
Monika Bakke

"Between Us, Animals" Emotional Ties Between Humans and Other Animals

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.17

The fact that some people are silly about animals cannot stop the topic being a serious one. (...) We are not just rather like animals; we are animals.

Mary Midgley¹

In the western cultural context, emotional relationships between humans and other animals are as a rule determined by a deeply entrenched anthropocentrism² stemming from Judaic and Classical traditions, and later reinforced by Christianity and modern philosophy³, the latter reaching its negative culmination in the writings of Descartes and his followers. The French philosopher believed that only humans are capable of having an emo-

Monika Bakke – teaches in the Philosophy Department at the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland. She writes on contemporary art and aesthetics with a particular interest in posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism, and in cross-cultural and gender perspectives. She is the author of *Open Body* (2000) [in Polish] and *Bio-transfigurations. Art and Aesthetics of Posthumanism* (2010) [in Polish], co-author of *Pleroma. Art in Search of Fullness* (1998), editor of *Australian Aboriginal Aesthetics* (2004) [in Polish], *Going Aerial. Air, Art, Architecture* (2006) and *The Life of Air Dwelling, Communicating, Manipulating* (2011). Since 2001, she has been an editor of the cultural journal *Czas Kultury*.

1 Moussaieff J. Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), 37.

2 This approach is also known as species chauvinism; the term itself was coined by Richard D. Rayder in 1970.

3 A synthetic approach to the history of anthropocentrism can be found, for example, in Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, (New York: New York Review of Books, 1990); whereas a broader and more interesting discussion of the matter can be found in Gary Steiner's *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents. The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2005).

tional life which supposedly manifested itself as laughter, blushing and turning pale, shedding tears, etc., whereas animals were only perfect machines devoid of any semblance of spiritual life and unable to experience emotions. The results of these beliefs turned out to be nothing less than disastrous for animals in general, especially as vivisection became increasingly popular and the shriek of a tormented animal was considered to be synonymous with the sound a metal spring makes when it is hit. Clearly, Darwin did not share the Cartesian belief that emotions are unique to humans. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, he cautioned that "as long as man and all other animals are viewed as independent creations, an effectual stop is put to our natural desire to investigate as far as possible the causes of expression"⁴. Therefore, animal and human emotions can be considered to form a continuum and "he who admits on general grounds that the structure and habits of all animals have been gradually evolved, will look at the whole subject of expression in a new and interesting light"⁵. Employing the comparative method in his enquiries into the expression of emotions in a variety of non-human species, as well as in newborns, individuals with mental disorders, and non-European peoples⁶, Darwin concluded that some forms of emotional expression are instinctive and innate—and thus hereditary—therefore there should not be any intercultural differences in said expression.

In the second half of the 20th century, the question of animal emotionality, previously explored mostly by philosophers, began to interest ethnologists and animal psychologists who further linked the emotional capacity of animals with the question of their consciousness and intelligence. However, studies in this particular field are often accused of unintentional anthropomorphism, as was the case with Darwin's seminal *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which contains the following passage: "Even insects express anger, terror, jealousy, and love by their stridulation"⁷. But we only know the traditional anthropocentric world criticized by Darwin and the modern world of cultural constructivism – this is essentially the place we inhabit. It is difficult therefore to underestimate the wide-ranging skepticism concerning our ability to gain any further insight into the world of animals and their emotions, shared by many scholars, including Brian Massumi, who claims that

4 Charles Darwin and Paul Ekman. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 19.

5 *Ibid.*, 19

6 Darwin believed that in these groups emotional expression was the most pronounced and the least inhibited by social customs.

7 Darwin and Ekman, *The Expression*, 347

it is meaningless to interrogate the relation of the human to the nonhuman if the nonhuman is only a construct of human culture, or inertness. The concepts of nature and culture need serious reworking, in a way that expresses the irreducible alterity of the nonhuman in and through its active connection to the human and vice versa. Let matter be matter, brains be brains, jellyfish be jellyfish, and culture be nature, irreducible alterity and infinite connection⁸.

However, few animal behaviorists call for radical change of the status quo, as most believe that anthropomorphization may be helpful in the long run. To quote James Serpell, it has been widely adopted in fields like experimental psychology and behavioral animal psychology: "it allows us (...) to predict how others would behave in similar circumstances. If this is the case, then it logically follows that we should use precisely the same criteria to judge and predict the behavior of non-humans, since they are obviously similar to us in a great many respects"⁹.

The growing research interest in animal emotionality and its interspecies manifestations goes hand in hand with a growing critical interest in interspecies relationships that humans enter into. A favorable context for these changes was created already in the last century in the context of environmental philosophies and ecologically-oriented social movements, especially those with a non-anthropocentric slant like the animal liberation movement or various forms of deep ecology¹⁰. Both our perception and the language we use to discuss the psyche of other animals are changing slowly but surely. These changes are evident, for instance, in the shifts in studies on animals and pain, where researchers are now considering not only physical but also psychological suffering. We are interested in those aspects that connect us to other animals, we are looking for continuity and symbiosis, not for irreducible alterity. In the humanities, anthropocentrism is in decline, a process that is fairly slow but very prominent.

Although currently we no longer question the existence of animal emotionality, which moderates, to a certain extent, the difference between "us" and "them" on a worldview level, the way we practice and portray (which itself is part of the practice) our relationships with other animals changes extremely

8 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 39

9 James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173

10 See: Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology. The Search for a Livable World* (London-New York: Routledge, 2005)

slowly and, to some degree, it still follows deeply entrenched anthropocentric patterns. In this essay, I will focus on the two most common and simultaneously radically opposite emotional attitudes towards other animals, including apparent interspecies approximation, that is forcing animals into frameworks created specifically to describe interpersonal relationships, also called oedipalization; and the belief in total and therefore absolutely irreducible alterity between "us" and "them". Both attitudes, and the practices stemming from them, are anthropocentric in nature.

Oedipalizing Animals or On Disservice

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish three types of animals, one of which comprises "individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, «my» cat, «my» dog"¹¹. This fairly common process of "humanization" quite effectively protects the animals from being eaten, however it does not give rise to any sort of animal autonomy. On the contrary, it forces animals into culturally approved mechanisms of exploitation by humans for their own emotional purposes or for the sake of their whims. One classic example of an anthropomorphic depiction of the oedipalization process was the case of Flush as portrayed by Virginia Woolf: the relationship between Miss Barrett and her dog was sophisticated and intimate, she "loved Flush, and Flush was worthy of her love"¹². Her devotion, however, was short-lived and petered out at the first sight of Mister Browning, as the dog, mute by nature, could not compete with a poet. He was completely outmatched by the human challenger because, as Woolf anthropomorphically describes it, it was obvious even to Flush himself that "never had such wastes of dismal distance separated them. He lay there ignored; he might not have been there, he felt. Miss Barrett no longer remembered his existence"¹³.

11 The other categories include: "animals with characteristics or attributes, (...) animals as they are treated in great divine myths. (...) Finally, there are more demonic animals, packs of *affect animals* that form a multiplicity, a becoming". This classification, however, is neither definitive nor exclusive. Any animal can join either of the categories and move freely between them: "There is always the possibility that a given animal, a louse, a cheetah or an elephant, will be treated as a pet, my little beast. And at the other extreme, it is also possible for any animal to be treated in the mode of the pack or swarm; (...) Even the cat, even the dog". Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 240-241.

12 Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33.

13 *Ibid.*, 39.

Speaking out against similar practices, Donna Haraway categorically declared that we “should always see animals as animals”, not furry humans. But are we truly up to the task? In *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Haraway points out that the term “significant other” is in no way limited to humans and can easily mean members of other species. The author claims that human expectations of being unconditionally loved by canines are based on unfounded beliefs and are demeaning to both dogs and children as they lead to mistaking the former for the latter. This does not mean, however, that we should give up on any sort of emotional relationship with these animals. Haraway admits that she finds “the love of and between historically situated dogs and humans precious” and then goes on to justify her position:

contrary to lots of dangerous and unethical projection in the Western world that makes domestic canines into furry children, dogs are not about oneself. Indeed, that is the beauty of dogs. They are not a projection, nor the realization of an intention, nor the telos of anything. They are dogs; i.e., a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protein relationship with human beings. The relationship is not especially nice; it is full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play¹⁴.

Haraway clearly indicates that requiring a canine to give humans unconditional love places a burden on it that is as heavy as any other one. Even if in the majority of cases this coexistence turns out to be satisfying and pleasant for both parties, it puts the dog in a risky and ultimately untenable situation, in that its failure to fulfil the emotional expectations or fantasies of humans can result in its abandonment¹⁵, as the relationship is always determined by the human party. Moreover, Haraway supports the idea that in our relationship with canines we should abandon training in favor of proper communication, despite apparent differences between both species. In such a context, it becomes possible to discuss the matter of “animal happiness”, as does Vicki Herne, the dog trainer and author mentioned by Haraway in her book¹⁶. This particular happiness may arise when the animal and the human communicate

14 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 11-12.

15 *Ibid.*, 38.

16 Vicki Herne, “Horses, Hounds, and Jeffersonian Happiness: What’s Wrong with Animal Rights?” <http://www.dogtrainingarts.com>

properly, which in turn shapes the rights that both parties can claim in this relationship. Animal rights or human rights with respect to animals are never imposed in a top-down fashion, they are always shaped by individual relations, therefore not only does the human have legitimate expectations towards the animal but so does the animal towards the human. We should strive towards a state of affairs wherein these sorts of relationships are based on reciprocity.

Wild at Heart

Our emotional relationship with wild animals – historically understood as a part of the wilderness, that is space not yet colonized by civilized peoples – should be examined by means of different categories. The concept of wilderness framing it as a space hostile to (civilized) humans and the domain of wild animals as well “wild” humans was formulated in the times of Ancient Greece¹⁷. The Romantic period, however, purged the connotations of hostility and associated the wilderness with pristine, untainted land that man has not yet sullied with his presence and which still has the power to restore his spiritual balance. Nowadays, that Romantic perception of nature is extended onto areas protected from human interference, like nature reserves, whereas the very concept of nature as hostile to humans is projected primarily onto the so-called “urban jungle”¹⁸. Nevertheless, there are still swaths of wilderness where human’s existence is threatened by the local wildlife, adverse weather conditions, etc. These places, however, no longer elicit the trepidation they used to, nowadays they are challenges to be overcome by city dwellers who go there to seek entertainment, excitement, and most of all, themselves.

The case of Timothy Treadwell which I will examine here, would never stir up that much interest and controversy if its conclusion were less tragic. Treadwell’s story was recounted multiple times in newspapers, books, and even in Werner Herzog’s documentary *Grizzly Man* (2005). The film, made up of handheld video footage captured by Treadwell during a series of trips to Alaska which combined a unique account of a life spent amidst wild animals with elusive moments of the life of the animals themselves, especially grizzly bears.

17 Our ideas about the inhabitants of the wilderness have changed over time; nevertheless, for a very long time the general consensus was that the wilderness is roamed by monsters and spiritual entities under various guises, often hostile to humans. A modern take on that myth can be found in the subject matter and popularity of the *Blair Witch Project*.

18 See Andrew Light, “Urban Wilderness”, in *Wild Ideas*, ed. D. Rothenberg. (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

The headline of *Anchorage Daily News* from October 8, 2003 reads: "Wildlife author killed, eaten by bears he loved". The wording suggests a confrontation between emotionally fragile beings, that is humans, and ruthless, brutal animals capable of killing "in cold blood". This incredibly biased headline, like many others that cropped up after Treadwell's demise, is clearly crammed with anthropomorphic projections revealing themselves in the sentimental expectation of reciprocity and unconditional love that many humans demand from pets. This anthropomorphically constructed opposition of love and death is anchored in the juxtaposition of the feral and the civilized, itself the cornerstone of the Classical concept of nature¹⁹. What we are dealing with here, then, is a fusion of the Romantic and Classical visions of the wilderness, wherein love is the ultimate human value and death the obvious evil, lurking in a remote, hostile wilderness. Thus, Treadwell's story became a reiteration of the manifestly anthropocentric tale of the gulf separating the human from the non-human: if the distance between "us" and "them" is not maintained, the consequences are bound to be fatal.

Unfortunately, even Herzog's *Grizzly Man* documentary falls prey to the same anthropocentric depiction of the wild animal as total, impenetrable, and hostile otherness. Herzog manipulates the emotions of both the people he interviewed as well as his audience to conclude that the non-human sphere, the sphere populated by wildlife, is permeated with violence and death, and therefore should be avoided or treated with utmost caution. The pronounced emphasis of anthropophagy, as well as cannibalism sometimes practiced by bears, is supposed to elicit repulsion in the audience and thus reinforce the viewers' anthropocentric beliefs. The director assumes the mantle of the enlightened sage who protects humans from fatal encounters with the animal other and decides that only he will listen to the original audio recording of the deadly attack (the movie shows Herzog listening to the recording that he denied the audience).

While Herzog clearly reveals himself to be a proponent of the Classical notion of a wilderness which is hostile to humans, his cinematic interpretation of Treadwell's behavior invokes the Romantic concept in a very peculiar, nearly parodic fashion, plainly evident both in the naive and sentimental way of its conceptualization and the paternalistic attitude towards wildlife. Some of Treadwell's assumptions are patently absurd, like for example his belief that predators should peacefully coexist with their prey and flies should "have more respect" towards the carcass of the fox he favored and tried to domesticate.

19 Light notes that there are three elements specific to Classical wilderness: 1. separation from civilized areas; 2. savagery of its inhabitants, the non-human beasts; 3. superiority of the civilized man; Light, "Urban Wilderness", 197.

Even more problematic is the oedipalization of wildlife not only through domestication but also through giving animals human names and drawing up human-like genealogies for them, the latter apparent in Treadwell's numerous stories about a group of bears he was close with. Treadwell himself uses phrases like "he's been with me for over a decade", "my animal friends", etc. By trying to domesticate the animals or simply getting them accustomed to human presence, he was doing the bears a great disservice and exposing them to potential dangers stemming from encounters with humans.

Herzog also revealed footage implying that Treadwell sometimes forgot the conventions of the nature documentary as well his own story he wanted to expound. In these moments he acts on impulse, disregarding both the camera and the clarity of message, and his interactions with animals are such as to completely contravene every convention of the wildlife film. These moments, or rather those bits of footage, are seldom shared by Herzog himself, maybe it is simply because they are not that frequent in the recordings Treadwell left behind. Based on these cracks in the conventional façade, we can easily infer the intensity of experiences devoid of conventionalized emotions generated in front of the camera for the sake of future audiences. These moments of escape are the result of a frank, visceral reaction to animals whose presence was often a completely random occurrence. There can be no talk of indifference here because, as Braidotti explains, "not rationality but rather affectivity counts here; (...) That implies that the crucial mechanism by which the subject operates is the expression of his or her innermost core, that is affectivity and the capacity of interrelations"²⁰. And thus, this undeniable connection with animals and the obstinate desire to live within their natural habitat led Treadwell to a world where survival was a struggle but without which he struggled to survive.

Appetite for the Other

Eating is usually associated with killing, therefore questions revolving around individual dietary preferences can inspire a lot of mixed emotions. The difference between what is edible and what we consider food becomes very important as, in the words of Glenn Kuehn, it reflects the way in which we define our own selves: "In this context, food is indicative of what we think we are and what we wish to be"²¹. Treadwell was fully aware that all along he

20 Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 205.

21 Glenn Kuehn, "Dining on Fido. Death, Identity, and the Aesthetic Dilemma of Eating Animals", in *Animal Pragmatism*, ed. Erin McKenna and Andrew Light, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 245.

risked being eaten and that knowledge infused his life with new intensity. His choice to live among the bears brought him to the razor's edge between life and death on which he successfully balanced for years, and it was living in this persistent gloom of death that paradoxically delayed Treadwell's demise. Close proximity to mortal danger was what fueled him, made him feel like he was living life to the fullest, but it worked like any other addiction: imbibing allows the addict to function, in order to get another shot, another high, another drink. In Braidotti's words, "the proximity of death suspends life, not in transcendence, but rather in the radical immanence of just a life, here and now, for as long as we can and as much as we take"²². Treadwell's potentially fatal encounters with animals did not sap his resilience, on the contrary, they breathed new life into him, brought him joy and even pleasure. "Whatever gets you through the day"²³, writes Braidotti, is just fine, and in Treadwell's case it was living among the bears. Each day became the penultimate one until his dying day arrived, long delayed but always expected. Still, the fatal encounter with the animal was surprising, terrifying, affective. In contrast to previous penultimate confrontations, the final one was never supposed to be contextualized and recounted in front of a camera. It took place at the affective level and remained there, and the affective level is, to quote Massumi, "situational: the full extent of events impinges on the context"²⁴.

The media perspective portrays Treadwell's death as gruesome. But what was so horrific in that particular event? It inspired emotions strong enough to produce further ursine victims, killed so that human remains could be extracted from their bodies (Treadwell's girlfriend was also killed in the bear attack) in order to ultimately cremate them and spread the ashes in the exact spot where the act of incorporation took place. The absolutely unnecessary killing of bears only highlights how anthropophagy is still considered taboo in human culture. As we can clearly see forms of corporeal communion with animals are precisely defined and strictly controlled, and incorporation can only be unilateral – only human animals are allowed to consume the bodies of other animals. There can be no symmetry in that regard, and even thinking about it seems transgressive and horrifying. Additionally, episodes of

22 Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 211.

23 *Ibid.*, 205.

24 Massumi, *Parables*, 28. That stands in contrast with emotions, defined by Massumi as "subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized". (*ibid.*)

anthropophagy leave humans scrambling to immediately separate human flesh from the non-human. As Alphonso Lagis writes,

we alone are the uneaten ones, the unexchangeable value, the cosmic dignity. We have buried our corpses out of the reach of scavenger animals, dogs and hyenas; have encased them in stone mausoleums and steel coffins; have mummified them and have injected them with formaldehyde so that they will not be food of larvae or cremated them to make them inedible even to bacteria²⁵.

Treadwell, however, was more than just an underachiever and a bear enthusiast, he became part of a process that transcended all individual experience—the process of becoming other-than-human. It was initiated, or we may even say Treadwell was infected by it, in the course of his direct encounters with the ursine population of Alaska. As he himself admitted, when he came into contact with the animal world, it engulfed and infected him, and thus he crossed over and within to embrace his obsession. The process, however, was different than in the case of Gregor, the protagonist of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, whose transmutation into an animal was hampered time and time again by re-oedipalizing forces²⁶ which ultimately resulted in his doom, whereas Treadwell's death was not the result of his fear of crossing over to the other side—quite the contrary. The appetite for something/someone is rooted in the desire to consume or to be consumed, in the irresistible need to meld, to fuse and confuse, therefore in the will to lose oneself.

Episodes of anthropophagy have always inspired terror, even if the truth is that they have not been all that frequent throughout history. Nevertheless, images produced by mass culture, like for example *Jaws*²⁷, have become part and parcel of our idea of human encounters with wildlife. In our mass consciousness, wolves, crocodiles, Komodo dragons, sharks are "killing machines" devoid of any emotion. However, recreational encounters with these predators usually bring in heavy crowds, as there can be no *ersatz* for the fear arising from the very real possibility of being bitten or devoured. As noted by Lingis, in the world of the human animal, the reverse Eucharist seems to be the only

25 Alphonso Lingis, *Trust*, (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 147.

26 See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 14.

27 The average global annual number of deaths from shark attacks is five, whereas falling coconuts kill over 150 people all over the world every year. Nobody, however, would even dream of shooting thrillers about deadly coconuts. This little bit of trivia was first brought up by Christian Frei.

rule, its message being: “do not eat my flesh, do not drink my blood”²⁸. In the symbolic sphere, anthropophagy is permissible only in the form of cannibalism, whereas the consumption of human flesh by non-human entities is always an affront to the anthropocentric order of things and is a severe violation of the carefully guarded anthropogenetic limits. In the words of Bakhtin: “Man’s encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage”²⁹. What, then, would happen were we to make the relationship reciprocal? Firstly, man is reduced to fodder and thus loses his subjective status and, as a result of the latter, loses identity, is deprived of his privileged position and his power. In such a world, humanity, as defined by its taxonomic and singular individuality, ceases to exist and is merged directly with the great chain of life that we call *zoe*; this is simultaneously terrifying and enthralling.

As noted by Caillois³⁰, there is a direct relationship between pleasure derived from eating and sexual pleasure, and sexual intercourse, as another form of carnal interaction with the animal, is subject to even more stringent taboos. Interspecies affection has to remain platonic and interspecies sexual desire cannot transcend corporeal boundaries – in contrast to food consumption, sexual incorporation is strictly forbidden for both parties. Therefore, the coupling between Leda and the swan that has animated European imagination for centuries and inspired numerous retellings in both Western art and literature, has to remain a fantasy; otherwise, such an act would undoubtedly constitute, in the words of Roland Barthes, “unrefined” pleasure, the experience of which does not reinforce man’s own subjectivity and his status as the master of the animal kingdom – on the contrary, it induces him to lose himself³¹. In Christian Europe³², pleasure derived from sexual contact with animals, and maybe even experienced in a mutual manner, was considered “the most heinous and unspeakable of crimes”³³ and was punishable by death; this stands in direct contrast with the traditions of polytheist Europe where

28 Lingis, *Trust*, 108.

29 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 281.

30 Roger Caillois, “The Praying Mantis”, in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank, (Raleigh, Duke University Press, 2003).

31 See: Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

32 Bestiality was expressly forbidden by the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Hittite code, cf. Serpell, *Company*, 34.

33 Serpell, *Company*, 34.

practices that in later centuries were considered to be a threat to subjectivity were part and parcel of the cultural mores. Lest we forget, sexual contact between humans and animals so prevalent in Classical mythology resulted in the birth of not only dangerous half-breeds, including monsters like the Minotaur, but also humans of exceptional beauty, like Helen. Peter Singer, whose concern for animal welfare garnered him an equal measure of both admiration and disapproval, thinks that even if interspecies sexual relations are not necessarily normal or natural, they surely are not "an offence to our status and dignity as human beings"³⁴. Lingis, on the other hand, notes that when we have sex with a member of our own species, "we also make love with the horse and the dolphin, the kitten and the macaw, the powdery moths and the lustful crickets"³⁵. Our orgasmic flesh reveals extensive linkage to the world inhabited by other forms of life, becomes part of a world greater than the human domain.

We, the Postanthropocentric Others

In many circles, anthropocentrism is considered unwarranted, even arrogant and anachronistic. However, we find ourselves only at the beginning of the journey which will open us up to the world of the unknown, non-human other. "Naturally, we will recognize it in ourselves", writes Jolanta Brach-Czaina, "I mean sand, leaves, claws. We will discover our demolished stony constituents, breathe new life into the despised animal spirit, but still we will have no peace to speak of"³⁶. It is a new experience that will surely allow us to lose ourselves, or more precisely, to shake the gene-deep feeling of certainty and superiority ingrained into us over the course of millennia spent in our privileged position. All was cut to man's measure as man was the measure of all. Donna Haraway inquires into the unpredictable consequences of radical approaches to the concepts of nature and culture, animal and human, object and subject. Her expectations of change and her concern for the ontological status of humans and animals are voiced in her questions:

What happens if Western philosophers truly reopen the question of the relation of the subject and the species? What happens if thinkers in these traditions – which have depended fundamentally on the category of the

34 Peter Singer, "Heavy Petting". Accessed July 31, 2015. <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001----.htm>

35 Alphonso Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions*, (Berkeley-London: University of California Press, 2000), 37.

36 Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Blony umysłu*, (Warszawa: Sic!, 2003), 123.

animal in order to generate and legitimate the class of humans – really ask, not knowing the answer, if non-humans are subjects?³⁷

Attempts to overcome the hegemony of the anthropocentric subject are on the rise, new critical voices continue to surface. The subject problem is raised in a range of approaches, therefore it seems valid to ask not only about objects or objectified animals becoming subjects (as do Haraway or Singer) but to commit to a broader inquiry focused on who/what we are becoming/will become once we discard our anthropocentric beliefs.

Our emotional relationships constitute but a fraction of the complex symbiotic relations with non-human others, that is the organic and inorganic environment that we inhabit and which we actively shape. To frame it in the sense of Spinozan *affectus*, we impinge and are impinged upon, “we move in an environment of air currents, rustling trees, and animate bodies”³⁸, and if we were only able to free ourselves from bodies defined by form, individuality, and subjectivity, claims Lingis³⁹, we would be free to realize and liberate the multiplicity of movements and intensities in us, the animal and vegetable, the organic and inorganic. Elizabeth Grosz remarks that “the human is in the process of becoming other-than-human, of overcoming itself”⁴⁰, and from such a perspective, existence cannot be considered as solely the life of an individual. Life understood as *zoe*, the biological life, proceeds ever onward regardless of individual deaths, it multiplies everywhere in its mindless intensity and multiplicity of form, in affect!

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

37 Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), back cover.

38 *Ibid.*, 29.

39 Lingis, *Emotions*, 29.

40 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time. Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 63.