

The Cat, the Dog, and the Kitten-Lamb

The Animal Figure in Kafka and Derrida

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Abstract

Prominent thinkers on the work of Franz Kafka - among whom Margot Norris, and Deleuze and Guattari - have argued that Kafka's *hybrid* animals cannot be metaphors or figures. In this article, I will develop an alternative concept of figure better suited to capture the nature of Kafka's hybrid creatures, in order to avoid the complete elimination of figures from his animal stories. First, I will explore the animal figure in the work of Jacques Derrida: the basis of the alternative. Then, I will use Derrida's animal figure as a conceptual lens through which the figural aspects of Kafka's animals can be acknowledged. My main aim is to show how Kafka can approach the animal while using figures.

Introduction

Imagine a man that transforms into an insect, overnight. Imagine an ape lecturing about his transformation into a human. Imagine a small pet, half lamb-half kitten, skipping through your living room. Imagine being a dog with an aptitude for science. Imagine being a mole-like predator frantically digging your burrow. These curious creatures are only a small selection of all the animals that critter around Franz Kafka's oeuvre. His short stories, especially, are crowded with hybrid creatures that shift between different species: from humans to animals, from animals to humans, or from animals to other animals.

Although it is impossible to find *the* interpretation of Kafka, a trend is visible to understand Kafka's animal fictions as an early articulation of the shift from anthropocentrism to a biocentric philosophical orientation.¹ Anthropocentrism means "human-centred," and it contains the accusation that philosophy first and foremost is concerned with humans, regarding animals and nature primarily as a resource for human endeavours. Meanwhile, biocentrism removes the human from the centre of the universe and extends inherent value to all living beings without

¹ These themes are investigated by multiple authors from various disciplines in: Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri, eds., *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings* (Lanham Md.: Lexington Books, 2010).

imposing the human experience upon other creatures. Influenced by the implications of Darwin's evolutionary theory, Kafka anticipated the recent reflection upon the human relations with other animals, and the problematic nature of a sharp distinction between human and animal life.²

Because of their biocentricity, Kafka's animals should not be read as human metaphors. Allegorical and religious interpretations have approached the animal stories as metaphors for Kafka's own troubled life, or as symbolizing the absurd human predicament. For example, the man turning into an insect simply stands for Kafka's tormented relationship with his family. Margot Norris, in her groundbreaking work on the biocentric tradition,³ is highly critical of these allegorical and religious interpretations since they put an anthropocentric reading on Kafka's biocentric texts. The animal fictions, belonging to Kafka's most mature writing, explore the radical confrontation with the animal. This confrontation is effaced by interpreting Kafka's animals as representing human existence.⁴

Norris is not the only one who rejects allegorical and religious readings of Kafka. Deleuze and Guattari, in their influential work on Kafka, write: "Kafka deliberately *kills* all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation."⁵ They do not only reject the idea that Kafka's animals are human allegories, but they also expel everything metaphorical and figural from Kafka's work. The basis of their claim is the identification of Kafka's animal stories with Deleuze's and Guattari's own ontological concept *becoming-animal*.⁶ Becoming-animal emphasizes the process that underlies all pre-set properties and identities, such as different animal species: the "real" animal is a process of becoming that is

² Margot Norris, "Kafka's Hybrids: Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans," in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Lanham Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), 28–29.

³ Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

⁴ Norris, 103–5.

⁵ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 22, my emphasis.

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, 22.

trapped in these fixed subjectivities.⁷ In other words, it is not only a mistake to perceive the animals from Kafka's stories as metaphors for the human predicament; it is a mistake to see them as figures at all.

Curiously, Norris comes to a similar conclusion regarding the metaphorical in Kafka's work, although through a different argument. She also maintains that Kafka discards all representation and everything metaphorical, since Kafka displays an antipathy towards *mimesis* (imitation), together with the whole constellation of representation and figuration that comes with it. For Norris, metaphors and figures belong to a system of abilities (creating metaphor, representing something, imitating something) that the biocentric tradition rejected. Metaphors and figures? That is something only humans do. According to Norris, if Kafka truly explores the animal and animality without the anthropocentric bias, his animal stories cannot make use of these human devices.⁸

Kafka's animal stories, specifically, suffer from these bold claims since they belong to the most imaginative and fantastical of his oeuvre. Admittedly, it is true that Kafka had a difficult relationship with the metaphor, but claiming that he tried to get rid of the metaphor is an oversimplification of Kafka's strategy of writing. Thinking the animal requires the creativity to think and write from the most radically different point of view: an imaginative pursuit in which figures and metaphors play an important role. In addition, Deleuze and Guattari recognize that becoming-animal as a process before any figuration does not fit Kafka's creatures entirely. The discrepancy becomes visible when they wonder whether the structural failure of Kafka's animals is due to the fact that they are still too figural.⁹ Apparently, Deleuze and Guattari recognize that the figure is somehow maintained, but becoming-animal might not be a suitable concept to understand this aspect of Kafka's work.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 243.

⁸ Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence*, 11–12; 65–72.

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 15.

What is missing is a conceptual framework in which Kafka's animal figures can be placed without completely dismissing the metaphor. Although there is a difficulty in thinking the animal with something that is thoroughly human, the metaphor is not a human device necessarily. The challenge is to develop a concept of figure that can maintain the particular status of Kafka's creatures as *animal figures*. To do so, I propose to bring the animals from Kafka's stories into dialogue with Jacques Derrida. Derrida has a radically different approach to the figure, and it forms an important concept in his thinking on the animal. To what extent is it possible to understand Kafka's animal creatures with the concept of animal figure at work in Derrida?¹⁰ My aim is to develop Derrida's animal figure as a conceptual lens through which the figural aspect of Kafka's animals will come into focus.

An important function of this article is to lay the groundwork for a dual investigation of the animal in Derrida and Kafka. Until now, the relationship between these two thinkers regarding their work on the animal has been uncharted territory. Both Derrida and Kafka are seen as being among the few thinkers who have genuinely reflected on the animal's predicament, but a dual investigation into their approach is still lacking. This is surprising, since Derrida has recognized Kafka as an influence on his approach to the animal question.

In the first part, I will explore Derrida's animal figure. Derrida lays down the basis of this concept in his interrogation of the metaphor in "White Mythology."¹¹ My focus lies on how Derrida connects the binary between figure and concept (the proper) to the binary between animal and human. Derrida's figure

¹⁰ I am aware that my use of the term "concept" could raise some eyebrows, especially in an article dedicated to Derrida's use of the figure. A traditional conception of the metaphor can differentiate between the proper concept and the image that represents that concept. Derrida denies that philosophy can establish a category of fundamental concepts that are completely distinct from the figure, since the concept is governed by the rule that constitutes the difference between these two. Even though the strict boundaries between concept and figure can never be maintained, according to Derrida concepts are static: they have strict boundaries and serve to identify something. Concepts, however, have emerged because they can be applied to different contexts over time. My intention is to develop the general notion of figure with certain recurring characteristics at play in Derrida's and Kafka's work. I use the term "concept of figure" with the intention to bring out the tensions that are at play here, and to draw attention to the ways in which concept and figure continuously influence each other.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," trans. F.C.T. Moore, *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 5–74.

cannot be caught in both dichotomies, and therefore it becomes an important aspect of his thinking on the animal. At the end of the first part, I discuss how this new concept is visible in one of Derrida's most famous animal figures, the cat from *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.¹²

In the second part, Derrida's animal figure functions as a conceptual lens through which I approach Kafka. My interpretation of Kafka is mostly inspired by Margot Norris, since she recognizes the paradoxical nature of Kafka's artistic mode.¹³ I follow Norris in her interpretation of Kafka's mode of writing, but I extend her analysis to Kafka's animals themselves; something she does not pay attention to. Based on Kafka's "A Crossbreed"¹⁴ and "Investigations of a Dog,"¹⁵ I argue that not only the narrations, but the hybrids themselves express this paradoxical state. When the paradoxical structure of Kafka's animals is recognized, it becomes apparent that they, like Derrida's animal figures, interrupt the difference between proper and figure, and human and animal. Therefore, I propose – contra Deleuze and Guattari, and Norris – that Kafka can explore the animal while using figures.

I. Derrida: the animal figure

Before I move on to Kafka, I first explore the different aspects of the animal figure in Derrida's work. My starting point is Derrida's examination of the metaphor in "White Mythology." Here, Derrida seeks to dismantle the binary between the metaphor and the concept with a staggering number of references of the metaphor in philosophy. However, Derrida is not only concerned with the difference between the metaphor and the concept. A recurring subject is the ability to create metaphors, and whether it constitutes a difference between humans and animals. In "White

¹² Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Luise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

¹³ Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence*, 130–33.

¹⁴ Franz Kafka, *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 426–27.

¹⁵ Kafka, 279–316.

Mythology,” the binary between figure and concept, and animal and human intersect.¹⁶ This binary intersection is the starting point of the animal figures that appear in Derrida’s later work, like in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.¹⁷

Proper-figure and human-animal

For Derrida, the metaphor has a much broader scope than a mere rhetorical device. The metaphor is often understood as a figure of speech: “love is fire” or “her tears were a river flowing down her cheeks.” In a traditional conception of the metaphor, the metaphorical image (the figure) must always refer to the meaning that it is conveying without being identical to it. “Love is fire” says something about the emotional state of love, but it is not literally fire. So, with the use of the metaphor two determinations are made at once. On the one hand, the metaphor is the determination that two signs are similar, otherwise the figure could never lead to the meaning it designates. On the other hand, the metaphor is the determination that two things are not identical with one another, otherwise it would not be a metaphor, at all. Therefore, the metaphor is invested in the problem of what things properly are, a classic metaphysical problem. Now that the metaphor is not only a figure of speech, it includes all analogical figures and symbols; anything that designates a meaning with which it is not univocally identical.¹⁸

Within philosophy, the issue of the metaphor is the claim that underlies its usage: the binary between the proper and the figure. When I use a metaphor, I claim to know how to discern between the figure (the metaphorical image) and what something properly is (the meaning that the metaphor brings out). What is at stake is the opposition between the proper and the non-proper/figure.¹⁹ For Derrida, the proper has multiple connotations, but it is always about what things or ideas “really” are. It includes properties that belong to something, like the properties of a tree. It includes proper meaning, which is a sign that univocally and immediately expresses

¹⁶ Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy.”

¹⁷ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

¹⁸ Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” 12–14.

¹⁹ Derrida, 18.

its meaning without the insertion of a symbol, figure or metaphor.²⁰ To this side of the binary also belongs the concept, which serves to identify and categorize what some things are, and others are not. For example, the concept “human nature” is deployed to identify some living creatures with certain characteristics as humans, while others are deemed animals by default.

The other side of the binary is the figure, which is above all anything that is not the proper.²¹ The figure is defined by a negation, the *non*-proper, since figures are never properly themselves. For example, an action figure is the image of a hero, but it is not the real hero. The figure is never truly the “real” thing, but only an image or a representation of that thing. This process of difference - never truly being oneself, or *one* self - inherent to the figure makes it unstable. The figure never univocally and unambiguously designates its meaning. When I use the metaphor “love is fire” people will probably understand what I am trying to say, but it is extremely hard to express the meaning of “love is fire” without the metaphorical image. I will never know for certain whether my metaphor has the same connotation for everyone, nor will I know whether the figure expresses what I intend to say. Furthermore, most of the time the meaning of “love is fire” is also opaque towards me. Even I do not know what I am saying exactly.

For Derrida, the human-animal opposition is connected to the opposition between concept and figure, with the animal and the figure on the same side of the binary. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida suggests that humans are occupied above all with what is proper to themselves: which properties belong to humans and not to others? In order to call oneself properly something, the human must be able to discern the proper from the figurative, the real from the imaginary, the metaphor from the concept.²² Here, the question of the animal intersects with the metaphor on a crucial point: thinking the non-human animal begins with the radical disarming of everything that is proper to man including its own occupation with the proper, what it means for something to be (a) proper, and the difference

²⁰ Derrida, 47–48.

²¹ Derrida, 28–29.

²² Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 14.

between the figurative and the real. Therefore, Derrida is in need of a rearticulation of the figure for his approach to the animal. This rearticulation forms the basis of my approach to Kafka's animal fictions, because it dismantles the metaphor as an instrument completely under human control.

A new animal figure

The new animal figure unravels the two binaries at play, but it is not a complete destruction of the difference between figure and concept, or human and animal. Those who have read Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* probably know that Derrida wants to avoid a continuum between animal and human. The task is to "multiply" and "thicken" difference, instead of falling back into homogeneity.²³ A similar wariness is present in "White Mythology." Derrida opts for a concept of figure that is allowed "to leave its "mark" on a "concept,"²⁴ but that does not completely eradicate the difference between the two. This is an important conceptualization of the figure, which Derrida does not elaborate much on in "White Mythology." I will come back to this description in my discussion of Derrida's cat from *The Animal That Therefore I am*, since it is good example of what Derrida means with this phrase. For now, one of the challenges that Derrida takes up is to unhinge the relationship between the metaphor and the meaning that it is supposed to designate, and to make room for a figure that is allowed to fail to attain its intended meaning.

Derrida's discussion of Aristotle in "White Mythology" is an important piece of the puzzle in the rearticulation that Derrida is undertaking.²⁵ In Derrida's reading of Aristotle, the metaphor relies on the ability to see resemblance between two different things, an ability reserved for humans. Although the metaphor is a human endeavor, metaphors are only allowed if they guide to knowledge that was not there before the metaphor was applied. Thereafter, the knowledge that the

²³ Derrida, 29.

²⁴ Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," 65.

²⁵ Derrida, 36–39.

metaphor uncovered must be expressed in non-metaphorical language: after usage, the metaphor must be destroyed. In other words, good metaphor, when it is properly controlled, is in service of knowledge and truth, but only to contribute to a non-metaphorical discourse.²⁶

In Derrida's reading of Aristotle, language is language only to the extent that it can control and analyse the plurality of meaning, without remainder.²⁷ "Every case in which a plurality of meanings is irreducible, in which there is not even a promise of unity of sense, is a case in which we are beyond language. And consequently beyond humanity."²⁸ Therefore, the metaphor is only proper to humanity in a very specific way: only when the metaphor leads to a univocal sense can it said to be properly human. So, the metaphor, which is the "animal" of language, can only be created by the human and only to become proper meaning, to become human.

Aristotle's metaphor is of the kind of which Kafka is wary. In his lifetime, Kafka felt like an other in many parts of his life: estranged from his father, misunderstood by his family, vegetarian, Jewish, German-speaking but with a Yiddish background, a lawyer who considered himself a writer. In his diaries, he repeatedly compared himself to animals in order to express his discomfort with himself. Animals represent the otherness that he experienced in his own life, but it is important to keep in mind that the animal is not simply a metaphor for Kafka's human troubles. Hadea Nell Kriesberg notes that, in the historical reality of Kafka's time, Jews were frequently referred to as "rats," "mice," "insects," "vermin," or "dogs."²⁹ Such daily reality could have instigated Kafka's ponderings of what it would mean for a human to truly become an animal, or the other way around.

²⁶ Derrida, 36–39.

²⁷ Derrida, 49.

²⁸ Derrida, 49.

²⁹ Kriesberg, "Czechs, Jews and Dogs Not Allowed": Identity, Boundary, and Moral Stance in Kafka's 'A Crossbreed' and 'Jackals and Arabs,'" in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Lanham Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), 34.

For Norris, this is exactly what Kafka is doing in his animal fictions. Kafka is not investigating what it is *like* to be an animal (a metaphorical animal), but he returns to his own animality.³⁰ Kafka achieves this by “turning metaphor on its head.”³¹ Figurative language functions as an arena for his biocentric performance, but only to appropriate its literal meaning. Contrary to Aristotle’s metaphor, the metaphor is not an image anymore that is guided to its real meaning predetermined by a human subject. No, the metaphorical image becomes the literal meaning in order to subvert its anthropocentric presuppositions. In Norris’ reading of “A Report to an Academy,”³² Kafka’s ape that learns human language tricks the reader and its anthropocentric bias to use animals as human allegories: “Kafka misleads readers into creating allegories whose collapse reveals the truth concealed at the repressed literal level.”³³

However, there is a different kind of metaphor possible: metaphor is not always Aristotle’s good metaphor. No, the metaphor always runs the risk that it fails to attain truth, according to Derrida, since it has an irreducible lack in its structure: “Metaphor is the moment of possible sense as a possibility of non-truth. It is the moment of detour in which truth can still be lost.”³⁴ When the metaphor is not properly controlled, it goes beyond its proper function in human language. The metaphor, the animal of language, resists the meaning that the human intended, and it disturbs the whole of human semantics. Derrida’s new concept of figure is this moment of metaphorical failure; the moment when the figure goes on a path it was not supposed to travel.³⁵ The figure consists of a process outside human control in which the original designation of a proper meaning with a sign is interrupted, and the sign no longer has a proper expression.

³⁰ Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence*, 1–2.

³¹ Norris, 224.

³² Norris, 67–72.

³³ Norris, 225.

³⁴ Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” 42.

³⁵ Derrida, 42.

The catachresis is a useful figure of speech to come to grips with Derrida's thinking on this matter.³⁶ Originally, catachresis meant a semantic misuse or abuse, but it is also a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied in a way that departs from its conventional usage. For example, a phrase from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* reads: "His complexion is perfect gallows." The character Gonzalo implies that Boatswain has the appearance of a criminal and must be hanged. Here, "perfect gallows" is a mixed metaphor, because two objects are compared that have no obvious similarity between them.³⁷ Shakespeare creates a new connection between two images to express an idea in a new way, but it remains difficult to grasp the exact meaning. What could a complexion like perfect gallows look like? Although I have the feeling that I understand Shakespeare's line, it remains open to new interpretation. When confronted with a catachresis it is difficult to grasp what is expressed exactly, since it is a figure of speech that has no proper meaning anymore.³⁸

Derrida's new articulation of the figure is a catachresis: it is a moment in which the proper meaning of a sign is interrupted by placing it in a different context, or by mixing it with another image with which it would not normally be compared. The key to the catachresis is that it does not go outside language, it does not create new signs, but it transforms language's functioning. In other words, it produces new rules of exchange, new meanings, with old material. The catachresis embodies the moment when a figure fails to attain its proper meaning, and the possibility of alternative meaning arises.³⁹

The figure of a cat

To preserve the figural aspect of Kafka's imaginative animals, I have been exploring Derrida's rearticulation of the figure. Kafka is suspicious of a metaphor

³⁶ Derrida, 56–60.

³⁷ Literary Devices, "Catachresis," 2021, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://literarydevices.net/catachresis/>.

³⁸ Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," 58.

³⁹ Derrida, 59.

completely in human control, such as Aristotle's, but with Derrida's figure, the metaphor is allowed to create new meaning outside predetermined human intentions. There are two important aspects to the new figure with which Derrida is working after "White Mythology." The first aspect is that the human-animal binary and the opposition between the figure and the proper intersect. The second, the result is the production of a sense whose intermediate status between proper meaning and figure escapes this dichotomy (a catachresis). Especially this last point is something that Derrida associated with animal figures as his interest for the animal grew over time. How is Derrida's rearticulation of the figure embodied by the animals from his own work? How does Derrida's animal figure struggle to twist free from these two dichotomies? To fully understand the animal figure that Derrida develops, this section is dedicated to one specific animal figure: the cat from *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida challenges the mechanism that makes a one-size-fits-all category such as "animal" possible. By drawing on the philosophical self-other scheme, Derrida posits the animal as the other to the human self. Conceiving the animal as other enables the human subject to decide what is "proper to human" and what is not. Remember that, for Derrida, humanity is characterized by its obsession with what is proper to itself. For centuries, humans have separated themselves from the rest of animal life with the help of all kinds of abilities: language, rationality, culture, consciousness - the list goes on. Although philosophical and scientific theories about animals have changed over time, what endures is the theoretical structure that underlies this kind of thinking. Namely, to deny that animals can truly respond; animals can only react. In this narrative, humans have a certain self-awareness that ensures that their actions are not merely instinctual or mechanical reactions to stimuli.⁴⁰

The difference between reaction and response is challenged by a curious encounter: Derrida comes out of the shower, naked, and finds himself in the gaze of a cat. When the cat looks at him, Derrida cannot help but wonder whether the cat

⁴⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 5-7; 10.

is *really* looking at him. The cat is not only a machine that reacts to stimuli. It is a living creature that has intentions, that can surprise him, and that is impossible to fully grasp.⁴¹ However, if the cat is intentionally looking at him, is it not responding to him? What does it even mean for an animal to respond? And if the cat responds to him, how could Derrida still call himself human, the only creature that truly responds? Slowly, the difference between humans and animals – reacting versus responding – is unhinged in the moment that Derrida meets the gaze of an animal.⁴² “I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal.”⁴³ This question will guide the entirety of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

“Who am I?” When Derrida meets the cat, he cannot apply the animal identity to the cat anymore, and, consequently, the human identity to himself. Caught in the eyes of the cat, all meaning that the cat usually has for him is suspended, and Derrida cannot uphold the markers that constitute his own identity. Not only, “animal,” “female,” and “cat,” but also “human” and “male” fail to attain their proper meanings. They cannot function as properties (or “propers”) anymore, and the only thing left are two living creatures that meet each other in this specific moment.⁴⁴

With the cat, the use of the word “animal” and “human” is not only interrupted: the animal figure also carries the possibility of a different meaning. In this moment, “everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse.”⁴⁵ The apocalypse does not designate the ending of the world, but it is brought back to its meaning in the original ancient Greek: *an uncovering*, the disclosure or the revelation of great knowledge. The knowledge that Derrida is waiting for is what makes it possible for him to discern the human from the animal, himself from the cat. It is the knowledge of what is proper to the human and what

⁴¹ Derrida, 3–5.

⁴² Derrida, 10.

⁴³ Derrida, 3.

⁴⁴ Derrida, 9.

⁴⁵ Derrida, 12.

is not. However, in the moment before that “everything can happen.”⁴⁶ When Derrida focusses on the cat looking at him, and not the other way around, he experiences that there is an animal agency there, that he can never fully grasp. The cat looks at him: “To see, without going to see, without touching yet, and without biting, although that threat remains on its lips or on the tip of the tongue.”⁴⁷ Derrida considers the cat as a subject that is capable of sudden behaviour he cannot control, nor fully understand. Therefore, a different relation towards the living creature in front of him is completely open.⁴⁸

In the encounter with the cat, Derrida gives substance to one of his formulations of the figure in “White Mythology.” The figure is allowed to “to leave its “mark” on a “concept.”⁴⁹ In the gaze of the cat, proper meaning is suspended, but only for a very short moment. After one of them leaves the room, Derrida can use the name “animal” again without shame. Timothy Clark calls this condition the “double bind” of poetry: poetry takes place only at the risk of disappearing into the economy of language that it both needs and unsettles.⁵⁰ Similarly, the encounter with the cat only takes place within a structure of meaning that it needs and unsettles with the risk that the moment passes. Nevertheless, something does change. Proper meaning does not reinstall itself undamaged, unmarked. The only certainty that Derrida has in the moment of metaphorical failure is this: “Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized [*rebelle à tout concept*].”⁵¹ Although the experience of the cat’s refusal to be put under a certain meaning of the word “animal” might fade, the result is that the limitations of this category have been brought to his attention. “Animal” and “human” cannot be used in same way as before, at least not unambiguously.

⁴⁶ Derrida, 12.

⁴⁷ Derrida, 4.

⁴⁸ Derrida, 4.

⁴⁹ Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” 65.

⁵⁰ Timothy Clark, “By Heart: A Reading of Derrida’s ‘Che Cos’ è La Poesia?’ through Keats and Celan,” *Oxford Literary Review* 15, no. 1 (1993): 48.

⁵¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 9.

It is important to look closely at the animal figure that Derrida is describing in this text, because not only the figure of a cat is at stake. In the gaze of the cat Derrida experiences the limit of the human, a “bordercrossing.”⁵² The cat’s gaze “allows me to see and be seen through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other.”⁵³ Derrida looks at himself from the vantage point of the other, while he experiences that he is being looked at. On the one hand, the human figure and the animal figure are expelled, and Derrida is transported to a moment before any identification has taken place. On the other hand, Derrida still experiences himself as a human that is looking at a cat. Derrida receives an impossible point of view: seeing himself from the viewpoint of the animal other without losing the human experience.⁵⁴ So, Derrida is not only introducing an animal figure, but he is also playing with a mixed metaphor in which the human and the animal come together. Such intertwining of human and animal reminds of Kafka’s approach, on which I will elaborate further in the next section.

To sum up, Derrida’s cat is a catachresis. It is a mixed metaphor – the combination of human and animal – that interrupts the proper meaning of these markers of identity. However, the catachrestic cat does not only interrupt meaning, it also constitutes a new possible sense. The new sense, made from old material, refuses to be caught in proper language again, which explains why Derrida goes on and on about how troubling the experience with the cat is. There is no unambiguous, proper language for him to put the experience into words.

Now, it is possible to understand why Derrida’s new figure is not a human device only. Geoffrey Bennington points out that Derrida toys with the catachresis to begin to think a non-humanist form of language, since the catachresis is a forceful and irruptive extension of a sign proper to one idea to a sense without signifier.⁵⁵ The forceful nature of the catachresis is clearly visible in *The Animal That*

⁵² Derrida, 12.

⁵³ Derrida, 12, my emphasis.

⁵⁴ Derrida, 12.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Bennington, “Metaphor and Analogy in Derrida,” in *A Companion to Derrida*, ed. Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014), 95–96.

Therefore I Am, since Derrida is completely overtaken by the moment that the cat looks at him. Derrida's new figure can accommodate a genuine investigation into the animal, because these new possible connections are spontaneous and accidental. They are not the work of a human literary genius, nor Derrida forcing a name like "animal" on the cat. They are unintentional moments in which animal figures become ambiguous and defy human expectations. Accordingly, Derrida's animal figure withstands the claim from Norris, and Deleuze and Guattari that animal life cannot be expressed with the metaphor. In Derrida's hands, metaphor is allowed to function outside human control, and this is exactly the kind of animal figure present in Kafka's work.

II. Kafka: bewildering hybridity

While I could probably find a cat somewhere outside my own home, I have never woken up as an insect or met an ape that could talk. Kafka always plays with a form of hybridity. His animals are always in transition or crossed between different species. My aim is to understand Kafka's animals as *figures*, and to maintain the imaginative pursuit that Kafka is undertaking instead of depleting everything metaphorical and figural from his texts. In the second half of the article, I use Derrida's animal figure as a conceptual lens through which Kafka's creatures can be understood. This conceptual lens consists of a mixed figure, a catachresis, that forms a new sense when it escapes the initial dichotomy between human and animal, and proper and figure. I specifically call it a lens, because Kafka's stories are particularly hard to capture within one concept.

My reading of Kafka is based on Margot Norris' description of Kafka's artistic mode. According to Norris, it is important to recognize the paradoxical nature of Kafka's work. His narrations consume themselves logically and rhetorically in paradox and self-contradiction. He does so by creating a rhetorical web consisting of negatives, conditionals and hypotheticals that dissolve any

statement.⁵⁶ For every position, multiple interpretations are possible, something of which Kafka's characters are always very aware as they spiral into endless rhetorical possibilities. To illustrate, the first sentence of "Investigations of a Dog" reads: "How much my life has changed, and yet how unchanged it has remained at bottom!"⁵⁷ Even in the first sentence, Kafka manages to describe a life that has changed so much, and simultaneously has not changed at all. A dual state of self-contradiction is immediately introduced.

The consequence of this paradoxical artistic mode is that Kafka never brings in critique from the outside: he always exploits the tensions within a certain premise, belief, or rationality. For Kafka, there is a component of uncertainty in every symbol or meaning. His stories capitalize on these ambiguities rendering every justification for their logic, rationality, or cultural expression absurd and perverse. In the animal fictions specifically, all anthropocentric meaning and symbols are depleted from the text. The only thing left is a text that has negated everything that it has posited, but is still there to leave a mark on the one that reads it: that is Kafka's unique animal gesture.⁵⁸

Even though I am very much indebted to Norris' reading of Kafka, I am critical of her claim that Kafka depletes all metaphors and figures from his texts.⁵⁹ Consequently, Kafka's hybrid animals – the talking ape or the half lamb-half kitten – cannot be figures: they must be literal and real. Does that do justice to Kafka's approach? Before I come back to this question in the conclusion, I first would like to show that there is another interpretation possible. What Norris overlooks is that not only the narrations are caught in self-contradiction, but that also Kafka's animal hybrids themselves are trapped in a paradoxical state. Once the contradictory nature of Kafka's animals is recognized, it is possible to see them as *animal figures*: not the anthropocentric human metaphor from Aristotle, but Derrida's animal figure

⁵⁶ Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence*, 130–33.

⁵⁷ Kafka, *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, 278.

⁵⁸ Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence*, 11–12; 65–72; 132–33.

⁵⁹ Norris, 11–12; 65–72.

that defies human control. My argument is that Kafka's animals are mixed metaphors, catachreses, that open up the possibility of new meaning once the hybrids attain a paradoxical state. In this state of paradox, the hybrid animal cannot be caught in the properties of the original figures that constitute it. Therefore, Kafka's animals interrupt not only the difference between the proper and the figure, but also between the human and the animal.

Since Kafka's animals display different hybrid structures, I discuss two stories that are emblematic for each hybrid type. With this division, I follow Margot Norris, who classifies Kafka's animal fictions according to external or internal hybridity. The first are animals whose hybridity manifests on the outside. External hybridity is characteristic for Kafka's earlier work, and it consists of a physical transition from one species to the other. From an external perspective – often in the form of a narrator – the story of a hybrid creature is told. The second kind of hybridity belongs to Kafka's later work. In these stories, he explores a more radical ontological point of view. Kafka replaces external hybridity with internal hybridity by placing human rationality and language in animal consciousness. Now that the human figure is expelled, the narrative is told from a trapped subjectivity that fruitlessly tries to make sense of its environment or existence.⁶⁰

External Hybridity

The first hybrid fiction is Kafka's extremely short, but thought-provoking story: "A Crossbreed."⁶¹ Like in Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Kafka writes about a cat, although this cat has undergone a peculiar transformation. In "A Crossbreed," a narrator talks about a legacy from his father, a fascinating creature that is half kitten and half lamb. The kitten-lamb – although Kafka does not give the creature an official name – has a disturbing effect on the narrator, who struggles to describe the behavior and characteristics of the crossbreed.⁶²

⁶⁰ Norris, "Kafka's Hybrids: Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans," 19–20.

⁶¹ Kafka, *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, 426–27.

⁶² Kafka, 426–27.

The kitten-lamb has a figural structure that is characteristic for Kafka's external hybrids. Initially, Kafka uses two figures that in everyday use have a clear structure of reference. The kitten-lamb is the mix of two recognizable species: feline and sheep. Both have their own associations, characteristics, and significations. On one side: kitten, predator, pet, fangs, short hair, claws, slinking. On the other: lamb, prey, cattle, curly hair, skipping etc. However, by combining these images and their corresponding properties the new hybrid figure fails to designate the proper meaning of the original figures. The kitten-lamb has the appearance of both a cat and a lamb, but it does not seem to fit in its skin, according to the narrator. It also displays curious behavior that goes back and forth between typical cat or lamb demeanors. It can purr, but not mew. It loathes rats, it flees from cats, and attacks lambs. "Beside the hen coop it can lie for hours in ambush, but it has never yet seized an opportunity for murder."⁶³ Like a cat, it looks longingly at chickens, but like a lamb, it never tries to catch one.

Kafka combines the properties belonging to the cat and the lamb to create a disturbed hybrid image, but the hybridity is not limited to the figures Kafka started with. Instead of trying to solve the ambiguity that arises in his hybrids, he amplifies the contradictions. The figures within the hybrid start to cancel each other out. Everything characteristic for the cat is inhibited by a property of the lamb, and vice versa. The kitten-lamb is cat and lamb, and at the same time cat nor lamb; it is predator and prey, but also predator nor prey.

Once the initial animal figures cannot attain their traditional properties anymore, it becomes possible for new meaning to arise. "Not content with being lamb and cat, it almost insists on being a dog as well."⁶⁴ The kitten-lamb cannot be caught in the meaning of the original figures, and therefore the narrator must use other images to describe the creature. However, he does not stop there. Immediately after this observation, the narrator starts to see human qualities in the kitten-lamb. When he cries, he sees tears on its whiskers, but he cannot distinguish if they are

⁶³ Kafka, 426.

⁶⁴ Kafka, 427.

his own tears or the creature's. "Once when, as may happen to anyone, I could see no way out of my business problems and all that they involved, and was ready to let everything go, and in this mood was lying in my rocking chair in my room, the beast on my knees, I happened to glance down and saw tears dropping from its huge whiskers. Were they mine, or were they the lamb's? Had this cat, along with the soul of a lamb, the ambitions of a human being?"⁶⁵ The narrator does not only wonder about the human ambitions of the kitten-lamb. Sometimes, it even seems as if the creature is saying something to him, although he can never truly understand what message it is trying to convey.⁶⁶

The story takes an unsettling turn at the end when the narrator wonders if it might not be a relief for the kitten-lamb to be slaughtered. Even though he chooses not to, "it sometimes gazes at me with a look of human understanding, challenging me to do the thing of which both of us are thinking."⁶⁷ The ending of "A Crossbreed" is a harsh paradox that is often missed. The moment that the narrator starts to see human qualities in the kitten-lamb, it is implied that he is thinking about committing suicide. Killing a suffering animal, like the kitten-lamb, is often seen as permitted in contrast to human euthanasia. When the narrator is challenged by the kitten-lamb "to do the thing of which both of us are thinking,"⁶⁸ this means two things at the same time: to kill himself and the kitten-lamb like the animals that they both are, and to lengthen their suffering as one does with humans.

Kafka's external hybrids are often a variation of the structure that is visible in the kitten-lamb. First, Kafka creates a hybrid with two or more distinct figures (step 1). Then, the hybrid's image is disturbed by putting the two figures that it is made up of into contradiction, and they end up in a paradoxical state (step 2). This paradoxical state makes the animal figure perceptible for meaning that it did not have in the first place (step 3). The last step always involves the inclusion of the human figure, even if the hybrid did not start with it. Like Derrida and the cat, the

⁶⁵ Kafka, 427.

⁶⁶ Kafka, 427.

⁶⁷ Kafka, 427.

⁶⁸ Kafka, 427.

identity of the human narrator intertwines with the animal identity of the kitten-lamb. With the ambiguous animal hybrid, the difference between animal and human cannot be upheld anymore. The mixed metaphor does not end with the figure of a kitten and a lamb. The human is soon caught within its structure as it tries to make sense of a figure it cannot control. In other words, Kafka creates a mixed figure that forms a new sense when it escapes the initial dichotomy between human and animal, and proper and figure: the kitten-lamb is therefore a catachresis.

Internal Hybridity

The kitten-lamb is an instance of external hybridity, but in his later animal fictions Kafka introduces creatures with a different figural structure. Instead of crossing two species from the outside, such as kitten and lamb, these creatures are internal hybrids. They are animals that have been endowed with human language and reasoning to imagine a rich, intelligent, and speculative animal consciousness. Meanwhile, the human figure is omitted. There is no human narrator, or any other human character.

The first story in which Kafka experiments with this new form of hybridity is “Investigations of a Dog.”⁶⁹ The story revolves around a dog that hopelessly tries to make sense of his own phenomenological condition. His investigations cover a range of questions, some extremely practical: “Whence does the earth procure this food?”⁷⁰ While others are existential: the dog’s biggest question is how to break the silence and to find the truth about his species. The reader is given a small window into the dog’s thoughts, who tries to approach his questions like a scientist. For example, he conducts an experiment about the origin of food by starving himself. Although all his experiments have failed, he still tries to draw conclusions about the nature of dogs – “dogdom” in his words - based on the limited data he has and his hypothetical reasoning. This leads into a speculative array of thoughts that has

⁶⁹ Kafka, 278–316.

⁷⁰ Kafka, 288.

Kafka's artistic signature written all over it: every inference that dog thinks he can make will simultaneously be negated by another interpretation.⁷¹

The dog displays the three steps from the external hybrid, but in a different variation. This time Kafka introduces one figure, a dog (step 1). This dog really is a normal dog, according to himself, since all dogs belong to dogdom (almost like they take part in the Platonic idea Dog). However, the dog does wonder whether there is another dog like him. A dog, that asks questions like he does. So, maybe the dog is different from other dogs, but even that difference stems from dogdom: "the only strange thing about me is my nature, yet even that, as I am always careful to remember, has its foundation in universal dog nature."⁷² The dog is a dog, and not a dog at the same time. However, there is no distinct second figure that puts the first figure into contradiction as is the case for the external hybrids. Indeed, what makes this dog's own species status indeterminate is that Kafka has given him human language, reasoning, and the scientific attitude, but the dog remains in the dark whether other dogs also have these abilities.⁷³

Especially in "Investigations of a Dog" the lack of this second (human) figure is visible, since the dog is completely unaware of the existence of humans and their influence on his life. "Apart from us dogs there are all sorts of creatures in the world, wretched, limited, dumb creatures who have no language but mechanical cries."⁷⁴ In the dog's world, there is nothing beyond his own species: "All knowledge, the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog."⁷⁵ Only, what he cannot see is that food magically appears out of thin air, because these dumb creatures are feeding him; that the mysterious soaring dogs with their senseless lives are lap dogs;⁷⁶ and that the musical dogs, who perform

⁷¹ Kafka, 278–316.

⁷² Kafka, 297.

⁷³ Kafka, 301–2.

⁷⁴ Kafka, 279.

⁷⁵ Kafka, 289–90.

⁷⁶ Kafka, 293–94.

indecent acts by standing on their behind legs, are circus dogs forced to perform their tricks by a dog trainer.⁷⁷

The contradiction (step 2) arises out of the fact that the dog tries to understand his own existence according to some model of human reasoning and logic, but that he is completely oblivious of the human presence in his life. Therefore, he is oblivious to the effect of domestication, while it is always domestication that will prevent him from discovering the nature of dogs and breaking the silence. For example, when dog tries to understand why food sometimes comes out of the sky instead of the ground, which are dog treats from his owner, his experiment is sabotaged by the fact that he, as a dog that is bred to be responsive to food, can never withstand food's appeal. "But in isolated cases something else happened, something really strange; the food did not fall but followed me through the air; the food pursued the hungry. That never went on for long, [...] my greed put a premature end to the experiment and I swallowed down the tempting food."⁷⁸ As long as dog sees his own species as the centre of the universe (like humans often do), he will never understand the phenomenological predicament he finds himself in.

Again, Kafka is steering towards a paradoxical conclusion for the animal figure with which he is working. This dog can never uncover the truth of dogdom, namely the fact that dogs are domesticated by humans, because he is completely oblivious to the influence of humans on his life. His nature will only make sense, once he recognizes that his life is intimately connected to a species that he currently deems lesser than his own. Human logic and science, in the form that Kafka gives it to the dog, cannot account for this perspective. At the same time, the only reason the dog can conduct his investigations is because he has been endowed with the properties of the figure that has been expelled from the story. So, the properties that make dog question his nature actually make it impossible for him to understand himself.

⁷⁷ Kafka, 280–85.

⁷⁸ Kafka, 305.

In addition, the human properties, like the scientific attitude and reasoning, are also put in a paradoxical state. The reader knows that the dog's pursuit of truth fails, because he is trapped in his own flawed subjective experience. If the dog could only see himself from human perspective, then his life would make a lot more sense. However, is human rationality not supposed to be an objective means to truth? And if the dog cannot attain the truth about himself with the help of his dog version of reason and science, who says that humans can? How is our experience any more valid than the dog's? What is left is a figure of a dog that is not really a dog - or maybe he is, the dog could not possibly know - because it is endowed with human properties that might not be so human after all.

"Investigations of a Dog" is often read as a parody of human science or as a play on our own human narcissism, and Kafka is certainly playing with these themes.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, reading the story as a parody only does not do justice to the effect that the story has. What Kafka is exploring is the point of view that Derrida describes years later in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: seeing oneself from the viewpoint of the animal without losing the human experience. Kafka already plays with this coming together of viewpoint in "A Crossbreed" when the narrator's human identity intertwines with the kitten-lamb, but it is not until "Investigations of a Dog" that the coming together of human and animal is fully established. With the troubled, but explicit use of certain human properties, Kafka tries to look through the eyes of the animal and he invites the reader to look with him.

The effect is that new possible meanings arise (step 3). Kafka gives the reader a possible version of what a dog could be experiencing. Even though I doubt that a dog literally would have the thoughts that Kafka gave it, I cannot help but wonder whether it might be possible that dogs, in their own way, try to make sense of the world like I do. What Kafka shows me is that I am not so different from this dog by forcing me to identify with the animal through my own human rationality and logic.

⁷⁹ Norris, "Kafka's Hybrids: Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans," 24–26. Norris gives an excellent reading of the story, although she tends to focus on the irony in it.

The catachrestic hybrid

In short, Kafka's unique artistic mode is not only present in the narratives of his stories, but also in the hybrid structures of the animals they feature. In the case of the external hybrid, Kafka crosses two recognizable animal figures. Then, he brings his new hybrid in paradox and self-contradiction by cultivating its internal inconsistencies. The internal hybrids are a variation of this structure. Kafka places human qualities in an animal consciousness rendering its species status indeterminate, while depleting the human properties of their human rigor. In both cases, Kafka creates a mixed metaphor comprised of animal figures that normally are not put together: an animal catachresis. The kitten-lamb and the dog cannot be defined by the usual ideas that I have about cats and lambs and dogs, and once these connections are severed new connections can be formed.

The catachrestic hybrids create new connections, but it is difficult to grasp their exact meaning. Like Shakespeare's "His complexion is perfect gallows" or Derrida's cat that refused to be conceptualized, I try to make sense of what is happening exactly with these animals. Nevertheless, there is always something that slips through my fingers. It is impossible to control Kafka's hybrid animals by placing a definite interpretation on them: it is impossible to give them one univocal proper sense. This is why one should not be seduced to read Kafka's work as a human metaphor. Kafka's creatures do not have a proper sense, and therefore they are figures that defy the human obsession with the proper – to use Derridean phrasing.

Only that does not mean that they express nothing. Kafka's texts give me the opportunity to think differently about animals without telling me exactly what to think. Like the cat left a mark on Derrida when he was caught in its gaze, these stories leave a mark on the reader. I might never see a kitten-lamb in real life, but the figure challenges my conception of what the animal is or could be. Kafka's animal catachreses always involve a questioning of the relationship between humans and animals, their differences and non-differences, and the human influence on animal life. In their own way, Kafka's animal figures leave their mark

on a concept, on what it means to be an animal. What they show is that animals are not simply objects, resources, or mindless creatures that run from stimulus to stimulus. Animals have subjectivity and agency, which Kafka constructs through his animal-to-human or human-to-animal transformations. In a diary entry Kafka wrote: “I strive to know the whole human and animal community, to recognize their basic predilections, desires, moral ideals [...]”⁸⁰ With his hybrids, Kafka touches upon the lived experience of particular individual animal beings, and he explores how the human and non-human influence each other’s subjectivity alike.

Although, Derrida and Kafka both work with the animal figure as a catachresis, the hybrid structure that Kafka delves into is unique to his writing. This is particularly visible when comparing the dog from “Investigations of a Dog” with the cat from *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. While Derrida suggests looking through the eyes of the animal, Kafka actually looks through the eyes of the animal. He takes the mixed metaphor a step further than Derrida ever could by placing the catachresis *in* the animal itself, and not only between human and animal. The effect is that the figure is not only a short moment anymore, like it is for Derrida. Kafka creates an endless catachresis: an indefinite animal figure that, trapped in paradox and self-contradiction, always remains open for new possibilities.

The implication is that there is no moral ideal waiting for the reader at the end of Kafka’s oeuvre. There is no clear lesson to be taught. What his stories are about is their effect. Kafka generates an experience of confusion and doubt that above all shows that *the* animal does not exist. Kafka resists the human temptation to place themselves above animal life, to objectify individual animal beings, and to appropriate the animal. All these insights, he shares with Derrida. Only, while Derrida writes about the experience of the catachrestic cat looking at him, Kafka generates the experience itself in many different hybrid forms. That is why Kafka’s animal fictions have inspired and disturbed so many. If Derrida is a child waiting for the apocalypse, Kafka is the animal resisting the apocalypse whenever he can.

⁸⁰ Franz Kafka, *Franz Kafka: Diaries, 1910-1923* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 387.

Conclusion

In this article, I developed a different concept of animal figure as an alternative for the contention that everything metaphorical must be expelled from Kafka's animal stories. First, I showed that for Derrida the metaphor is not necessarily a human device. Derrida's animal figure is a catachresis: it is a moment in which the proper meaning of a sign is interrupted by mixing it with another image with which it would not normally be compared. When the human and the animal come together in the figure of the cat, the proper meanings of these markers of identity are interrupted, and the possibility of a new sense arises. Derrida's concept of figure is not a human device, because these new possible connections are spontaneous and accidental. They are unintentional moments in which animal figures become ambiguous and go on a different path than humans expect.

In the second half of the article, the catachrestic animal figure from Derrida's work served as a conceptual lens for Kafka's hybrids. On the one hand, I am indebted to Margot Norris and her description of Kafka's unique artistic mode: she convincingly shows how Kafka's narrations consume themselves logically and rhetorically in self-contradiction. On the other hand, my approach is different from Norris's, since I focus on how this paradoxical mode of writing is present in the hybrid creatures themselves. I argue that the self-contradictive structure of the animal hybrids causes them to become catachreses; they are figures. Kafka's animals are mixed metaphors that gain a new sense once the initial figures fail to attain their proper meaning. Nevertheless, Kafka's artistic mode differentiates his animal figure from Derrida's concept as well. Instead of short moments, Kafka's hybrids are endless mixed metaphors, and they generate the experience of Derrida meeting his cat in written form.

To sum up, I argue – contrary to Deleuze and Guattari, and Margot Norris - that Kafka can use figures in his animal writings. To reject Kafka's animals as symbols for the human predicament does not necessarily entail the absolute depletion of the metaphorical and the figural. In other words, Kafka can think the animal and use figures. Only, what is the advantage of this approach?

While the tradition of the fable portrays animals only to speak of humans (think of the fox who stands for cunning), the repudiation of the figure from animal discourse only shores up the problem. The underlying assumption of this turn to the completely “real” and “antirepresentational” animal is that only human language signifies. It is rather like Derrida’s discussion of Jacques Lacan.⁸¹ According to Derrida, Lacan assumes that the animal in exceptional circumstances may pretend, but that it cannot “pretend to pretend.”⁸² The animal “does not make tracks whose deception lies in the fact that they will be taken as false, while being in fact true ones.”⁸³ Therefore, the animal is characterized by its incapacity to perform a second order of signification, or to engage with the imaginary and the symbolic. This is the assumption that underlies the idea that the animal cannot be thought with figures and metaphors.

Apart from the challenge that this approach, again, characterizes animal life by an incapacity, this assumption loses ground in Kafka’s work. Kafka does not simply take his chance with figural language when writing animals. He uses this language to do justice to non-human agency in his attempt to imagine the animal perspective. Kafka does not only show the limits of human language, imagination and symbolism when he places it in an animal actor: he imagines what these capacities would look like from the animal perspective and opens the possibility for animal signification.

The benefit of understanding Kafka’s animals as figures, as catachrestic animals, is that it can account for what I would argue is the most important accomplishment of his work: the dissolution of the difference between the figural and the real as a difference between the human and the animal. In his animal fictions, Kafka explores different animalities by exploiting animal figures in different hybrid states. Stripping them from their figurative status is stripping them of what makes them powerful. Namely, the fact that these stories could be about real animals, but also about imaginary ones. Kafka explores an animal agency that

⁸¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 129–30.

⁸² Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* as cited in Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 129.

⁸³ Lacan, *Ecrits* as cited in Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 129–30.

belongs to figures, metaphors, representation, and imagination as much as human agency does. Kafka can think the animal, because he allows the animal to enter the supposedly human realm of the figure.

Another purpose of this article is to lay theoretical groundwork for a dual investigation into Derrida's and Kafka's approach to the animal question. Until now, Kafka's influence on Derrida's work on the animal has not gained any scholarly attention, yet. Now that I have developed a conceptualization of the animal figure in Kafka and Derrida, it is possible to provide a detailed comparison of the different animal figures from their texts. How do Derrida and Kafka approach the animal through figures? What are the benefits and disadvantages of such an approach? Furthermore, some important notions from Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, such as the gaze and the difference between reaction and response, are present in Kafka's animal stories. A detailed comparison of these notions and their function within the animal question could provide insight into the work of two philosophers who attempted to look at and as the animal.

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Tracking Animal Subjectivity in Deconstruction: Derrida, Cixous, and Kafka

Summary (Max. 200 words)

Within animal studies, deconstruction - a branch of philosophy that is mainly associated with Jacques Derrida - is recognized for the dismantling of anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, critics have their doubts whether deconstruction also contributes to animal studies' positive project: the development of models of thinking that can account for animal subjectivities that are not based on human-centred logic. Meanwhile, scholars within the field of animal studies examine deconstructive texts with this objective in mind. Mostly, for the reason that deconstruction is open to animal alterity. The question is: *if and how does deconstruction invent non-anthropocentric forms of animal subjectivity and agency?* The aim is to examine how deconstruction contributes to new notions, concepts and models of thinking regarding animal subjectivity by its continuous address to animal alterity.

The proposed research extends this question beyond the borders of Derrida's philosophy alone by examining the work of Franz Kafka and Hélène Cixous. Kafka and Cixous have not only been associated with deconstructive writing, but they have also been recognized for exploring the animal viewpoint in their narratives. The research will examine the different deconstructive styles of Derrida, Kafka, and Cixous, and evaluate how it enables them to express animal subjectivity and agency.

KEY WORDS: Animal, Derrida, Cixous, Kafka, Anthropocentrism, Deconstruction, Alterity, Otherness

1. Animal studies: onto a positive project

In the last few decades the interdisciplinary field of animal studies has committed to a critique of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism means “human centred,” and it is accompanied with the belief that human beings are the most important entities in the universe. An anthropocentric theory interprets the world in terms of human values and experiences, while the experience of other living creatures is disregarded. The criticism on anthropocentrism has uncovered the deep-rooted bias of human value and experience present in current discourses of science and philosophy. These discourses are inadequate for describing the many rich lives of animals. However, now that traditional concepts like human, animal, and animality have been displaced, there is uncertainty how to move forward in this field (Calarco 2008, 4).

With the criticism of anthropocentrism in full swing, it is now time for a positive project. This positive project develops alternative models of thinking that could replace traditional anthropocentric concepts. It remains crucial that these alternatives avoid the human appropriation of animal life, because there is always a difficulty when theorizing with and about animals. Research within animal studies stretches the limits of language, epistemology, and ethics, because it tries to understand creatures that are very different from us: they have different bodies, ways of communicating, and their own point of view. Kari Weil describes the problem accurately: “How to understand and give voice to others or to experiences that seem impervious to our means of understanding; how to attend to difference without appropriating or distorting it (Weil 2012, 7).” In other words, scholars within animal studies continuously navigate the question of voicing animal alterity. The task of philosophy is to create conceptual tools that are sensitive to the diversity of animal life and that can account for different animal subjectivities.

2. The problem of deconstruction in animal studies

The proposed research will examine the value of a specific branch of philosophy for this task: *deconstruction*. The influence of deconstruction on animal studies has

been significant, best known through the philosopher Jacques Derrida. Nevertheless, there is no consensus whether deconstructive thinking could contribute to the positive project the field requires.

Deconstruction takes as its starting point that there is never a univocal point of reference that ensures the meaning of a symbol, identity, or any other sign. Meaning cannot be regarded as static or fixed, but it is constantly changing and evolving. In this context, deconstruction is not concerned with the discovery of “true” meaning. It is the continuous questioning of the basis of what we might perceive as a fixed meaning (its dominant interpretation) by searching for tensions, contradictions, and heterogeneity within the structure of reference itself (C. Turner 2016).

For this reason, deconstruction defies institutionalisation in one dominant definition. Derrida has emphasized that deconstruction is not a method in the traditional sense. One cannot “apply” deconstruction to carry out a scientific or philosophical investigation. Deconstruction is rather a style of reading and writing: an endless interrogation of institutionalised meaning with no determinable outcome. Only in that way can we prevent existing structures of dominance from reasserting themselves (C. Turner 2016).

Deconstruction has made an important contribution to the dismantling of anthropocentrism, but Derrida’s approach has also been criticized. Derrida exposes the human-animal binary as an inadequate boundary capable of enormous violence: it functions as a tool of power that enables humans to dominate animal life and other humans (Derrida 1991, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Even though Derrida acknowledges the critical influence that animals have on his own humanity, Donna Haraway (2008, 22–23) argues that these mindful encounters never motivated his philosophy to go beyond the human subject. The particular animal - *this* cat or *this* dog - and the relationships Derrida had with them are never the subject of philosophical reflection. Derrida fails to leave the criticism of anthropocentrism behind, and therefore his published writings do not explore new ways of relating to animal life (Haraway 2008, 22–23).

A discussion between Terblanche (2004) and Hurst (2007) is characteristic for Haraway's criticism. In an essay about Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008b), Terblanche (2004) argues that deconstruction undermines the potential of language to describe animals. Derrida loses sight of all the diverse ways in which animals are subjects when he opts for "an intrinsic and aesthetic labyrinth of intertextual or philosophical animals (Terblanche 2004, 236)." In a reaction to Terblanche's article, Andrea Hurst (2007) accuses Terblanche (2004) of having a biased reading of Derrida's text. According to Hurst, Derrida is "acutely sensitive to the necessity of writing that reveals in its construction the truth of its subject, and, allowing the impossibility of total control over this (Hurst 2007, 140)." The problem is that Terblanche (2004) has misinterpreted the animal that Derrida is describing in this essay, namely the animal that he himself is (Hurst 2007, 144).

There remains a tension in Hurst's response to Terblanche: Derrida, apparently, is not trying to describe other animals, since the text is about the human animal. Now, we circle back to Haraway's objection (2008, 22–23). Does Derrida express new forms of animal subjectivity, or is he mostly focused on unravelling the human subject?

In short, critics of deconstruction have claimed that Derrida is not capable of conceptualising new animal relations, since he remains encapsulated in his deconstructive approach. Deconstruction, with its focus on the limits within meaning and language, can undo boundaries, but it cannot make a stance: it cannot build something new. Derrida's insistence on the violence of the human-animal binary, and his inability to write beyond the troubled human subject is characteristic for this problem.

Meanwhile, scholars are looking at deconstructive texts to contribute to animal studies, mostly because deconstruction is open to animal alterity (see: *The Animal Question in Deconstruction* (L. Turner 2013)). In an interview, Derrida says: "Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language [...] an openness towards the other (Kearney 1984, 123–24)." For this reason, John D. Caputo (1993) argues that it is a misconception to understand deconstruction only

as destructive linguistic play. Deconstruction has never only aimed at dismantling structures, such as anthropocentrism. The point of deconstruction is to loosen old structures by exposing them to the unexpected, the other, in order to produce new forms (Caputo 1993, 456–57). In a footnote Caputo even claims: “Derrida's efforts are always bent towards minimizing the effects of regularizing subjectivity and maximizing the possibilities of alterity, of *inventing new forms of subjectivity* (1993, 469, my emphasis).”

Especially in a field such as animal studies, it is important to be vigilant for the multiplicity of animal being. Animals call upon us to rethink, ever anew, what is meant with “person,” “subjectivity,” “self,” “animality,” “humanity,” and the entire cluster of terms that follow these concepts. For this reason, Cary Wolfe (2007) argues that deconstruction’s approach to language and knowledge addresses animal subjectivity, because it is sensitive to non-order, plurality, and contradiction. It resists the temptation to put a human interpretation on animal life in its desire for control and unity (Wolfe 2007). So, deconstruction can help us develop new forms of animal subjectivity, because its practice continuously points to something new that struggles to twist free from existing forms.

The question of the proposed research is: *if and how does deconstruction invent non-anthropocentric forms of animal subjectivity and agency?* The aim is to examine how deconstruction contributes to new notions, concepts and models of thinking regarding animal subjectivity by its continuous address to animal alterity.

3. Extending the problem: Cixous and Kafka

Derrida is not the only thinker who has been associated with deconstruction. Two relevant authors are Franz Kafka and Hélène Cixous. Both Kafka and Cixous use a deconstructive style to examine the human-animal distinction. Through a paradoxical and circuitous style of writing they expose the inadequacies of strict boundaries between humans and animals, while they explore the animal point of view.

Cixous is a French feminist writer, poet, and philosopher. Many animals populate her essays and books, in which she mainly focusses on human-animal entanglement. To illustrate, Andersson shows how animal subjects teach Cixous what it means to be human, and to recognize humanity in the other animal (Andersson 2017, 427). Furthermore, scholarship involved in the work of Cixous and Derrida increasingly discusses how their thoughts interweave, but one of the differences between the two is that Cixous is not afraid to explore the animal viewpoint (L. Turner 2014). Especially Cixous' book *Stigmata* (2005) contains multiple essays in which Cixous, as a living being, tries to understand the experience of other creatures.

Cixous is of interest for this research project, because she brings a unique point of view to the question of the animal with her own deconstructive style. What is still to be explored is *how* Cixous' style allows her to write animal agency. A starting point could be Gerhardt's (2017, 687) argument that Cixous grapples at a non-anthropocentric autobiography by playing with the narrative voice, which switches between herself and her childhood dog Fips. One could also think of Cixous' (2005) emphasis on corporeality: the scratches from a cat, or the scars from a dog bite. In her narratives, she understands these material marks as animal writings that constitute her identity. The proposed research will examine Cixous' deconstructive style with its focus on human-animal entanglement and corporeality, and it will analyse how she explores animal subjectivity and agency through those textual means.

While there is a growing body of literature comparing the work of Cixous and Derrida, Kafka has not been recognized as part of the deconstructive tradition. Kafka (1883-1924) is a German-speaking Bohemian story writer, whose work has recently gained traction within animal studies. In his lifetime he wrote many animal stories in which troublesome hybrid creatures often are the main character (Kafka 1971). Within animal studies his work is understood as an early articulation of the anthropocentric critique (Lucht 2010, 9). Moreover, some see his short stories as an important source for animal studies' positive project, because Kafka gives voice to

(a troubled) animal agency by writing from animal's point of view (Goodbody 2016; Lucht and Yarri 2010).

Although Kafka's animal fictions have been associated with deconstruction, the implications of this claim are still to be explored. Margot Norris (1985, 2010) compares the textual style of Kafka's animal stories to Derrida's deconstructive writing, even though the term deconstruction did not exist in Kafka's lifetime. Norris sees Kafka as a deconstructive writer, because his writing is parasitic on the ambiguity of meaning part of any sign, symbol or identity. Kafka's works "consume themselves logically and rhetorically in paradox and self-contradiction (Norris 1985, 133)." He does so, with a truly unique artistic style that might deviate from Derrida's and Cixous', but which in its own way displays deconstructive features. The proposed research will examine how Kafka's writing relates to Cixous' and Derrida's deconstructive texts, and how Kafka's style expresses the animal as a subject.

Two examples of Kafka's deconstructive style that would be of interest are the following. First, Kafka's use of *wenn*. Burkhard Müller (2010) explains how Kafka's subordination of the German conjunction *wenn* (in English, "when" and "if") enables him to write the temporal clause and the conditional simultaneously. Kafka's employment of *wenn* makes it possible to describe a course of events that properly speaking does not happen, and therefore can be haunted by contradictory statements throughout (Müller 2010, 102–3). Second, Kafka's hybrid creatures. Kafka's animals are always hybrids in which he brings human and animal together. This intertwining of human and animal is a deliberate strategy through which he imagines a troubled animal subjectivity and consciousness (Müller 2010; Norris 2010). With both techniques, Kafka creates a state of paradox that serves as a springboard for subversive thought, but that also creates the possibility for a new interpretation of traditional concepts.

To sum up, according to the critics of deconstruction, this branch of philosophy is unable to contribute to the positive project of animal studies. By expanding the problem of deconstruction with the work of Kafka and Cixous, the research project

will examine this criticism beyond the work of Derrida alone. A part of the problem is that deconstruction, as a general mode of writing, does not exist: Kafka, Cixous and Derrida have different deconstructive styles. These differences have not been mapped out, yet, with regards to their ability to explore the animal viewpoint. The research will examine the deconstructive styles of the authors and evaluate how they express animal subjectivity and agency. Therefore, this research project will contribute to our understanding of the different deconstructive styles of the authors, and it will explore the ways in which deconstruction invents new forms of animal subjectivity.

4. Methodology

The question of the proposed research is: *if and how does deconstruction invent non-anthropocentric forms of animal subjectivity and agency?* To answer this question the research will be executed with the following methodology.

First, the animals in the work of Kafka, Cixous and Derrida are mapped out. An animal index of Kafka's work already exists (Yarri 2010), but such an index has not been created for Derrida and Cixous yet. In their writings, animals regularly appear, even in texts that do not have the animal as their primary subject. Thus, it is important to first create an overview of all the animals for each individual author before an analysis can be performed.

Then, the relevant passages are selected, and the deconstructive styles of the authors are specified and analysed. Which techniques are performed? Where do their strategies overlap, and where do they differ? Do the animal figures themselves have a deconstructive effect on the text; do they have a form of deconstructive agency? Not only the works of Derrida, Cixous and Kafka will be a source, but also the existing body of literature on this subject.

Finally, Kafka's, Derrida's and Cixous' deconstructive styles will be compared, and their value will be estimated on the basis of two criteria. First, to what extent are they susceptible to the objection against Derrida's approach? Are

these texts mostly focused on the critique of anthropocentrism? Or are the deconstructive writings of these authors a source for new notions and concepts regarding animal subjectivity and agency? Second, what do we learn about animals (and humans)? Are these new concepts sensitive to the lived reality of animals, or are they mostly a human play with words?

These three steps will achieve the main aim of the proposed research: they will provide an overview of deconstruction's contribution to animal studies with the development of new forms of animal subjectivity. In doing so, the research will contribute to animal studies as a whole, and it will investigate the potential of deconstructive writing within this field. More importantly, the research is devoted to a different understanding of animal life: one that is not based on the violent hierarchy between human and animal that is still pervasive in society today.

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2490

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Timetable

Year 1: Derrida

- Create an index of the animals in the work of Derrida.
- Select the passages relevant for the account of animal subjectivity and agency in the work of Derrida.
- Analyse the deconstructive techniques Derrida uses in these passages, and conceptualise Derrida's deconstructive style.
- On the basis of these passages and Derrida's deconstructive style, conceptualise new forms of animal subjectivity and agency.
- Make a selection of the relevant secondary literature in the field.
- Familiarize oneself with the relevant discussions and problems in the field.
- Write an article on the basis of the index of animals in Derrida's work.
- Write a draft on the animal and deconstruction in Derrida.
- Present article at an animal studies oriented conference, or Derrida oriented conference.

Year 2: Cixous

- Create an index of the animals in the work of Cixous.
- Select the passages relevant for the account of animal subjectivity and agency in the work of Cixous.
- Analyse the deconstructive techniques Cixous uses in these passages, and conceptualise Cixous' deconstructive style.
- On the basis of these passages and Cixous' deconstructive style conceptualise new forms of animal subjectivity and agency.
- Make a selection of the relevant secondary literature in the field, particularly on the relationship between Cixous and the other authors.
- Write an article on the basis of the index of the animals in Cixous' work.
- Write a draft on the animal and deconstruction in the work of Cixous.
- Present article at an animal studies oriented conference.

Year 3: Kafka

- Select the passages relevant for the account of animal subjectivity and agency in the work of Kafka.
- Analyse the deconstructive techniques Kafka uses in these passages, and conceptualise Kafka's deconstructive style.
- On the basis of these passages and Kafka's deconstructive style, conceptualise new forms of animal subjectivity and agency.
- Evaluate and compare the deconstructive styles of Cixous, Derrida and Kafka.
- Craft new notions, concepts and models of thinking regarding animal subjectivity and agency on the basis of the earlier analyses of the three authors.
- Write a draft in which the deconstructive styles of Cixous, Derrida and Kafka are compared.
- Write a draft in which the authors are evaluated on their potential for inventing new forms of animal subjectivity and agency.
- Present article at a conference concerning literature within philosophy, or a conference concerned with animal studies.

Year 4: Finalization

- Write dissertation based on the written drafts and articles.
- Present the result of the dissertation at an international conference.

Summary for non-specialists (Max. 500 words)

Humans are animals, but we behave like we are a special kind of animal. We treat non-human animals as “lesser” beings, and we assess them according to our own capacities. For example, scientists judge the value of chimpanzees by their ability to solve human math problems. The assumption is that humans are more valuable than other living beings, and that we possess the capacity to objectively understand all other lifeforms from our human perspective.

Are humans better than other animals? Are we really this “special” kind of animal? In the last few decades, the human tendency to value themselves above other animal life has been criticized by a field that is called “animal studies.” Among other things, the aims of animal studies are: 1) to dismantle the violent human domination over animal life, 2) to formulate new ways in which animals are regarded as subjects instead of objects. The second aim takes at its starting point that animals, in their own way, are agents with intentions and consciousness. Nevertheless, the field of animal studies continuously navigates the difficulty that animals are different beings, with bodies and ways of communicating that seem impervious to our human means of understanding. This is called animal alterity.

There is no consensus whether a certain branch of philosophy, *deconstruction*, is able to contribute to this second aim. Deconstructive writing focusses on how meaning (institutions, symbols, or identities etc.) cannot be regarded as fixed or static. To illustrate, deconstruction contributes to animal studies’ first aim by questioning whether the difference between humans and animals is absolute. However, critics argue that deconstruction cannot account for the invention of new animal subjectivities, because it cannot describe the real lived experience of animals; a criticism that is often directed at philosopher Jacques Derrida. In other words, deconstruction can criticize, but it cannot build something new. Meanwhile, scholars are looking at deconstructive texts to contribute to animal studies, because they are particularly suited to navigate the difficulty of animal alterity. Deconstruction can help us develop new forms of animal subjectivity, because its practice continuously points to something new that struggles to twist

free from the dominant interpretation of terms like “animal,” “subjectivity,” or “human.”

The proposed research will investigate if and how deconstruction invents new forms of animal subjectivity and agency that are not based on a human-centred logic. To do so, the research extends beyond the work of Derrida. Franz Kafka and Hélène Cixous are two lesser-known authors who have been associated with deconstruction, and who explore animal agency in their narratives. However, the three authors have their own unique deconstructive style; there is not one kind of deconstruction. The proposed research will examine the deconstructive styles of Derrida, Kafka, and Cixous, and evaluate how they explore animals as beings with intentions, feelings, and their own viewpoint. Therefore, the research is devoted to a different understanding of animal life: one that is not based on the violent hierarchy between human and animal that is still pervasive in society today.

Curriculum Vitae

Education

2018 – 2021

Research Master Philosophy – Radboud University, Nijmegen

2015 – 2018

Bachelor Philosophy – Utrecht University, Utrecht

With honours

2013 – 2014

Governmental and Organizational sciences – Utrecht University, Utrecht

Work Experience

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Facility employee – Eager People

2020 – current

Tutor philosophy – Independent

2019 – 2020

Junior Consultant – De Ruijter Strategie

- Scenario analysis for Ministry of Social Affairs (Netherlands): researcher, writer, project assistant.
- Scenario workshop for NWO (Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research): assistant workshops

Extra-curricular activities

2020 – current

Voluntary Student Teacher – Oud Geleerd Jong Gedaan

- Philosophy lectures for seniors

Feb 2019

Organization “Winter School” – Radboud University

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Secretary – USTV (Utrecht Student Theatre Association)

2014 – 2015

Treasurer – USTV (Utrecht Student Theatre Association)

Awards

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Languages

Dutch: Native Speaker

English: Fluent