their fellow primates to such an extent that they will initiate their own resistance against the technical specter. The “hope” that concludes Perrin’s usual three-act structure is absent from this earliest of his films, or rather it is only a presence that lingers in the film’s afterimage. Before I turn to how hope manifests in some of Perrin’s other films, however, let me turn to a sequence in *Le Peuple migrateur*, which displays the human’s impact on the “wild opera” of animality through the actual presence of human bodies on screen.

Le Peuple migrateur differs from Perrin’s other films in that it never fully detaches the environments of its animal subjects from the environments of humans. The film begins on a farm, and it tracks the different flocks of birds as they fly not only over forests and oceans but also past cities and highways. In some cases, we even see humans helping the birds. The film therefore suggests that what differentiates the birds from us—and thus what allows them to stand in for an ideal image, on which we can project our fantasies—is not their position or location but

their mode of being. This mode of being is the mode of migration or an eternal return, a return that the film encourages its viewers to desire from the very first line spoken by the narrator:

“L’histoire des oiseaux migrateurs est celle d’une promesse: la promesse du retour.”⁷⁸ For the human viewer, this return would manifest as a return to a life that, like the birds’ (supposedly), directs itself toward “une seule nécessité: survivre. Leur migration est un combat pour la vie.”⁷⁹

But the film argues that it is the human, unsurprisingly, who prevents such a return, interrupting the pure flow of migration and therefore working against, rather than for, life. A sequence of three crucial scenes about midway through the film makes clear just what it is about the human that works to negate life. In the first scene, a group of hunters shoot down a flock of birds one by one; with the first gunshot, the soundtrack halts, and we watch the camera shift away from tracking the flock as a whole to tracking the separate descents of individual fallen birds, landing at last with a view of the hunters from a distance, their bodies obscured in shadow, reflected to us as a sort of negative image, the most violent and hidden parts of ourselves. In the next scene, a group of red-breasted geese decide to take a nighttime drink at an unfortunate spot: a coastal oil rig. As they glide across the water, the rig’s outline is shown reflected on the surface, as though we ourselves look down on the birds from (or as) the violent structure. The scene reaches its inevitable conclusion when one of the geese mistakes oil for water and gets trapped, unable to fly away with the rest of the flock. Finally, in the third scene, and perhaps the most revealing of the three, a flock of graylag geese lands on a lake where, ostensibly, one of their species floats alone. One of the geese approaches the loner and appears to try communicating. The camera cuts quickly between their eyelines. After a few honks with no

⁷⁸ “The story of migratory birds is that of a promise: the promise of return” (translation mine).

⁷⁹ “a sole necessity: survival. Their migration is a fight for life” (translation mine).

response, the goose seems to realize that he is facing a plastic decoy and honks a warning to the group. A dog then runs toward them, and shots ring out from the trees. Most of the flock flies away unharmed, but at least one bird is brought down.

What these scenes, viewed in sequence, show us is that the image itself is what prevents us from realizing the blissful mode of animal being that we have projected onto the screen. It is through the mirror image, embodied here in the decoy duck, that we see ourselves as insufficient, at risk of falling into fragments unless we make ourselves whole in the way that we think the Other wants us to be. This, in itself, is unavoidable; it is in the viewing subject's nature to experience a gap between its ideal image and its substance. The problem, suggests Perrin, is that we have installed the Other in the place of technical mastery: We want to be the oil rig; we want to be the gun; and we want, although it is disputable how well these films are able to address the danger of this fact, to be the camera.

But in our quest to become these objects, we destroy ourselves. The need, then, is to rethink the Other, such that It mirrors an alternative form of becoming-Other: a becoming-human that is not simply a becoming-apparatus but also a becoming-animal. Is this, then, the hope toward which Perrin's films guide us?

iv. Anti-Dialectical Hope: Becoming-With in *Microcosmos* and *Les Saisons*

I turn at last to the two remaining wildlife documentaries in Perrin's oeuvre, *Les Saisons* and *Microcosmos : Le Peuple de l'herbe*. Despite my argument that Perrin's films largely conform to a Lacanian framework of identification, I recognize there is something fundamentally anti-Lacanian in the very notion of "hope." In acknowledging that Perrin's films valorize hope, and in assenting to the value of hope myself, I am in some sense underscoring a contradiction in

Perrin's films, insofar as I am resisting the notion that lasting happiness is impossible or unethical, a mere fantasy provided by the Other toward which one always strives but which can never be attained, precisely because it is not one's own. As Žižek says, "We don't really want to get what we think that we want" (Big Think).

What I would say in response, and what I think Perrin's films affirm in their emphasis on the hope for a better world that would include animals, is that one can always think more clearly through what one wants, which is to say what the Other wants, and as a result want not merely the final goal but also the process in reaching that goal. This enjoyment of the process is, of course, a possibility Žižek acknowledges in the form of a Hegelian reconciliation, a coming to terms with the antagonisms at the core of subjectivity, but he and other Lacanians would resist framing such reconciliation as a resolution toward hope or happiness. The possibility that the process itself could become the goal, a source of persistent (rather than merely episodic) joy, is a difficult one for Lacan to consider; to think such joy, one must turn to the Deleuzo-Guattarian logic of becoming-animal.

Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming offers a resolution to the Lacanian ego's dissatisfaction through its promise of a non-dialectical real. Becoming at once precedes, determines, and escapes the subject. It proceeds not through imitation or reproduction of a fantasy imposed by a big Other but through transversal movements. As they write in "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible":

Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here?...What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not; and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other it becomes is not. This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as

taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first. (238)

My analysis of Perrin's films will conclude with the argument that their apparatuses manifest the mutual becomings of their human viewers and their animal subjects, which is to say they make clear "the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both" (293). I have suggested the same of *Planet Earth II* and other wildlife films, which is why I do not dismiss the political value of those films outright. However, Perrin's films differ in that they situate the movement of becoming within a dialectic of identification, such that the viewer both understands how the apparatus separates the human from the animal (a separation that is ignored by the *Planet Earth* films) and looks to the movement of becoming as a potential solution, a means of fleeing the human-animal duality that allows for shared thriving.

I will start with *Microcosmos*. *Microcosmos*, I noted earlier, is an exception among Perrin's films in that it relies far less, if at all, on the dialectical structure of narrative that Perrin located in *Océans*. Instead of first provoking the viewer to identify with a sort of cohesive infinitude that is projected onto animality, and then interrupting the cohesion by reflecting the mirror back onto the human's apparatus-based otherness, *Microcosmos* plunges the viewer into a world so defined by radical otherness, what Deleuze would consider the "intensity" of "pure difference," (*Difference and Repetition* 144)⁸⁰ that the presence of humans or machines onscreen is not necessary. *Microcosmos* devotes the entirety of its short 70 minute, nearly narration-less runtime to the "wild opera," to convincing the viewer that the world of arthropods is indeed a

⁸⁰ Deleuze contrasts qualitative, indivisible, sensible intensities (e.g. temperatures, speeds, emotions) with divisible, quantitative, measurable extensities like space and motion. Deleuze's Spinozist interpretation of univocal Being defines "intensity...as pure difference in itself, that which is at once both imperceptible for empirical sensibility which grasps intensity only already covered or mediated by the quality to which it gives rise, and at the same time that which can be perceived only from the point of view of a transcendental sensibility which apprehends it immediately in the encounter" (144). I suggest here that there is a certain affective enjoyment one experiences in watching these insects engaged in their quotidian actions that transcends the "empirical sensibility" of mere microscopic observation.

mirror to the world of humans. Directors Nuridsany and Pérennou frame becoming, the movement or in-betweenness on display in the insect's being, as itself the source of a transcendent hope.

All this said, the film can only sustain the viewer's fascination with its vision by exploiting the binary structure of identification inherent in the filmic eye. It does so through the establishment of analogous relations, orderings of differences that allow the viewer to identify with the insect world by traveling between two *planes*, the macro- and microcosmic.⁸¹ The film invites analogic identification in its opening sequence: it opens with an aerial shot above the clouds, as though we are in an airplane; as the camera swoops down, the clouds smoothly fade into trees with fairly congruent shapes, which then fade into the blades of grass of a field, which then fade into the segments of a single blade of grass, climbing on top of which we watch the segmented body of a caterpillar moving in fits and starts. Beneath it all, a child sings, seeming to promise something both familiar and perpetually new. This sort of fractal, involutionary zooming-in primes the viewer to draw comparisons between movements on the microscopic and macroscopic planes. These comparisons are likely to alternate between the mechanistic and the anthropomorphic. The movements of caterpillars (set to a sort of plodding, repetitive backbeat) resemble the movements of a freight train; the movements of two snails during coitus (set to

⁸¹ The geometric imagery of planes (or rather, to evoke the more explicitly cinematic connotations of the original French, *plans*) is central to Deleuze and Guattari's explanation of becomings. Although it is not right, they say, to think of becoming as something that occurs between two agential "beings" (beings are "molar," they write, whereas "all becomings are molecular" (275)), one *can* think of it as a process between two *plans*: the "plane of consistency" (or, as they call it elsewhere, the "plane of immanence") and the "plane of organization." They describe the usual relation between the two planes thus: "The plane of organization is constantly working away at the plane of consistency, always trying to plug the lines of flight, stop or interrupt the movements of deterritorialization, weigh them down, re-stratify them, reconstitute forms and subjects in a dimension of depth. Conversely, the plane of consistency is constantly extricating itself from the plane of organization, causing particles to spin off the strata, scrambling forms by dint of speed or slowness, breaking down functions by means of assemblages or microassemblages" (270). Becoming happens when molecular phenomena "jump from" the plane of organization to the plane of consistency. "It is in jumping from one plane to the other, or from the relative thresholds to the absolute threshold that coexists with them, that the imperceptible becomes necessarily perceived" (282).

opera singing) resemble the movements of humans doing the same. The viewer thus comes to identify a mechanical animality at the core of the human.

As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, however, becoming is more than analogy or imitation; it is, rather, the in-between space of the movement that takes place in analogy and mimicry. For becoming to persist, there has to be an affective remainder, an intensity that lingers with the viewer. This intensity materializes in the film's final sequence: for close to three minutes, a crane fly,⁸² having just completed its pupal metamorphosis, breaks, movement by barely perceptible movement, through the surface of a pond. The head emerges first; bent down initially, it appears to watch its own reflection as its body rises little by little. The music swells as the legs break through and the antennae pop out, one at a time, and it folds its front limbs as though in prayer. Finally, it stands in perfect stillness on the water; it appears Christlike and, in its translucence, beyond Christlike. But as soon as one identifies something supersensible in the fly's metamorphosis, something both profoundly human in the insect and inhuman in oneself, it flies off in an instant. One feels with frustration the desire to follow it into the sky, but here the film ends. All that is shown before the credits is a shot of the sunrise above the grass, with a rooster's crow, church bells, and children's voices heard in the distance. The invitation to flight remains, but the becoming-insect that will allow this flight has escaped the film and resides now in the viewer. The day that has dawned will become what it is meant to be.

But not all of Perrin's films leave the question of how this new becoming might look so open to interpretation. *Les Saisons*, in some ways Perrin's most conventional wildlife film, ends with some of the same explicit pleas for conservation that one might find at the end of a *Planet Earth* episode. As the film's relatively structured narrative, a 90-minute condensation of the

⁸² Also known as a mosquito hawk; identified as "Le Moustique Cousin achevant sa métamorphose" in the closing credits (translated literally, "the cousin mosquito completing its metamorphosis").

Holocene as experienced by the animals of the forest, winds down toward its third act of “hope,” the narrator speaks over images of urbanization and war that, in the span of just five to ten minutes, represent the most devastating impacts of the Anthropocene; the narrator marks this epoch’s arrival by noting, “l’homme est devenu une force géologique. Il modifie la nature et les saisons.”⁸³ A deer then walks into a denuded forest as the narrator asks, “Que reste-t-il de l’âge d’or de la forêt ?”⁸⁴ The question calls back to, first, his declaration of such a “golden age” at the beginning of the film, where we watch the tundra melt and the forests take its place as they did at the end of the last Ice Age, and second, the supposed end of this golden age later in the film, when we see humans proliferate, develop agriculture, and begin mass deforestation. The film then cuts to a shot of Paris, and the narrator raises the possibility of hope for a new relation to the nonhuman world: “Il y a dix mille ans, s’étendait ici une forêt peuplée d’animaux sauvages. Si nous sommes capables de construire des villes éternelles, nous devons être capables de préserver la part sauvage de notre monde.”⁸⁵

The irony in this expression of hope is that it takes our capacity to “construct eternal cities” for granted, when in fact the infrastructure of our cities will fall apart if we do not, as Perrin puts it, “preserve the wild part of our world.” The film therefore asks the viewer to enter into a position of mediation between a transcendent urbanizing intelligence and a fragile “wild part.” Only in submitting oneself to and serving both can the human survive. And what the final few shots of the film will show, I suggest, is that Perrin frames the very act of viewing films as itself an act of mediation between these two forces.

⁸³ “Man has become a geological force. He modifies nature and the seasons” (translation mine).

⁸⁴ “What remains of the forest’s golden age?” (translation mine)

⁸⁵ “Ten thousand years ago, there stood here a forest inhabited by wild animals. If we are capable of constructing eternal cities, we must be capable of preserving the wild part of our world” (translation mine).

Indeed, the very next question the narrator poses concerns the gaze (or at least the look): “Quel regard portons-nous sur nos compagnons de planète ?” – literally, “what gaze do we turn on our planetary companions?”⁸⁶ Perrin’s films draw attention to the difference between a gaze that captures the subject and a look of mutual recognition, whereby one sees oneself and the animal “caught” or captured by “the same mirror.” As I mentioned earlier, the metaphor of *capture* is one that Deleuze and Guattari apply to processes of becoming: “The act of becoming is a capturing [*une capture*], a possession, a plus-value, but never a reproduction or an imitation” (*Kafka* 13). Antoine Traisnel, in his dissertation, draws a contrast between the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense of capture, a capture-in-motion that “possess[es]” human and animal alike, and the static capture (imposed on the animal who is seen as poor in world) we find in Heidegger’s work: “Viewed as an *active* process, capture dissolves or at least destabilizes the traditional lines of demarcation between the animal and the human. On the other hand, taken to be the permanent condition of the animal (as in Heidegger’s sequestered animal), capture consolidates the boundaries between the human and the animal” (*After the Animal* 6). And as he reminds us in *Capture*, animals have long “actively “participated” (albeit not always voluntarily) in shaping modern technologies of capture” (*Capture*). Even as apparatuses of tracking and capture serve a crucial function in the destruction of animal life, they also elicit the sense of identification necessary to halt such destruction.

So long as the human tries to conquer the animal, nothing but mutual annihilation under an apparatus that subsumes them both will result. But when the human gives itself over to the animal, an apparatus of mutual respect (in the literal etymological sense of mutual regard or “looking back”) can emerge. As Donna Haraway writes, “If we appreciate the foolishness of

⁸⁶ Figuratively, the *regard* here is something like “consideration” that the English speaker would “show.”

human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming with—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” (244). These “contact zones” often materialize with the help of visual apparatuses; in her analysis of National Geographic’s Crittercam (a camera similar to the one attached to the falcon in *Planet Earth II*), Haraway argues that humans and animals “become with” one another when the apparatus serves as a means of respect, as they and the technologies enter into “infoldings”: “technologies are not mediations, something in between us and another bit of the world. Rather, technologies are organs, full partners in what Merleau-Ponty called “infoldings of the flesh”” (249). One can also point here to Karen Barad’s theory of agential realism, which adopts the largely Foucauldian definition of apparatuses as “material-discursive practices—causal intra-actions through which matter is iteratively and differentially articulated, reconfiguring the material-discursive field of possibilities and impossibilities in the ongoing dynamics of intra-activity that is agency.” Barad argues that apparatuses are at once “material (re)configurings or discursive practices that produce material phenomena in their differential becoming” *and* “themselves phenomena...constituted through particular practices that are perpetually open to rearrangements, rearticulations, and other reworkings...[and] always in the process of intra-acting with other apparatuses”—including human or nonhuman agencies (170). It is not the technology but our own agential relation of becoming that serves as a mediation between human and nonhuman. All of this, to reframe it in terms of capture, guides us to what Derrida says of the specter in *Specters of Marx*: “To capture it, is that not to be captivated by it?” (165).

One experiences such becoming, infolding, intra-action, or captivation in one of the final shots of *Les Saisons*: the look exchanged between a young girl and a fawn, foraging with her mother, to which I alluded earlier. The scene begins by tracking the girl from behind. As she

sneaks into a grove, the viewer follows her in the position of the camera; we see the two deer's faces before we see the girl's, suggesting the human's perspective is one of technical surveillance. But when the fawn's eye looks toward the camera, and the camera cuts back to the girl, her eyes wide with wonder and self-consciousness, the apparatus changes its function, entering into the movement of becoming, of in-betweenness. "Au printemps de ce nouveau siècle," says the narrator, "une nouvelle alliance est encore possible." This alliance requires not just mere looking but also being looked at. The apparatus, when it enters into this particular position between human and animal, escapes conflict and conquest. In the film's final shot, the camera tracks the doe and her fawn a few steps, but then stops, allowing them to walk away into the trees; there is no more hunting, no more chasing, no more disclosing.

Les Saisons is, as I noted earlier, arguably Perrin's most problematic film, deploying and even exploiting living animals as actors in a drama that begins with a fictional state of nature, a "golden age" that only makes sense to those who periodize their and others' histories. For the same reason, however, it is his most provocative film, and the most revealing in relation to the other works. Nature and culture alike emerge as both real and unreal, precarious and enduring, contingent and universal. By the closing shot, one has entered into the position of a third, a plus-value, a resolution of the dialectic between animal and apparatus. One becomes, going forward, the animal apparatus.

Conclusion: How Images Cross the Gates, But Must Then Themselves Be Crossed

It would be fair to ask why I have chosen to conclude the final chapter of this dissertation, a dissertation that has largely employed a Derridean deconstructionist methodology, with a reflection on becoming-animal, a term that evokes Deleuzian assemblage theory and may

seem to come from the very materialist or “grand mechanistic” “tradition” that Derrida challenges (*The Animal* 76). It is because becoming, as that which materializes between two planes, evokes the material *im*-materiality of the spectral animal, of the specter who, as Baudrillard writes, accomplishes the “function of the “passer” or the “go-between” [passeur],” who helps us to realize “play in a universe without common measure” (Baudrillard 33-34).

Despite the differences between these films, my analyses of *Planet Earth II* and the works of Jacques Perrin have arrived at a single, seemingly paradoxical conclusion: The work of wildlife filmmaking is, on the one hand, dependent on a semiotic violence that is at the heart of physical violence against animals; but on the other, revelatory of an alternative space for becoming that could put an end to such violence. To make sense of this paradox, one can juxtapose the insights made roughly four decades ago by Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes regarding the photographic image. Sontag and Barthes agree that the photograph in some sense records the death of its living subject, but they often take radically different, though equally correct, tones. Whereas Sontag focuses on the photograph’s violence (“To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as a camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder” (10)) Barthes focuses on its capacity to resurrect the trace of a prior life (“The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star” (80)).

If the photograph – and by extension, film – is at once a murder and a resurrected trace of its subject, then this would mean that the image and its subject alike share a capacity to transgress one another’s boundaries, in the manner of a specter who captures its host without becoming equivalent to it. The image itself is what crosses the “gates of truth,” to return to Timofeeva’s framing of the division between human and animal. And if one acknowledges that the animal’s image is at once the violent denial of its absence and the expansion of its presence, one can enjoy, respect, and still critique these documentaries without contradiction. It is possible that the wildlife film is a vital but nonetheless inadequate, perhaps temporary, phase in the human’s becoming-animal. Perrin’s films may be more honest about the limitations of the human perspective, but they, like the BBC’s films, do not make as strong an argument for the value of continuing to make such films as they do for the value of viewing and thinking through them. I do not mean to suggest that the act of making a wildlife film is inherently unethical, but that it may be unethical to do so without thinking through and exposing the symbolic violence of images and apparatuses.

Regrettably, I have not had the space in this chapter to reflect on other apparatuses of image-making beyond film; these would include not only other visual media like the photograph, painting, or sculpture, but also the imagistic apparatus of the book as text and, indeed, apparatuses that are only beginning to materialize—such as augmented or virtual reality—or those that have yet to come—such as, perhaps, some sort of direct brain-to-brain communication across species, a fantasy made more real by the seeming promises of a technology like Elon Musk’s Neuralink. In all these cases, one can appreciate these images as information, instances of becoming. One can indeed incorporate a trace of what the animal sees or feels, and one can then act in the service of a becoming-animal that evades the need for apparatuses of violence.

But one must not mistake the trace for the totality of a becoming, for the actual seeing and the actual feeling. One must cross the images of truth, which is to say play with them, to find the truth of the animal's freedom.

CONCLUSION – SOVEREIGN ANIMALS: ARTIFICIAL SOULS AND THE HUMAN'S AUTOIMMUNE WRITING OF THE SELF

This dissertation has suggested spectrality as a metaphor for the at once synchronous and diachronous processes of identification humans have deployed in the construction of their individual and collective autobiographies in relation to animals: I am *and* am not an animal just as I am and am not a specter. I have framed these processes as *autobiographical strategies*, insofar as they answer Derrida's call for a "strategy" that "would consist in pluralizing and varying the "as such"" in the Heideggerian formulation of being and mortality "as such," which the human alone, supposedly, understands. "[I]nstead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of," these novels, essays, and films demonstrate "that the human is, in a way, similarly "deprived," by means of a privation that is not a privation, and that there is no pure and simple "as such"" (*The Animal* 160). The various formal and thematic approaches to spectrality explored in this dissertation help us "to get out of [the] opposition...between the "as such" and the "not as such,"" the opposition which underlies anthropocentric narratives and the denial of nonhuman animal worlds (156).

I introduced this dissertation with a reading of Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, a text that I argue signals a rupture in Derrida's thought on the self in its relation to an alterity that it not only follows but fundamentally *is*. It is fitting, then, that I conclude with a brief

commentary on *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida's final seminar, in which the figure of the sovereign, "the ipseity of the *ipse*...he who has the right and the strength to be and be recognized as himself, the same, properly the same as himself" (66), serves to exemplify the nonhuman "beast" that is at the core of the human's self-definition as autobiographical animal. In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida continues to identify the human's animality as a means of appreciating the sameness or selfhood that is inherent in every difference with alterity. The seminar's title includes a homophonic pun that shows this, as Derrida makes explicit: "the beast and [et] the sovereign (couple, coupling, copula), the beast is [est] the sovereign, man is the beast for man" (30). The "and/is" [et/est] plays a role similar to that of the "I am/I follow" [*je suis*] in the earlier address.

"Sovereignty," says Derrida as he reads Hobbes, "is the artificial soul...artificial animal monster which is none other than artificial man" (28). But although this artificial soul may be "*posited as immortal*," it is in fact "prosthetic and mortal," and it "lasts only as long as law, sovereignty, and the state are able to *protect* fearful subjects against what is causing them fear" (42). There is no doubt that a crisis of sovereignty confronts the human in the 21st century, and that this crisis both provokes and emerges from a state of fear. More ambiguity emerges, however, if we attempt to diagnose the cause of this fear. Is the problem that the sovereign has failed to protect us from the Hobbesian "beast" (which is also, Derrida notes, an omnipotent notion of God), or is it that the sovereign, in taking the place of this beast ("The human sovereign takes place as place-taking [*lieu-tenant*], he takes place, the place standing in for the absolute sovereign: God" (54)), now provokes a fear so strong that it can no longer protect its subjects from itself? What happens when the sovereign becomes afraid of itself, 'spooks' itself in the manner of a Marx who frightens himself with his own ghosts? "Sovereignty," according to

Derrida's formulation in *Rogues*, not only decides "rights and law" but claims for itself "The right to decide on the exception and the right to suspend rights and law" (*Rogues* 141). When does the law acquire a beastly power of its own, too strong for the sovereign to decide on its exception?

The enmeshed catastrophes of COVID-19 and anthropogenic climate change both provoke such questions. Rhizomatic networks of technical systems bring humans and animals in ways that exceed the intentions and capacities of those governments and institutions that claim to exercise power over them. One can hope that this excess is part of what Derrida calls the "autoimmune" self-correcting mechanism of democracy. It is no mere coincidence that a zoonotic illness, a resurgence of the animal presence on whose absence the human's right to self-determination rests, has revealed and exacerbated the gaps in democracy's figurative immune system, its means of self-protection against authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

Democracy is autoimmune because, to quote Fred Evans's summary of Derrida's argument, "its freedom and equality requirements cancel each other out" (Evans 303). Democracy is therefore only real on the basis of an impossible idea. But "This im-possible is not privative. It is not the inaccessible, and it is not what I can indefinitely defer...It comes upon me from on high, in the form of an injunction that does not simply wait on the horizon" (*Rogues* 84). Democracy's "autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes-which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event" (152). But if I only say that one can "hope" the recent challenges to democracy are part of an autoimmune vulnerability, a vulnerability that leads to a better "democracy to come," it is because the coronavirus, as a

zoonotic event, is not strictly an autoimmune illness. It is, indeed, the arrival of an alterity outside the human *autos*, an *autos* that has been equated with the *demos* of democracy since the concept of democracy found its sovereignty. We know definitively that there is an *autos* that is other to the *demos*.

When Derrida writes that the task of “separating democracy from autonomy” is “more than difficult, indeed im-possible” (84), he is correct, but he perhaps neglects the danger of consigning democracy to a fate of *autocracy*, a “teleology” (87) of the sort that he is right to say we must avoid in all its regulative forms. It is more important than ever, I believe, to distinguish the *autos* of a human autonomy from the “animal machine” on whose artificial soul the sovereign depends. Such a distinction does not dispense with the sovereignty of a *demos*. On the contrary, it realizes sovereignty by recognizing, as Derrida does, that “pure sovereignty does not exist...it is always in the process of autoimmunizing itself, of betraying itself by betraying the democracy that nonetheless can never do without it” (101). This autoimmune sovereignty does not need to be projected onto or resigned to an Other, for it is inherent in all claims—be they on behalf of an individual or of a collective *demos*—to autonomy.

Derrida’s interest in autoimmunity is perhaps a historically contingent one, born in response to the AIDS pandemic,⁸⁷ but it begins with the terminology of “auto-affection” in *Of Grammatology*, where he observes that “auto-affection constitutes the same (auto) as it divides the same” (166). As I established in the introduction, he will spend most of his career, in a gesture of opposition to a metaphysics of presence, highlighting the process of division that takes

⁸⁷ For more on how Derrida draws on the AIDS pandemic for his analysis of autoimmunity, see Alice Andrews’s “Autoimmunity: Deconstructing Fictions of Illness and the Terrible Future to Come” (Goldsmiths, University of London, doctoral thesis, 2011, <http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/6920/>) and Andrea Timár’s “Derrida and the Immune System” (*Terror(ism) and Aesthetics*, edited by György Fogarasi, Zoltán Cora, and Ervin Török, *Et al.* — *Critical Theory Online*, 2015, <http://etal.hu/en/archive/terrorism-and-aesthetics-2015/derrida-and-the-immune-system/>).

place in auto-affection and autobiography, asserting the necessity of alterity to self-constitution; however, he will eventually acknowledge that he himself has a certain degree of power over this process of division in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. The exercise of this power is the conscious exercise of self-reflection and self-division for the purposes of self-constitution. What Derrida knows, and what the authors and filmmakers in this dissertation have affirmed, is that this self-constitution is all the more powerful, *self-affirming*, when it is done as an exercise of fiction, which is to say an exercise of *self-negation* by writing the self, reflecting the self, in the eyes of an (animal) other.

If autobiography is self-constituting, and if sovereignty is the right to exception from the law, then autobiographical sovereignty would be the *self-constituting making of a law to which oneself would not be subject*. Is this not what Derrida seeks to do through the power of a deconstruction to which he will (almost) never subject his own experiences? Is this not what the human seeks to do through the technical conquest of a natural world from which it excludes itself? Or is it, more generally, what life itself tries to do in its *différance*, its projection toward a *survie* and a futurity that exceeds any law that can rule any individual, finite, mortal living being?

The truth is that self-exception from one's own law is impossible. If one is, as Heidegger writes, "what one cares for," and if one must (as I believe) care for (be this care in the form of love or hate) the subject of any law one imposes, then one will always become the subject of one's own sovereign will. But it is in the *self-aware* knowledge of this impossibility that a sovereign may learn to manipulate the law's function as the unconditional possibility of all self-definition. In the case of human authors who seek to rewrite the human's autobiography by way

of the nonhuman animal, this means directing the human's possibilities toward a new impossible, the impossibility of a *demos* that includes humans and animals as equal and free.

And if, moreover, it is in the nature of such “*autoimmune* assurances” as sovereignty, democracy, autonomy, and ipseity to be “virtually capable not only of destroying themselves in suicidal fashion but of turning a certain death drive against the autos itself, against the ipseity that any suicide worthy of its name still presupposes” (*Rogues* 123, italics Derrida's) – and if it is also true that one can exercise a certain degree of control and power over the process of self-constitution that takes place through this autoimmune self-division – then perhaps it is true that one can claim a certain degree of control over the exact direction this “certain death drive” takes in turning against the self. And what is the death drive if not a call from beyond by the specters who haunt the thresholds of self-determination? These thresholds, like these specters and these animals within our human selves, are plural, as Derrida notes in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. Rethinking sovereignty and the self “requires us to rethink the very figure of the threshold...[or] at least a greater vigilance as to our irrepressible desire for the threshold, a threshold that *is* a threshold, a single and solid threshold. Perhaps there never is a threshold, any such threshold. The abyss,” he warns his audience, “is that there is more than one ground [*sol*], more than one solid, and more than one single threshold [*plus d'un seul seuil*]” (334). Perhaps the autobiographical, like all technics and *tekhne*, which, as Derrida claims, is “perhaps always an invention of limits” (298), is the means whereby we construct such thresholds—thresholds built not solely to separate us from the others, the specters, the animals, the spectral animals, but to let them in, to bring both their and ourselves out of the abyss.

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