

# Animals in Focus

## Živali v žarišču

Eds./Ur. Marjetka Golež Kaučič and/in Saša Babič



Knjiga je zelo dobrodošel in pomemben prispevek na področju animalističnih in kritično animalističnih študij, nenazadnje zato, ker diskurzu, v katerem močno prevladujeta anglo-ameriški in severno evropski akademski pogled, dodaja strokovno znanje in perspektive iz regije Alpe-Adria. Poleg tega knjiga prinaša pozitivni pogled z več poučnimi koncepti, pristopi in praksami, ki lahko učinkovito spremenijo odnos do nečloveških živali. Zlasti majhne razpoke v antropocentričnih in dualističnih gotovostih, ki odpirajo prostor za nečloveško subjektivizacijo in artikulacijo, predstavljene v tej knjigi, bodo vir navdiha za akademike in študente v širokem spektru disciplin, pa tudi za znanstveno zainteresirane aktiviste.

Overall, the book makes a very welcome and important contribution to the fields of human-animal studies and critical animal studies, not least because it adds expertise and perspectives from the Alpen-Adria region to a discourse that is strongly dominated by Anglo-American and Northern European academia. Moreover, the book conveys a positive outlook with several enlightening concepts, approaches, and practices that may effectively make a change for nonhuman animals. Especially the little cracks in anthropocentric and dualistic certainties that open space for nonhuman subjectivation and articulation presented in this volume will be a source of inspiration for academics and students in a wide range of disciplines as well as scientifically interested activists.

**Dr. Reingard Spanring,**

editor of the *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial* (Lexington, 2021)  
and research associate at the Institute of Educational Science  
at the University of Innsbruck

Osrednja ideja zbirke prispevkov je ponuditi drugačen pogled na odnose med človekom in živaljo, s poudarkom na nespeciesističnem in neantropocentričnem razumevanju sobitij. Z gotovostjo lahko rečemo, da se je knjiga *Živali v žarišču* izkazala za nepogrešljiv kompendij za razumevanje novih usmeritev že dobro razvitega področja kritičnih živalskih študij v srednji in vzhodni Evropi. Kot taka je pričevanje o nenehnih svetovnih prizadevanjih za odpravo nepotrebnega izkoriščanja človeku podobnih bitij, ki so že dolgo podvržena najbolj brutalnim oblikam zlorabe.

The core idea of the collection of essays is to provide a different perspective on human-animal relations, emphasizing a non-speciesist and non-anthropocentric understanding of our fellow creatures. It is safe to say that the volume *Animals in Focus* prove to be an indispensable compendium for understanding the new directions of the already well-developed field of critical animal studies in Central and Eastern Europe. As such, the book is a testimony to the ongoing global efforts to end the unnecessary exploitation of human-like beings who have long been subjected to the most brutal forms of abuse.

**Dr. Tomaž Grušovnik,**

editor of the *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial* (Lexington, 2021)  
and Full Professor, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education



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**Animals in Focus/ Živali v žarišču**

**Uredili / Edited by:**

Marjetka Golež Kaučič and/in Saša Babič

**Recenzenta / Reviewed by:**

Reingard Spannring and/in Tomaž Grušovnik

**Jezikovni pregled / Proof reading:**

Christian Green and/in Katja Križnik Jeraj

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Nataša Vuga, arnoldvuga+

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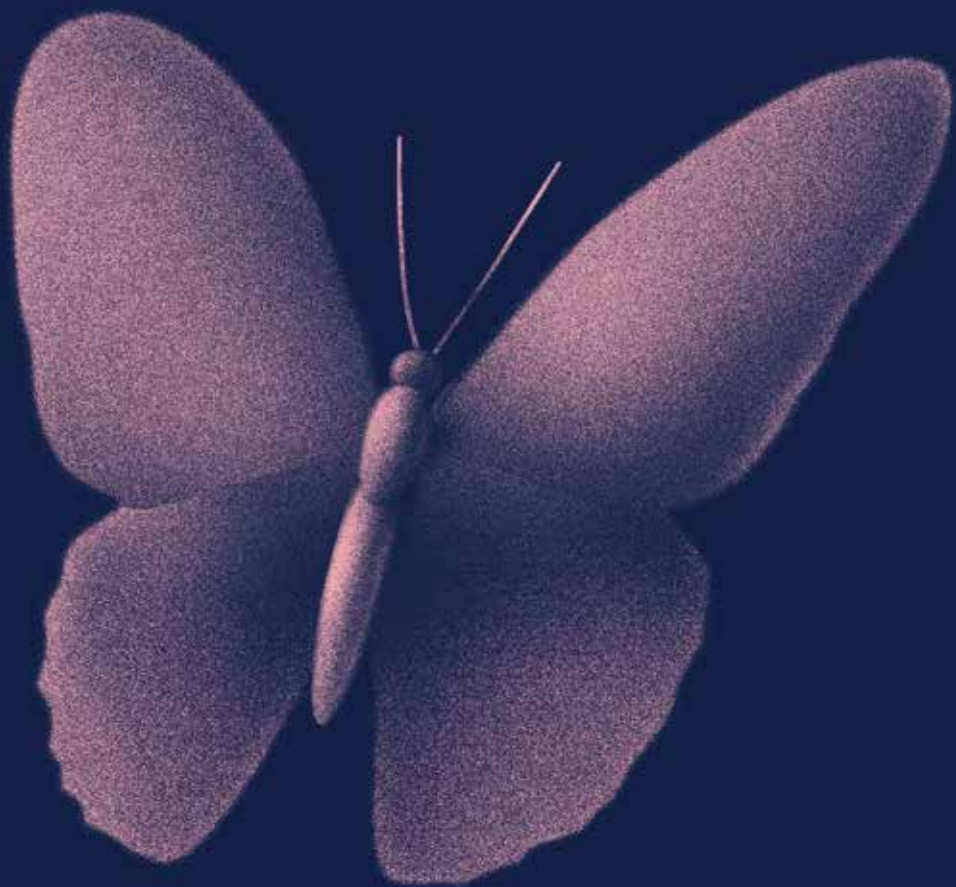
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# Prepoznavanje živali kot subjektov skozi osrediščeni pogled

## 13 Metulj

*V deželi, kamor odleti vsak glas,  
je bil metulj, totalno razpuščen,  
v zamolklo ravnotežje potopljen  
in vrinjen v cirkulirajoči čas,  
ki je razkril drget srebrne kože  
**očem**, ki jih metulj **ni prepoznal**,  
ko je bil **gledan** iz svetlobe rože,  
iz hrepenenja breztelesnih trav.*

(Detela, 2018: 147)

*Privezana ovca na travnati ploskvi –  
kako se vključuješ v **diskurze**  
**pogledov?***

(Detela, 2018: 896)

Monografija *Živali v žarišču* povezuje raziskovalke z različnih znanstvenih področij in je multidisciplinarni sklop pogledov na žival, ki ni več nekje na obrobju pogleda, temveč v središču. A to osrediščenje je zelo raznoliko, saj prispevki izhajajo iz filozofije, literarne vede, komparativistike, zoofolkloristike, antropologije, umetnostne zgodovine, kritične animalistike in kritične animalistične pedagogike ter varstvene biologije. Vse pa povezuje skupno izhodišče, to je misliti živali drugače, z zanikanjem antropocentričnega in speciestičnega pogleda na živali, kot temeljne oblike zatiranja (Patterson, 2002; Sanbonmatsu, 2014), in z umeščanjem njihovih življenj v raziskovalni in emotivni fokus. Predvsem gre za to, da ne odvrnemo pogleda (Grušovnik, Spannring and Lykke, 2021) od tiste živali, ki stopi pred naš pogled in se tudi zagleda v nas, ne glede na to, kakšen način njenega pogleda je to. Da jo zares vidimo, da ne zanikamo njenega obstoja, trpljenja in nasilja nad njo. Implicitno zanikanje zlorabe živali je treba ozavestiti in žival subjektivizirati ter ji dati moralno in pravno vrednost. To je imperativ kritičnih animalističnih etikov, ki razvijajo teorijo subjektivitete živali. To poudarja Weisberg: »Če bi druge živali dejansko prepoznali kot ... *subjekte* etične skrbi in ne kot objektov manipulacije, systemskega izkoriščanja nečloveških živali ne bi bilo več mogoče opravičiti« (2009: 40).

Subjekt gledanja, tj. fokalizatorja ali ožariščevalca so živali in je žival kot posameznik (Zahova, 2020). Tisti, ki ožarišča, pa je človek, ki pa zapuša svojo antropodominantno pozicijo. S tem omogoča, da živali ne vidimo v antropocentrični, antropomorfn ali drugi obliki, ko jo gledamo, kot da govori o sebi. Ali kot je zapisal Jure Detela: »bitja izrekajo sebe, ne mene« (2018: 179); šele takrat se pred nami pokaže resnično živalsko bitje.

Naše skupno izhodišče in znanstveno-kritični argumenti združujejo ugotovitve, ki povezujejo pomenske strukture in medsebojne odnose živalskih in človeških subjektov med seboj kot bistvene. Osrediščenje živali pomeni, da živali priznavamo kot samostojne subjekte in ne podrejena bitja. Subjektivizacija živali pa pomeni, da jih obravnavamo v protispeciističnem in neantropocentričnem duhu ter se zavedamo, da ne vključujemo samo njihovih teles v reprezentacijo, temveč vemo, da imajo živali cel diapazon čustev, čutenja, družinskega in duhovnega življenja, so zavestne v svojem delovanju in nenazadnje tudi artikulirajo ustvarjalnost ter si tako omogočajo samodeterminacijo. Best pravi, da:

Toda ljudje nismo edinstveni v tem, da imamo neokorteks; kompleksna čustva, kot so ljubezen, osamljenost, empatija in sram; sofisticirane jezike, vedenja in skupnosti; in celo estetske in moralne občutljivosti. Človeška bitja izstopajo le po stopnji, do katere so razvili zmožnosti in potencial za razum, jezik, zavest, estetiko, etiko, kulturo in tehnologijo veliko bolje od šimpanzov in drugih živali. (Best, 2009: 22)

Kljub temu, da so prispevki osredotočeni na živali, so živali v fokusu percipirane v njihovem položaju v današnjem svetu in v relacijah z ljudmi, saj jih še ne moremo

pojmovati kot svobodne entitete, čeprav se nekateri raziskovalci trudijo, da bi to tudi postale (Francione, 2008; Best, 2014), ali izražajo zaskrbljenost nad njihovim položajem (Wadiwel, 2015; Sanbonmatsu, 2017) prav zaradi njihovega vsakodnevnega izkoriščanja (Safran Foer, 2009; Sorenson, 2014) v kapitalističnih produkcijskih sistemih, ki jih potiskajo v objektifikacijo. S tem jim ne omogočajo, da bi razvile svoje življenjske potenciale v njim lastnem okolju, še posebej tiste živali, ki jih človek izkorišča za lastne potrebe, pa najsi bo to hrana, zabava, znanost, delo idr. Prav v teh sistemih, ki omogočajo, da živali postanejo neobstoječi subjekti (Adams, 2022), pa jih potem percipiramo kot amorfno gmoto, kot meso, kot modele za raziskave, lovski plen, in ne kot čuteča bitja, kar pa so kognitivni etologi že zdavnaj dokazali tudi za živali (Bekoff, 2024; Waal, 2016): živali razvijajo kompleksne čustvene in socialne odnose in komunikacije, njihova ustvarjalnost je intencionalna, lahko razvijejo tudi folklorne (Thompson, 2010; Magliocco, 2018) in religiozne refleksije (Schaefer, 2017; Goodall, 1963) ter kulturo in zoopoesis (Golež Kaučič, 2023).

Dokazi o živalski inteligenci so številni, obsežni in v veliki meri kažejo na prisotnost zapletenega uma, družbenega življenja in vedenja pri nečloveških živalih (Best, 2009, 2014; Hauser, 2001); če navedemo zgolj Griffinovo odkritje: netopirji uporabljajo eholokacijo za obvladovanje prostora, kar je dokaz, da živali mislijo. To odkritje mora spreminjati naš pogled na živali, pa tudi na nas same (Griffin, 2001). Inteligenco živali pa lahko prepoznamo le, če jih ne odpravimo tja, kjer obstajajo le kot človeški vir ali konkurenca v sobivanju, kot tiste, ki so v odmiku človeškega pogleda (Diamond, 1978; Hacking, 2008; Grušovnik, 2016; 2020; Berger, 1972), da jih sicer zaznamo, a ne osrediščimo ter obstanemo v večni krivdi zaradi njihovega položaja ali pa v popolni brezbriznosti nad tistim, ki je drugi in nam povzroča le nelagodje.

V monografiji razpravljamo o vrstni determiniranosti, čeprav je že popolnoma jasno, da vrsta obstaja le v taksonomskem smislu, ne pa v filozofskem, saj le telesna pojavnost ne oblikuje čutečega bitja, razlike v telesnosti še ne pomenijo, da je človeška pojavnost vredna več kot živalska, je le pridobila večjo družbeno in politično vrednost kot dominirajoča vrsta nad drugimi. Zato je potrebno, da žarek pogleda usmerimo na živalska telesa in duše, v različnih pojavnostih, ki bi jim lahko rekli telesno-čustveno-duhovna živalska diverziteteta, kamor nenazadnje sodimo tudi ljudje. Prav o tem razpravlja **Vesna Liponik** v prispevku **We Have Always Been Grotesque (Vedno smo bili groteskni)**, ki s pomočjo teoretskih diskurzov Agambena in Bahtina preučuje pomen groteske, še posebno glede koncepta vrste, ki je tesno povezana s telesno pojavnostjo. In prav groteska lahko združi nekaj, kar je nezdržljivo in s tem radikalno transformira sam pojem vrste. Avtorica razpravlja o vrstni nekonsistentnosti, danes bi temu lahko rekli »sympoetika« (Haraway, 2016) ali celo spajanje človeškega in živalskega (Helmreich in Kirksey, 2010) skozi grotesknost podob pravičnikov z živalskimi glavami na mesijanski pojedini, ki je upodobljena na miniaturi v hebrejski Bibliji iz 13. stoletja, s katero uvaja svoje delo *Odprto. Človek in žival* Giorgio Agamben. Avtorica meni, da ta groteskna podoba ali *zoocefalni idiom* (Gertsman, 2022) omogoča skrit protispeciesistični potencial tudi za današnji čas, ki se ji zdi v celoti grotesken.

Če groteska razveljavlja definicijo vrste, pa jo poezija, ki v sebi nosi zoopoetiko, lahko poudari ali pa preobrazi. V monografiji živali postavimo v fokus tudi skozi zoopoetiko, ki je poetika živalskega jezika, poleg klasičnega pojmovanja zoopoetike kot ustvarjanja s človeškim jezikom, in sicer kot *animal poesis* »živalska poezija« (Moe, 2013 in 2014: 59–88). Posamezni pesniki uporabljajo poezijo za oblikovanje *zoopoesis* – npr. prisotnost zvokov živali v poeziji, a tudi kot prisotnost živali v poeziji kot oseb. Pogled, da netopir ne leti samo skozi prostor, temveč ga podrobno zaznava, ne pa spreminja, je speciesistični pogled. Zoopoetika zahteva prepoznavanje, da imajo živali *komunikativne cone* – cone, ki se morda razlikujejo od človeških ust oziroma govora (Moe, 2014: 3). Z opazovanjem načina, kako se telesa in besedila medsebojno obveščajo, in izzivanjem binarističnih pristopov k ljudem in nečloveškim živalim literatura ponuja pomembno obliko, v kateri lahko razmišljamo skozi živali. Večina poezije je trdovratno zakoreninjena v pesnikovem opazovanju živali, čeprav bi lahko pravzaprav odstirali ideje o živalih. Zoopoetika predvideva tudi, da reprezentiramo komunikacijo živali, čustvovanje živali, razmišljanje živali – imaginativno in približano resničnosti. V ta zoopoetični svet vstopa **Jelka Kernev Štrajn** s prispevkom **The Non-human Animal Between Metaphor and Metamorphosis (Nečloveške živali med metaforo in metamorfozo)**, ki prav ob analizi štirih pesniških in proznih besedil, ki obravnavajo netopirja, uveljavlja prepričanje, da z metaforiko ne izrinjamo resničnih živali iz književnosti (prim. Jovanovski, 2013: 110), temveč je pesniška govorica najbližje nečloveškim živalim. Te živali naj bi bile prav z načinom sporazumevanja, ki je telesni in zvočni, intenzivno metaforične, kar je po njenem mnenju pravzaprav paradoks. S pomočjo interakcijske teorije metafore in koncepta metamorfoze želi prikazati, kako besedila, ki poskušajo ta zoopoesis približati bralcu, tista, ki binarnost med človekom in živaljo ukinjajo. Prav s tem, da skušajo komunikacijo živali umestiti v komunikacijo ljudi, postavljajo živali v žarišče pogleda, misli in emocije, s tem pa tudi omogočajo, kot je zapisala Rosi Braidotti: »Živali ni več mogoče metaforizirati kot drugo, temveč jo je treba jemati pod njenimi pogoji« (Braidotti, 2009: 528).

Živali so lahko postavljene v središče podob, lahko so umeščene v »središče sveta« in pričajo o sebi, imajo zavest o sebi in drugih (Hribar Sorčan, 2021: 20). Tudi v slikarstvu so torej lahko osrediščene, neodvisne od človeka in s svojimi telesi, gibi in pogledom kažejo, da čustvujejo in razmišljajo ter so subjektiviteta, ki »vedno pomeni določeno stopnjo zavedanja in samozavedanja identitete«, čeprav je to razumevanje nepopolno (Hall, 2004: 3). Če Stacy Alaimo s »čeztelesnostjo« vzpostavlja »etiko izpostavljenosti« (2016: 77, prim. Vičar, 2024) predvsem teles, pa je v 19. stoletju prek slikanja teles družnih in rejnih živali slikarka Rosa Bonheur te slikala kot posameznice in v moči podob poudarila počutje živali skozi njihovo telesnost, gibanje, pogled. Živali je videla kot osebe, jih portretirala ter s tem poudarila etični vidik svojega ustvarjanja. O tem razpravlja **Valentina Hribar Sorčan** v svojem prispevku **Interest in Realistic Animal Painting Using the Example of Rosa Bonheur Reviving (Obuditev zanimanja za realistično slikanje živali na primeru**

**Rose Bonheur**). Zdi se, da je prav prek slikanja Bonheur ustvarjala možnost za ontološko ekvivalenco (Ingold, 1994), hkrati pa jih ni zreducirala na objekte (Noske, 1989), s čimer je omogočala, da tudi skozi likovno umetnost živali gledamo kot protagoniste lastnega življenja. Zdi se, da tako kot zoopoetika tudi zoopodoba lahko prispevata k spremembam odnosa do živali in Hribar Sorčan o tem razmišlja v okviru filozofije umetnosti, Kernev Štrajn pa v okviru filozofije, literarne vede in zoosemiotike.

A da bi o živalih lahko sploh razmišljali, potrebujemo izobraževanje, ki pravzaprav v temeljih omogoča ali pa zanika t. i. spremembo odnosa do živali ter nato vpliva na prihodnje dožemanje živali. S tem se ukvarja **Ulrike Schmidt** v prispevku **Squirrel, Lynx, and Field mouse. The Contribution of School Text Books to a Speciesistic Perception of Animals (Veverica, ris in poljska miška. Prispevek avstrijskih šolskih učbenikov k speciesistični percepciji živali)** in ugotavlja, da je izvir antropocentričnih percepcij živali najti tudi v izobraževalnem procesu. Avtorica preučuje znanje, posredovano v avstrijskih šolskih učbenikih za 5. razred biologije in okolja, ter kritično in diskurzivno analizira jezikovno-medijsko (komunikacijsko) konceptualizacijo subjekta »žival« prek posredovanega znanja o različnih vrstah sesalcev. Ob tej analizi je ugotovila, da so živali predstavljene pretežno glede na uporabnost in taksonomsko delitev. Diskurz o živalih, ki ga posredujejo učbeniki, je strukturiran utilitarno-antropocentrično. S tem je potrdila, da je izobraževalni proces vpet v dominantne družbene strukture, ki poudarjajo antropodominacijo in živali še vedno prikazujejo kot druge. Preseči bi morali poučevanje zgolj telesnosti živali in njihovih fizičnih funkcij, kot jih v izobraževalnem procesu ponujajo biologi, in razširiti znanje o živalih vsaj s spoznanji kognitivne etologije.

Predvsem pa bi morali tudi v pedagoškem procesu zavzeti živalsko stališče, t. i. animal standpoint (Klampfer, 2010: 269–270; Best, 2014: 1–20; Donovan, 2022: 73), ki se osredinja na živali kot na subjektivitete in zavestna čuteča bitja. Postavi jih v fokus svoje lastne izkušnje drugega – življenja v drugega, kot je to sploh mogoče in vsekakor je mogoče, če presežemo kognitivne pristranskosti (Brooks Pribac, 2021). Zato bi vsekakor morala kritična animalistična pedagogika preučiti vse strukture, ki vodijo k izkoriščevalskim, odtujevalnim in podrejenim družbenim praksam, kar trdi že Helena Pedersen (2010, prim. še Andrzejewski, Pedersen, and Wicklund, 2009). Z uporabo kritičnih animalističnih študij (Nocella et al., 2014; Sanbonmatsu, 2011; Matsouka and Sorenson, 2018) in vzpostavitev kritične animalistične pedagogike (Nocella II et al., 2019; Gunnarsson Dinker and Pedersen, 2016, 2019) bi tudi v izobraževalni proces lahko vpeljali transformativni pogled na živali in dialoško čezvrstno izobraževalno okolje (Spannring, 2023).

Vzporedno z izobraževalnim procesom pa poteka še en proces, ki je tako zavesten kot inerten, saj prežema vse sfere človekovega bivanja in delovanja: to je tradicija. Tradicija večinoma nosi pozitivno konotacijo in se zdi nespremenljiva, večna. Tudi tista, ki omogoča nasilje nad živaljo, kot so npr. koline in definira ubijanje živali za hrano kot kulturno prakso oziroma celo kot dediščino. Zato je treba poudariti, da ni vsaka tradicija

pozitivna in zato bi morala biti redefinirana, saj nove okoliščine in spoznanja o intrinzični vrednosti živali zahtevajo novo refleksijo tradicije. Koline so negativna tradicija, ki je s celo mrežo negativne živalske simbolike tako močno zasidrana v kulturno-družbenem prostoru, da onemogoča drugačno videnje in dojetje živali, da konceptualizira živali zgolj na podlagi normalizacije živalskih objektov kot vira hrane. O tem razpravlja **Marjetka Golež Kaučič** v poglavju **Home Pig Slaughter; or, the Redefinition of Tradition and the Industrial Holocaust (Koline ali redefinicija tradicije in industrijski holokavst)** in govori o kolinah kot ubijalski praksi (kjer se ubija prašiča/svinjo kot »rejno« žival). Obravnava ga skozi zgodovino, folkloro, literaturo in šege. To prakso vzporeja z resničnostjo današnjega časa ob razkrivanju industrijskih agrokulturnih praks (Twine, 2012) ter ob emotivnih srečanjih s prašiči/svinjami. V tem vidimo več konceptov, ki jih je razvila kritična animalistika, in sicer speciesizem v neoliberalnem kapitalizmu (Nibert, 2014; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2018) in karnizem (Joy, 2010), vsi pa legitimirajo človeško dominanco nad nečloveškimi živalmi, Calvo pa je razvila koncept »antroparhije« (*anthroparchy*), kar dobesedno pomeni »človeška dominacija«, in dojemata antroparhijo kot družbeni sistem, kompleksen in razmeroma stabilen sklop odnosov, v katerem »okolišje« prevladuje prek oblik družbene organizacije, ki privilegirajo človeka (Cudworth, 2005: 63–71, Cudworth, 2007: 351–357). Meni, da ima antroparhija določene prednosti pred drugimi možnimi izrazi, kot sta »antropocentrizem« in »speciesizem« (Calvo, 2008: 34). Ne samo živali, temveč vsa narava postaja »pripomoček, instrument in vir« (Figueroa-Helland and Lindgren, 2016, 6–7). Pojavi se proces komodifikacije narave »ideja, da je zemlja mogoče zakonito posedovati kot lastnino, jo reducira na poglobljeno »stvar«, ki nato postane del kapitalističnega trga« (Avlon, 2023: 105). In kot pravi Donovan: »[...] ljudje operirajo, secirajo, uničujejo in preurejajo objektiviziran naravni svet v skladu s svojimi željami, predstavami, interesi. To je, ironično, le razširitev klasične prakse, ki ima korenine v kartezijanski epistemologiji« (Donovan, 2022: 74). Narava je torej pasivni objekt izkoriščanja, ki ga obvladujejo korporacije, ki proizvajajo herbicide in pesticide, saj je narava le nekaj, kar prinaša dobiček, ostalo pa je treba uničiti. Toda ob tem poteka tudi neke vrste »klanje« čebel, ki so sicer simbolno in vrednostno visoko na lestvici človekovega pozitivnega odnosa do živali. Vendar je pogled na čebelo večinoma utilitaristični, saj je čebela objekt izkoriščanja (njenega produkta, ki je med) in ne subjekt, ki bi ta produkt zadržal zase (Raušl, 2023). Subjektiviteta in vršilskost čebel sta izbrisana iz tega pogleda (Alaimo, 2010). O čebeli kot o subjektu pa razpravlja **Suzana Marjanič** v prispevku z naslovom **GMO Apocalypse or The So-Called Mysterious Extinction of Bees (GSO apokalipsa ali skrivnostno izumrtje čebel)**. Avtorica v središče postavlja čebelo in njeno bivanje ter umiranje oziroma izumiranje v delovanju antropocena in kapitalocena (Haraway, 2015), ki vodi v apokalipso, saj kapital uničuje naravo, skupaj z živimi bitji. In ne gre le za čebele; uničevanje je širše, poleg njih umirajo številne žuželke in rastline in posledično tisti opravešalci, ki omogočajo razvoj rastlin tudi za človeka. Razpravlja o »skrivnostnem« umiranju



čebel v lokalnem kontekstu Hrvaške in Srbije in opozarja na nevarnost GSO hrane, ki ne upošteva naravnih procesov, temveč v rastline vnaša gensko spremenjene organizme ter z glifosatom in herbicidi zastruplja ekosistem.

Povezanost čebel in medvedov se kaže že v slovenski besedi *medved*, saj je v njej skrit *med*, ki ga delajo čebele, medved pa ga ima za posladek. Toda ta medvrstnost ni izkoriščevalska, saj medved ne uporablja čebeljega medu za dobiček, ga le uporabi za preživetje. Razmerja človeka do medveda pa so kompleksna in ambivalentna, tudi prek imaginacij. Večinoma gre za vztrajanje na antropocentričnem stališču, ki pa je značilno le za zahodni pogled nanj, prvobitna ljudstva medveda namreč razumejo kot sebi enakega (prim. Nagy, 2024; Henderson, 2024). V našem, na človeka osredotočenem svetu pa ga obravnavamo kot pomembno »vrsto« in ne kot posameznika, ki ima kompleksne čustvene in kognitivne sposobnosti (Corman and Vandrovcová, 2014). Še vedno ga postavljamo v svet narave, ki pa je odtujen od sveta kulture, kamor smo uvrstili človeka. Tako kot smo kolonizirali naravo, smo kolonizirali tudi medveda, ga zaščitili, a le do tiste meje, ko nedovoljeno vstopa v človeško okolje. Takrat ukinemo zaščito in ga »odvzamemo« iz narave (ubijemo) ali pa ga zapremo v kletke in živalske vrtove. Zdi se, da vodimo nenehno vojno proti živalim (Wadiwel, 2015). Še vedno je torej uveljavljeni speciesistični pogled na živali, tudi na medveda, in je v ospredju biološka pravičnost pred resnično pravičnostjo. Spremembe percepcije ljudi do medveda v Sloveniji preučujeta **Anja Moric in Irena Kavčič** v prispevku **Ways of Seeing Bears in Slovenia (Videnja medvedov v Sloveniji)**, prek raziskav javnega mnenja o medvedih, posameznih interesnih skupin ter prek medijske reprezentacije medveda (prim. Vičar, 2017). Medved je postavljen v središče, a ne samo pogleda, temveč tudi negativnih konotacij, konflikta in sovraštva, a hkrati tudi občudovanja. Izpostavljata Kočevsko, kjer je prišlo do izrazito pozitivnega vrednotenja medveda, čeprav o dožemanju medveda kot subjektivitete še ne moremo govoriti.

Je pa mogoče, da prav prek imaginarne avtoetnografije, ki ne ponuja anket, vprašalnikov, niti ne večjih skupin, ki izražajo svoj odnos do medveda oziroma ga razumejo na različne načine, osrediščimo žival prek osebne izkušnje resnično živeče živali iz preteklosti, ki spregovori prek fiktivne osebne zgodbe. V njej odkrivamo ne samo njeno percepcijo sveta, močno pripeto le na človeško dominacijo, temveč tudi cel spekter čustvovanj, razmišljanj in doživljanj sveta z živalske perspektive ali živalskega stališča. V tem primeru lahko prepoznamo imaginativno pravičnost (Brooks Pribac in Golež Kaučič, 2024; Golež Kaučič, 2024), ki lahko vodi do resnične pravičnosti, prav prek imaginarne avtoetnografije. In ta je povezana z antropomorfizmom, ki je produktiven ali kritičen (Garrard, 2004: 19–20, 5), saj nam prikaže možnost, da se prek njega povežemo z več kot človeško in skozi njo ne preseva človeška epistemologija, temveč živalska. Avtoetnografska metoda (Hayano, 1979; Denzin, 1989; Ellis, 1991) je uporaba lastne udeležbe z opazovanjem in sodoživljanjem položaja živali. Ta metoda ponuja možnost doživljanja živali v imaginativni izkušnji, ki je bila nekoč resnična. Omogoča deskriptivni in introspektivni pogled in zelo natančno

intelektualno in emocionalno izkušnjo (Arluke and Sanders, 1996: 29). Uporaba avtoetnografije je po Ellis »vključevanje gibanja nazaj in naprej med doživljanjem in preučevanjem ranljivega jaza in opazovanja ter razkrivanja širšega konteksta te izkušnje« (Ellis, 2007: 14). Avtoetnografija je »žanr pisanja in raziskovanja, ki povezuje osebno s kulturnim« ter »postavlja sebe v družbeni kontekst« (Holt, 2003: 2 ). O tem razmišljata **Teja Brooks Pribac in Susanne Karr** v hibridnem prispevku **Down the Donkey Trail: An Imaginary Autoethnography (Po oslovi poti: imaginarna avtoetnografija)**. Od antropocentričnega pogleda na medveda prek ekosistemskih koristi pa je tako v zadnjem prispevku v žarišču usoda osla, izkoriščenega in uporabljenega zgolj za človeške interese in potrebe. Prispevek prikaže fiktivno življenje istrskega osla (prim. Cankar, 1911) prek namišljene živalske avtoetnografije, kjer o bivanju in življenju skozi spominsko optiko pripoveduje živalska subjektiviteta, ki pa izhaja iz resnične etnografije življenja oslov v petdesetih letih 20. stoletja, kar priča tudi človeška etnografija. Gre za imaginativno alternativo, za zastopanje glasu drugega – v tem primeru je to osel – ki sam ne more verbalizirati svojega položaja, a ga s telesno in glasovno komunikacijo venomer izraža. Izpostavlja tudi avtorjev odnos do družbene konstrukcije resničnosti, živalskega spomina kot temeljne vezi med preteklimi dogodki in sedanjimi realizacijami. Predstavlja možnost, da si predstavljamo resničnost oslovega življenja v Istri, ki je izpričano tudi v etnološki literaturi, tam le omenjeno kot sredstvo za prenos tovara (Ledinek Lozej, 2014: 49), skratka zgolj kot objekt uporabe in nekje celo objekt telesne zlorabe. Avtorici nato s prehodom na neko utopično sedanost, kjer so osli svobodne entitete s kompleksnim družinskim življenjem, čustvovanjem in globoko kognicijo ter ob upoštevanju njihove lastne kulture in duhovne refleksije, z imaginativno naracijo predstavljata utopično resničnost, ki pa je edina mogoča, če želimo doseči resnično pravičnost (Jovanovski, 2020: 52), ne pa samo vztrajati na izboljšanju pogojev delovnih živali, kar bi bilo sicer izkazovanje empatije (Baskar, 2023: 29; Sosič, 2021), a bi to bila še vedno človeška dominacija z zanikanjem njihove intrinzične vrednosti.

### **Svinja na koncu sveta**

*poplava je  
vse uničeno mokro deroče  
skupaj s plotom  
tonejo ljudje ladje zavarovalnice  
in potem neki človek  
z glavo še komaj nad gladino  
**gleda svinjo**  
ogromno pitano svinjo*

***večjo od sveta**  
(svet sam)  
blazno zavzeto  
proti jabolku plavati  
jabolko jesti*

(Liponik, 2023: 74)

# Recognising Animals as Subjects Through a Focalised View

## 13 A Butterfly

*In a land where every voice flies away,  
there was a butterfly, entirely on the loose,  
and squeezed in circulating time,  
immersed in a deadened balance  
which bare the shiver of silver skin  
to the eyes the butterfly **did not recognise**  
when it was **watched** from the light of a flower,  
the yearning of bodiless grass.*

(Detela, 2018: 147)

*Tethered sheep on a grassy plane –  
how do you enter the **discourse**  
of views?*

(Detela, 2018: 896)

The monograph *Animals in Focus* brings together researchers from different fields of science and offers a multidisciplinary set of views on the animal who is not on the fringes of our perspectives but has become their centre or focus. The move to the centre can be diverse, though, as the articles are based on philosophy, literary studies, comparative studies, zoofolkloristics, anthropology, art history, critical animal studies, critical animal pedagogies and conservation biology. They all proceed, however, from a common starting point, i.e., thinking of animals in a different way, by rejecting the anthropocentric and speciesist view of animals, the fundamental form of oppression (Patterson, 2002; Sanbonmatsu, 2014), and placing their lives in the research and emotive focus. The aim is not to avert our intention (Grušovnik, Spannring and Lykke, 2021) from the animal that catches our gaze, whatever the mode of gaze it is; to really see the animal and not deny its existence, suffering and abuse. The implicit denial of animal abuse must be brought into our consciousness and the animal must be subjectivised and given moral and legal value. This is an imperative of the critical animalistic ethicists who are developing the theory of animal subjectivity. As Weisberg points out: “If we actually recognized other animals as ... being *subjects* of ethical concern rather than *objects* of manipulation, the systemic exploitation of the nonhuman could no longer be justified” (2009: 40).

The subject of our gaze, i.e., of the focaliser, are animals and an animal as an individual (Zahova, 2020). The one who focuses is the human who is leaving behind their anthropodominant position. This allows us to avoid seeing the animal in an anthropocentric, anthropomorphic or other form when we gaze upon it, as if it is talking about itself. Or, as Jure Detela says: “... the beings articulate themselves, not me” (2018: 179); only then we can see the real animal being.

Our common starting point and scientific-critical arguments include findings that connect the structures of meaning and relationships between animal and human subjects as key. Focalisation of the animal means that the animals are recognised as autonomous subjects rather than subordinate beings. Subjectivising animals, on the other hand, means that we study them in an anti-speciesist and non-anthropocentric spirit, a representation that does not include only their bodies, because we know that animals have a whole range of emotions, feelings, family and spiritual lives, we know that they are conscious in their actions and they also articulate creativity, which means that they are capable of self-determination. As Best says:

But humans are not unique in their possession of a neocortex; of complex emotions like love, loneliness, empathy, and shame; of sophisticated languages, behaviours, and communities; and even of aesthetic and moral sensibilities. Human beings stand out in the degree to which they have developed capacities and potential for reason, language, consciousness, aesthetics, ethics, culture, and technology far beyond chimpanzees and other animals. (Best, 2009: 22)

Although the articles focus on animals, the animals in focus are perceived in the context of their position in the world today and their relations to people. Today, animals still cannot be considered free entities, despite the efforts of several researchers to either allow them to become so (Francione, 2008; Best, 2014) or to express their concern over the animals' position (Wadiwel, 2015; Sanbonmatsu, 2017) due to their daily exploitation (Safran Foer, 2009; Sorenson, 2014) in the capitalist production systems which force them into objectification. In this way, animals are not in a position to develop their life potential in their natural environment, especially the animals exploited by humans for their needs, be it food, entertainment, science, work, etc. It is these very systems that allow the animals to become non-existent subjects (Adams, 2022), precepted as an amorphous mass, as meat, as models for research or hunting and not as the sentient beings they were long ago proven to be by cognitive ethologists (Bekoff, 2024; Waal, 2016), who demonstrated that animals develop complex emotional and social relationships and communications, their creativity is intentional and they can also develop folklore (Thompson, 2010; Magliocco, 2018), religious reflections (Schaefer, 2017; Goodall, 1963), culture and zoopoiesis (Golež Kaučič, 2023).

There is abundant proof of animal intelligence that points to the presence of complex minds, social life and behaviour in non-human animals (Best, 2009, 2014; Hauser, 2001), for example, Griffin's findings that bats use echolocation to manoeuvre within a space, which proves that animals can think. This must change our view of animals and ourselves (Griffin, 2001). However, animal intelligence can only be recognised when we do not force them into a place where they exist only as a resource for humans or as competition in coexistence, like those from which humans avert their gaze (Diamond, 1978; Hacking 2008; Grušovnik, 2016, 2020; Berger, 1972), which means that we acknowledge them but we do not focalise them and so remain forever feeling guilty about their position or indifferent about the other while feeling nothing but discomfort.

The monograph discusses the determination of species, although it is clear that species exist only in the sense of taxonomy and not philosophy because merely physical presentation does not form a sentient being; differences in the corporeal do not mean that human presentation is more valuable than the animal's but, as the dominant species, the former has been merely given a higher social and political value. Therefore, we must focus our gaze on the animal bodies and souls in different presentations, which we could call corporeal-emotional-spiritual animal diversity, which is true also for humans. **Vesna Liponik** discusses this topic in her article **We Have Always Been Grotesque**, which, with the help of the theoretical discourse of Agamben and Bakhtin, studies the importance of the grotesque, especially within the concept of species, which is closely connected to the corporeal presentation. The grotesque can connect something that is incompatible and so it radically transforms the concept of species itself. The author discusses the inconsistencies of species, nowadays we would call this "sympoetics" (Haraway, 2016), or even joining the human and the animalistic (Helmreich and Kirksey, 2010) through the grotesque im-

ages of the righteous with animal heads at a messianic feast as pictured in a miniature in a Hebrew Bible dating from the 13th century, which was used by Giorgio Agamben to introduce his work *L'aperto: L'uomo e l'animale*. The author believes that this grotesque image or *zoocephalic idiom* (Gertsman, 2022) also allows for a hidden anti-speciesist potential for our time, which she sees as entirely grotesque.

If grotesque nullifies the definition of species, then poetry, which contains zoopoetics, can accentuate or transform it. The monograph also places the animal in focus with the help of zoopoetics, i.e., the poetics of the language of animals, as opposed to the classic understanding of zoopoetics as creativity using human language, so as *animal poesis* “animal poetry” (Moe, 2013 and 2014: 59–88). Individual poets use poetry to create *zoopoesis* – e.g., with the presence of animal sounds in poetry or as the presence of animals as persons in poetry. The view that a bat not only flies through a space but also detects it in detail although it does not transform it is a speciesist view. Zoopoetics demands recognition of animals’ *communicative zones* – zones that may differ from human mouth or language (Moe 2014: 3). By observing the way bodies and texts inform each other and by challenging the binary approach to people and non-human animals, literature offers an important form in which we can think through animals. Most poetry is firmly rooted in the poet’s observation of the animal, although we could actually reveal the ideas of animals themselves. Zoopoetics also assumes that we represent animal communication, animal feelings, and animal thought as imaginary and close to reality. **Jelka Kernev Štrajn** enters this world of zoopoetics with her article **The Non-human Animal Between Metaphor and Metamorphosis**, which through the analyses of four poetic and prose texts discussing a bat asserts a belief that metaphor does not displace real animals from poetry (cf. Jovanovski, 2013: 110) as the language of poetry is closest to non-human animals and because animals are supposed to be intensively metaphoric due to their communication, arising as it does from their bodies and sounds, which is, according to Kernev Štrajn, a paradox in itself. By applying the interaction theory of metaphor and the concept of metamorphosis, Kernev Štrajn aims to present how those texts that try to bring zoopoesis closer to the reader are texts that nullify the binary between the human and the animal. By aiming to place animal communication within human communication, the animal comes into the focus of our gaze, thought and emotion as, in the words of Rosi Braidotti: “The animal cannot be the metaphor for the other anymore, it must be accepted under its own conditions” (Braidotti, 2009: 528).

Animals can be placed in the centre of images, in the “centre of the world”, and they can explain themselves, they are conscious of themselves and others (Hribar Sorčan, 2021: 20). In visual arts as well, they can be focalised, independent of the human, and their bodies, movements and looks show that they can feel emotions, think and are a subjectivity, which “always means a certain degree of consciousness and self-consciousness of identity”, even though this understanding might be imperfect (Hall, 2004: 3). If Stacy Alaimo’s

“transcorporeality” implements “the ethics of exposure” (2016: 77, cf. Vičar, 2024), predominantly of bodies, then the 19th century painter Rosa Bonheur, who painted the bodies of pets and domestic animals, depicted them as individuals and through the power of imagery highlighted the animals’ wellbeing with their physical forms, movements and gaze. She saw animals as persons, painted their portraits and thus highlighted the ethics of her creations. Her work is discussed by **Valentina Hribar Sorčan** in her article **Revival of Interest in the Realistic Animal Painting of Rosa Bonheur**. It seems that, with her works, Bonheur created a possibility for ontological equivalence (Ingold, 1994) while managing not to reduce animals to objects (Noske, 1989), which also allows us to see animals as the protagonists of their own lives in the visual arts. It seems that both zoopoetics and zoo-imagery can contribute to the changes in attitudes towards the animal and Hribar Sorčan contemplates this thought in the framework of the philosophy of art, while Kernev Štrajn applies it in the framework of philosophy, literary science and zoosemiotics.

In order to actually disseminate a higher consciousness of animals, education is needed that fundamentally allows for, or denies, the so-called change in attitudes to the animal and consequently affects the future understanding of the animal. **Ulrike Schmidt** deals with this topic in **Squirrel, Lynx, and a Field Mouse. The Contribution of Austrian School Textbooks to a Speciesist Perception of Animals**. She asserts that the source of anthropocentric perceptions of animals can also be found in the education system. The author studies knowledge taught in Austrian biology and environmental studies schoolbooks intended for 5th grade students. Her critical and discourse analysis deals with the linguistic-media (communication) conceptualisation of the ‘animal’ subject as she analyses how various types of mammals are presented in the education system. She found that the animals are mostly presented on the basis of their usability and from the taxonomic point of view. The discourse on animals in student books is structured in a utilitarian-anthropocentric way. Consequently, she found that the education process is tied to the dominant social structures that highlight anthropodomination and the animals are still seen as the other. Education should go beyond teaching merely the physical aspect and functions of animals as provided by biologist in the education system; the material taught on animals should at least include the findings of cognitive theory.

The education system, however, should adopt the animal standpoint (Klampfer, 2010: 269–270; Best, 2014: 1–20; Donovan 2022: 73), which focuses on animals as subjective and conscious sentient beings. The animal standpoint brings into focus our own experience of the other – empathy, as much as it is possible and if we go beyond cognitive bias, it certainly becomes possible to do so (Brooks Pribac, 2021). Therefore, the critical animal pedagogies should study all structures that lead to exploitative, alienating and subordinate social practices, as already pointed out by Helena Pedersen (2010, cf. also Andrzejewski, Pedersen, and Wicklund, 2009). Implementing critical animal studies (Nocella et al., 2014; Sanbonmatsu, 2011; Matsouka and Sorenson, 2018) and critical animal

pedagogies (Nocella II et al., 2019; Gunnarsson Dinker and Pedersen, 2016, 2019) in the education system would bring about a transformative view of the animal and allow for a “dialogic transspecies learning space” (Spanning, 2023).

Another process also takes place parallel to the educational process, i.e., a process that is both conscious and inert as it permeates all areas of human existence and activities: that is tradition. Tradition mostly carries positive connotations and seems to be immutable and eternal. Even the one that allows violence and abuse of animals, such as *koline* (TN: slaughter of pigs in winter), and defines the killing of animals for food as a cultural practice or even heritage. Therefore, it should be stressed that not every tradition is positive and that each should be redefined as new circumstances and findings regarding the intrinsic value of animals call for new reflections on tradition. *Koline* are a negative tradition that is firmly set in our cultural-social space due to the entire network of negative symbolism and so does not allow for a different perspective and understanding of animals. It conceptualises animals merely based on the normalisation of animal objects as food source. **Marjetka Golež Kaučič** discusses this topic in **Home Pig Slaughter; or, the Redefinition of Tradition and Industrial Holocaust**. The chapter discusses *koline* as the practice of killing (a pig or hog is killed because it is a farmed animal). Golež Kaučič looks at the tradition via history, folklore, literature and customs. She compares the practice with the realities of the present time by revealing the industrial agricultural practices (Twine, 2012) and emotive meetings with pigs and hogs. We can see several concepts that have been developed by critical animal studies, i.e. speciesism in neoliberal capitalism (Nibert 2014; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2018) and carnism (Joy, 2010). They all legitimise human dominance over non-human animals, while Calvo develops the concept of anthroparchy, which literally means ‘human domination’, and perceive anthroparchy as a social system, a complex and relatively stable set of relationships in which the ‘environment’ is dominated through formations of social organisation which benefit the human (Cudworth, 2005: 63–71, Cudworth, 2007: 351–357). She considers that anthroparchy has certain advantages over other possible terms such as ‘anthropocentrism’ and ‘speciesism’ (Calvo, 2008: 34).

Not only animals, but all of nature “becomes an accessory, instrument, and resource” (Figueroa-Helland and Lindgren, 2016, 6–7). The process of commodification of nature emerges: “The idea that land can be legally owned as property reduces land to a commodified ‘thing’ that then becomes part of the capitalist marketplace.” (Avlon, 2023: 105). As Donovan says: “... humans operating on, dissecting, destroying, and rearranging an objectified natural world in accordance with their wishes, ideas, interests. It is in short, ironically, merely an extension of classical praxis, rooted in Cartesian epistemology” (Donovan 2022: 44). Nature is therefore a passive object of exploitation, controlled by corporations that produce herbicides and pesticides because nature is merely that which brings profit, the rest must be destroyed. However, this leads to the, shall we say, slaughter of bees, which, in terms of symbolism and value, rates high in the human positive attitude towards



animals. Still, the perception of the bee is predominantly utilitarian; the bee is an object of exploitation (for its product, honey) and not a subject that would keep its own product for itself (Raušl, 2023). Subjectivity and self-determination are erased from this perspective (Alaimo, 2010). **Suzana Marjanić** discusses the bee as a subject in her article **GMO Apocalypse; or, the So-called Mysterious Extinction of Bees**. The author brings into focus the bee, its life and its dying, or extinction, in the Anthropocene and Capitalocene epochs (Haraway, 2016), which in turn lead to an apocalypse as capital destroys nature and living beings. This not only affects the bees; the destruction is broad and is killing insects and plants, i.e. the pollinators that make the growth of plants that are vital for humans actually possible. Marjanić discusses a “mysterious” dying of bees in the local context of Croatia and Serbia and warns us of the dangers of GMO foods, which disregard natural processes by implementing genetically modified organisms into plants and poisoning our ecosystem with glyphosate and herbicides.

The connection between bees and bears in the Slovenian language lies in the Slovenian word for bear, i.e. *medved*, which hides the word *med*, meaning honey – a product of bees that bears love. However, this interspecies relationship is not exploitative as bears do not use honey for profit but for their own survival. The attitudes of the human towards the bear are complex and ambivalent, which can also be found in the imaginary, mostly in the insistence on an anthropocentric view, which is typical of the Western world, while indigenous peoples see the bear as an equal (see Nagy, 2024; Henderson, 2024). In our human-centred world, the bear is considered an important “species” and not as an individual with complex emotional and cognitive abilities (Corman and Vandrovcová, 2014). It is still set in the natural world; however, this world is alienated from the world of culture in which we have placed the human.

Just as we have colonised nature, we have also colonised the bear; we protect it, but only until it enters the human world without permission. Then the protection is repealed and the bear is “removed” from nature (killed), caged or sent to a zoo. It seems as if we are waging a never-ending war against animals (Wadiwel, 2015). Speciesism is the norm when perceiving animals, including the bear, and biological fairness trumps true fairness. **Anja Moric** and **Irena Kavčič** study the changes in the people’s perception of bears in Slovenia in their article, **The Perception of Bears in Slovenia**, which is based on research into the popular opinion of bears, the individual interest groups, and media representations of the bear (see Vičar, 2017). The bear is the centre of not only our view but also of negative connotations, conflict, hatred, and even admiration. Moric and Kavčič highlight the Kočevje Region, where the bear enjoys a decidedly positive perception, although we still cannot talk about understanding the bear as a subjectivity.

However, it is possible to focalise the animal through the personal experience of an animal that was alive in the past and now speaks through a fictitious personal story, i.e. through imaginary autoethnography that does not offer surveys, questionnaires nor

larger groups expressing their attitudes to, or perceptions of, the bear in different ways. The story, though, reveals not only the animal's perception of the world, closely tied to human domination, but also a spectrum of emotions, thoughts and experience of the world from the animal's perspective, its standpoint. In this case, we can recognise imaginative justice fairness (Brooks Pribac and Golež Kaučič, 2024; Golež Kaučič, 2024) that can lead to true fairness via imaginary autoethnography that is connected to anthropomorphism that can be productive or critical (Garrard, 2004: 19–20, 5), as it provides a means to connect with something more than human – it is not human epistemology, it is animal epistemology that shines through imaginary autoethnography. The autoethnographic method (Hayano, 1979; Denzin, 1989; Ellis, 1991) is the usage of one's own participation with observation and co-experience of the animal situation. The method provides an option for experiencing animals in imaginary participation. It allows for a descriptive and introspective view and a very precise intellectual and emotional experience (Arluke and Sanders, 1996; 29). According to Ellis, the use of autoethnography means “inclusion of backward and forward movements while experiencing and studying the vulnerable self and observing and revealing a broader context of this experience” (Ellis, 2007: 14). Autoethnography is “a genre of writing and research that connects the personal with the cultural” and “places the self in a social context” (Holt, 2003: 2). **Teja Brooks Pribac and Susanne Karr** discuss this in their hybrid article **Down the Donkey Trail: An Imaginary Autoethnography**. From the anthropocentric view of the bear and ecosystemic advantages, the last article brings into focus the fate of the donkey, exploited and used merely for human interests and needs. The article depicts the fictitious life of an Istrian donkey (see Cankar, 1911) in a fictitious animal autoethnography, in which an animal subjectivity narrates their existence and life through the optics of memory. The told story derives from an actual ethnography of the lives of donkeys in the 1950s, as is also witnessed by human ethnography. This is an imaginary alternative that represents the voice of the other – in this case the donkey – who is unable to verbalise their own position but can still express it through body language and vocal communication. It highlights the authors' attitude to the social construct of reality; animal memory as the main link between the events of the past and present realisations. It gives us an opportunity to imagine the reality of the donkey's life as told in ethnographic literature even though the donkey is mentioned merely as the means of transport (Ledinek Lozej, 2014: 49), i.e., an object for use and sometimes an object of physical abuse. The authors then move to a utopian present, in which the donkeys are free entities with complex family lives, emotions and profound cognition. By presenting their own culture and spiritual reflection, their imaginary narration presents a utopian reality, the only possible reality if we want to achieve true fairness (Jovanovski, 2020: 52) and not merely insist on improved conditions for work animals, which would mean showing empathy (Baskar, 2023: 29; Sosič, 2021), but would still remain within the realm of human domination that denies the animals' intrinsic value.

## **A sow at the end of the world**

*there's a flood  
all destroyed wet raging  
with their fences  
people ships insurances are sinking  
and then a **human**  
his head barely above the water  
**is looking at a sow**  
a huge fattened sow  
**larger than the world**  
**(the world itself)**  
awfully eager  
swimming towards an apple  
eating an apple*

(Liponik, 2023: 74)

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# We Have Always Been Grotesque

## Banquet

### Sitting at the same table

One of Giorgio Agamben's most widely read and discussed works, which has prompted considerable debate among scholars engaged in the study of human-animal relations, is certainly *The Open: Man and Animal* ([*L'aperto: L'uomo e l'animale*, 2002] 2004). The core of the work is Agamben's attempt to break with conceptualisations of the human-animal divide, to find a way out of this "practico-political mystery of separation" (Agamben, 2004: 92) that justifies the human through the animal or, more precisely, to render inoperative the anthropological machine that fuels the entire humanist tradition.

The anthropological machine, both ancient and modern, operates in accordance with the principle of the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, whereby "[b]oth machines are able to function only by establishing a zone of indifference at their centres, within which [...] the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, [...] must take place" (Agamben, 2004: 37–38). Anthropogenesis, according to Agamben, is the process through which the living being becomes human, and this becoming "results from the caesura and articulation between human and animal. This caesura passes first of all within man" (Agamben, 2004: 79).

In *The Open*, Agamben primarily addresses the issue of human animality, in which the animal serves merely as a pawn in the game, merely an animal that exemplifies and articulates a specific human biopolitical condition. This is also a significant criticism of his work by critical thinkers regarding the relationship between humans and animals (for more see e. g. Salzani, 2022). Carlo Salzani's *Agamben and the Animal* (2022) focuses entirely on the locus of the animal and the animal question in Agamben's thought, a question that is central to Agamben's work as a whole. Salzani, like Matthew Calarco (2008), identifies this 'rupture', a minimal but crucial turn in Agamben's oeuvre, represented by the work *The Open*. Agamben's attempt to transcend (even his own) anthropocentrism is clearly expressed in this work, since "the animal question is here tackled directly and explicitly as a problem (or rather as the very problem forming the foundation of Western metaphysics), but also that the messianic way out is identified in the de-position of the human-animal divide itself" (Salzani, 2022: 9–10).

But despite this, Salzani states that "[i]n a word, no true politics of (animal) liberation can be found in Agamben's work" (Salzani, 2022: xi). Nevertheless, we will endeavour to examine the question of what, despite this observation, Agamben's messianic way out as the grotesque way out offers to a critical rearticulation of animals and animality. In particular, we will identify the productive points for a radically different positioning of the relationship between humans and animals.

Agamben begins the first chapter of *The Open* with the title "Theriomorphous", that is, if we follow the Greek etymology of the word "therio" and "morphē", meaning in the form of an animal or beast, with an image to which he will return twice more in the course of the work and with which he will conclude *The Open*. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this image is the key to his project, that it in some way summarises all his efforts.

It is a scene depicted in miniature in a Hebrew Bible from the 13th century. The upper half is occupied by the griffin-like bird Ziz, the ox Behemoth and the great fish Leviathan, while the lower half depicts the righteous at a messianic banquet in the shade of the trees of paradise, each with an animal head: "the eagle's fierce beak, the red head of the ox, and the lion's head— but the other two righteous ones in the image also display the grotesque features of an ass and the profile of a leopard. And in turn the two musicians have animal heads as well" (Agamben, 2004: 2).

Agamben writes that the scene is "the last in every sense, since it concludes the codex as well as the history of humanity" (Agamben, 2004: 1). And it is the last in a much more incipient sense, in the sense of Derrida's apocalypse, judgement and revelation at the same time:

The righteous with animal heads in the miniature in the Ambrosian do not represent a new declension of the man-animal relation so much as a figure of the "great ignorance" which lets both of them be outside of being, saved precisely in their being unsavable. Perhaps there is still a way in which living

beings can sit at the messianic banquet of the righteous without taking on a historical task and without setting the anthropological machine into action (Agamben, 2004: 92).

With this image of the righteous with animal heads sitting at a common table, Agamben aims at an exit from metaphysics, a rupture, an outside, a deactivation of the anthropological machine. Agamben seeks a solution, a way out, in an image, an image that has puzzled scholars and interpreters (Agamben, 2004: 2). This image is or becomes Agamben's way out of the articulation of the way out. This image being a body of his desire, or as he writes in his short essay "Desiring", published in *Profanations* (2007), it is much easier to express one's desires in images than in words, and perhaps this is why Agamben resorts to images (and this is not the only image he resorts to, since at the end he turns to two other images of Titian's lovers). In "Desiring", Agamben states: "We are unable to put our desires into language because we have imagined them [...]. The body of desires is an image" (Agamben, 2007: 53). The image of the righteous with animal heads could then be described as "imagined desire [...] the beatitude of paradise" (Agamben, 2007: 54).

But if we really want to critically challenge the alternative that Agamben offers in the form of imagined desire, speaking of the animals and humans at the same table, it makes sense to ask who is at the table and what or who is on the table. Our first and most trivial caveat arises from a cursory glance at the contents of the containers on the table in which we can identify the poultry. The second caveat relates to Agamben's observation at the beginning of *The Open* referring to the rabbinical tradition according to which "in the days of the Messiah the righteous, who for their entire lives have observed the prescriptions of the Torah, will feast on the meat of Leviathan and Behemoth" (Agamben, 2004: 1). However, the chapter "Cognitio Experimentalis [Cognitive Experiment]", in which Agamben refers to this biblical scene for the second time, offers a different response to the content of the banquet.

The post-historical biblical scene, as Agamben points out, necessarily refers back to a pre-history in which the boundary between human and animal was established, quoting a passage from Thomas Aquinas' *Summa* with the telling title "Utrum Adam in statu innocentiae animalibus dominaretur [Whether Adam in the State of Innocence Had Mastery Over the Animals]":<sup>1</sup>

In the state of innocence [he writes] men did not have any bodily need of animals. Neither for clothing, since they were naked and not ashamed, there being no motions of inordinate concupiscence; nor for food, since they fed on the trees of Paradise; nor for means of transport, their bodies being strong enough for that purpose. Yet they needed them in order to draw from their nature an experimental knowledge [Indigebant tamen eis, ad experimen-

## 1

Despite Aquinas' overall "bad reputation" when it comes to animals (for more on this, see e.g. Steiner, 2010), Aquinas justifies the consumption of animals in the *Summa Theologiae* (1269), for example. However, in a section dealing with the theological explanation for animal trials, the matter is not so simple.

talem cognitionem sumendam de naturis eorum]. This is signified by the fact that God led the animals before man, that he might give them a name that designated their nature (Agamben, 2004: 22).

This prehistory to which Agamben refers in this passage is situated in a common locus in the history of philosophy, a golden age or a time of innocence, the beatitude of paradise, “a long lost moment of perfect harmony from which human beings have progressively fallen away in the course of time. This conception of time has captured the imagination of philosophers from Hesiod to Heidegger, who characterise history as a *Verfallsgeschichte*” (Steiner, 2010: 45). The idea of some sort of “paradisiacal before” has been important in the context of philosophical reflection on human-animal relations, and can be found in works by Sigmund Freud (1917), Georges Bataille (2005), Jean Baudrillard (1981) and John Berger (2009). With minor variations, mainly due to the fact that these are very diverse thinkers, the point is that there exists a place, a prehistoric place, where the relationship between humans and animals was conceived in a fundamentally different way, essentially more in favour of the animals. And what is important for us here is the fact that this change in the relationship was accompanied by a change in the *image* of that relationship. Freud, Bataille and Berger each mention prehistoric images of men (or gods) with animal heads.

But the Western ancient thinkers went a little further, and in their case, and as the above passage from the *Summa* shows, this paradisiacal period also had its own “gastronomic component a diet of fruits and grains that corresponded to the peaceful coexistence of human beings and animals in a gardenlike paradise” (Steiner, 2010: 45). Man’s fall from Eden, according to Empedocles, coincides with the advent of blood sacrifice and meat eating.

Thus, even if the core of Agamben’s project of deactivating the anthropological machine is as already mentioned indeed primarily concerned with the question of human nature, the acceptance of man’s fundamental non-humanness, this “de-position of the human-animal divide itself” (Salzani, 2022: 9–10) cannot be separated from the process of relocating one’s relationship to more than one’s own non-humanness. Or, to put it another way, even if the cognitive experiment is indeed primarily “an experiment de hominis natura” (Agamben, 2004: 22) as Agamben points out, in the last day, when man himself will come to terms with his *animal nature*, “the relations between animals and men will take on a new form” (Agamben, 2004: 3), a form-of-life. And as Salzani points out, this is where Agamben’s greatest contribution to the contemporary debate on the animal question can be located (Salzani, 2004).

It is therefore possible to assume that this revival of the prehistoric threshold in the image of the righteous at the Messianic banquet also involves a change of menu in favour of a different positioning between man and animal, a positioning in which “men did not have any bodily need of animals” (Agamben, 2004: 22). And this is the true *cognitio experimentalis*, the “diagonalisation of the elements of opposition” (Šumič Riha, 2011: 108), sitting at the same table.



## Outside of being species

But even if “[p]aradise calls Eden back into question” (Agamben, 2004: 21), is “[t]he saved night [...] a relationship with something unsavable” (Agamben, 2004: 82). Thus, not something that is lost and must be found again, as Agamben points out, but “rather, the lost and the forgotten as such” (Agamben, 2004: 82).

In the last chapters of *The Open*, Agamben, in the spirit of his messianic philosophy, turns first from Heidegger to Benjamin and then to Titian, and in the last chapter, entitled “Outside of Being”, he returns once more to the image of the righteous with animal heads, also mentioning Basilides’ depictions of animal-headed effigies reproduced by Bataille in *Documents*. All of these images can be read as images of the Benjaminian model of a “dialectic at a standstill” (Agamben, 2004: 83) or a “machine no longer articulating nature and man in order to produce the human through the suspension and capture of the inhuman” (Agamben, 2004: 83). But in the last chapter we encounter something else, a step further, in the image of the righteous men with animal heads, not only outside of being as the only way out of Western anthropocentric metaphysics, but also outside of being *species*.

As Salzani emphasises “[a]n ‘antispeciesist’ corollary to the anthropological machine appears a few years later in the short text ‘Special Being’ of *Profanations*, where Agamben laments the hypostatisation of the (human) species” (Salzani, 2020: 111). In this essay, which is next in line after the already mentioned “Desiring”, Agamben deconstructs the concepts of species and persona, which also occupies a pivotal place in political philosophy and antispeciesist discourse. Already in *The Open*, Agamben claims that homo sapiens

is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; [but] is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. [...]. It is an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape. Homo is a constitutively ‘anthropomorphous’ animal ..., who must recognise himself in a non-man in order to be human. (Agamben, 2004: 26)

If, according to Lacan, man appropriates his own image by looking into a mirror, an image that is originally external to him, this is not only a process of subjectivation, but this process is simultaneous with, or overlapping with, speciation. But, as Oxana Timofeeva points out, “what if it is the animal that exists outside of the mirror, where the human being has to recognise itself and at the same time cannot do so” (Timofeeva, 2018: xv). Timofeeva continues with Derrida, who reversed this question, for what if the answer lies not in man gazing at his mirror image, but in the animal gazing at man (Derrida, 2003, and Timofeeva, 2018: xv).

In “Special Being”, Agamben emphasises that “[t]he Latin term species, which means ‘appearance’, ‘aspect’, or ‘vision’, derives from a root signifying ‘to look, to see’”

For Lévinas, belonging to the moral community is precisely tied to the face, and Levinas axiomatically assigns the face to humans alone, thus excluding animals from any further morally relevant consideration. On the other hand, Lévinas' encounter with Bobby, a dog, or with Lévinas, "literally a dog!", with *literally a face*, complicates and destabilises his conceptual framework considerably. Unfortunately, however, it does not represent a major change or shift in Lévinas' thinking. For more, see e. g. Golež Kaučič, 2023: 275; Calarco, 2008 and Derrida, 2008.

(2007: 56) therefore "[t]he species of each thing is its visibility, that is, its pure intelligibility" (2007: 57).

Species is fundamentally linked to appearance, to the (mis-)recognition of one's own image in the mirror, to the recognition of similar bodies, which allows us to classify and identify, to distinguish from other bodies. The exposed part of the body in this sense is certainly the face or the mask, *persona*, inextricably linked to *species*.<sup>2</sup> Our understanding of species is informed by this perspective. This is the fundamental issue, as Agamben elucidates, "the original sin of our culture" (Agamben, 2007: 59) when species becomes the "principle of identity and classification [...] its most implacable apparatus [dispositivo]" (Agamben, 2007: 59).

It follows that "antispeciesism" is tied to a radically different conception of appearance, of likeness, of an identification that is not even tied to *species*, to appearance, to a rejection of the hegemony of species, or otherwise "imagining a new world, [...] demands the reimagining of the [...] body" (Jackson, 2020: 158). The impossibility of distinguishing between the human and the non-human, or even, following Agamben, the fundamental inhumanity of human, thus consequently complicates the speciesist distinction of species.

Agamben in "Outside of Being" makes it clear that to render the anthropological machine inoperative means above all to avoid new articulations of the relation between the human and the non-human that are more effective or authentic, mythological, but to point to a hiatus, a void that "separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension" (Agamben, 2004: 92). This hiatus, emptiness, outside, is not only outside of being, but above all outside of being species.

But even if this outside of being species does not represent a new mythological articulation of the relationship between the human and the non-human, it still constantly refers to something mythical or, in Agamben's terms, something pre-historical. But how does this outside of species actually work, and what is the role of the animal-headed righteous at the messianic banquet? When Agamben describes the appearance of the messianic righteous, he describes the features of one of them as grotesque:

the miniaturist has represented the righteous not with human faces, but with unmistakably animal heads. Here, not only do we recognise the eschatological animals in the three figures on the right— the eagle's fierce beak, the red head of the ox, and the lion's head— but the other two righteous ones in the image also display the grotesque features of an ass and the profile of a leopard. (Agamben, 2004: 2)

When we take a close look, a simple, almost banal question arises: why would the ass in the miniature have more grotesque features than the other righteous ones, why would the ass have grotesque features at all? What does this even mean? If we look closely at the

miniature, we see that the ass' face is flattened into a human-ass face. Is this what makes it grotesque, and what distinguishes it from other, more distinctly *animal* faces or rather animal *heads*. Is it the humanness of an animal's face that makes it grotesque, that makes it look like a face? The ass does not have the usual prolonged snout. According to Hegel, what differentiates a human face from that of an animal is the mouth, the anatomical emphasis on a prolonged snout, the sniffing organs that denote spiritual lack (Hegel, 1998).

Mikhail Bakhtin, who is responsible for "one of the best descriptions of grotesque physicality" (Chao, 2010: 4) in his *Rabelais and His World* ([1965] 1984), states that the mixing of human and animal features is one of the oldest forms of the grotesque, and that the shape of the head, the ears, the nose become grotesque when they adopt animal forms or the forms of inanimate objects, with the nose and mouth playing the most important part (1984: 316).

The image at the heart of Agamben's project is therefore grotesque. The grotesque, or above all the grotesque conception of the *species*, can thus be understood as the way out, the outside, the rupture, the theriomorphic suspension of the anthropomorphic machine, "the solution of the *mysterium coniunctionis*" (Agamben, 2004: 92), or rather, the grotesque conception of the species defines this rupture. Outside of being species is to acknowledge the simultaneous existence of several species in one species, the impossibility of the species as such, its impossible nature. Agamben's imagined desire is therefore a grotesque image. Since, in the grotesque conception of the body, the relations between the human and the non-human are conceived in a fundamentally different way, the species is conceived in a fundamentally different way and this apparently fleeting reference to the grotesque in the description of the appearance of one of the righteous is very much in line with Agamben's posthumanist project. In what follows, then, we will further explore the workings of the grotesque, what it is that allows the grotesque to function as a rupture, outside of being species, especially in relation to the conception of the body.

## Species of confusion

Italian philosopher Leonardo Caffo in his text "Animality Now" (2020) sees, as a result of Agamben's miniature, a "metamorphosis that makes us all identical in deferral" (Caffo, 2020: 319). Metamorphosis, the state of in-betweenness, is one of the decisive features of the grotesque.

As Shun-Liang Chao (2010) points out, starting from the 'origin' of the grotesque, the paintings of Nero's underground Domus Aurea, discovered in 1480, which depict chimerical hybrids between humans, animals and plants, the grotesque first and foremost represents a physical in-betweenness, a transformation or, as stated by Bakhtin "a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis" (Bakhtin, 1984: 24).

### 3

For Bakhtin, the culture of folk humour is opposed to “the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture”. He divides its manifestations into three distinct forms: ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions and various genres of billingsgate (Bakhtin, 1984: 4).

The grotesque is elusive and always in motion. Many scholars of the grotesque (e. g. Chao, Edwards and Graulund, Thomson, Harpham, Biscaia) have observed the curious fact that the grotesque cannot be contained in a single definition. According to Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, there is something in its intrinsic transgressive nature that prevents the grotesque from being straightjacketed into a single definition (2013) and thus, in theory itself, the grotesque presents a problem, a disturbance, and it triggers precisely those effects from which it is supposed to emerge, which are supposed to be triggered by its artistic manifestations.

Geoffrey Harpham states it is “a species of confusion” (Harpham, 1982: xv), “a concept without form” (Harpham, 1982: xv) that “creates a major discomfort” (Pimentel Biscaia, 2011: 107). Therefore, it is not surprising that, for example, in comparison to the sublime, the grotesque occupies a marginal place in the system of aesthetics.

This specific position occupied by the grotesque is concomitant with the fact that the grotesque is often mixed up with satire or bizarre, surreal, caricature, fantastic etc., or that the grotesque is almost everything or anything or, as Maria Sofia Pimentel Biscaia emphasises, it is often curious “that the presence of the grotesque is easily sensed but hardly apprehended by the mind” (Pimentel Biscaia, 2011: 106).

But no matter which theory of the grotesque we follow, in the broadest sense the grotesque always refers to two things; first, a depiction of necessary irresolvables of opposites (Edwards and Graulund, 2013), or of what is otherwise conceived of as opposites. What is supposed to be the opposite is therefore necessarily contained and unresolved in the grotesque, horror and laughter, human and nonhuman, death and life, etc., since there is “no exclusive or permanent state of something which does not already contain within it something else” (Edwards and Graulund, 2013: 3). As literary scholar Philip Thomson emphasises, “grotesque is in some forms at least an appropriate expression of the problematical nature of existence” (Thomson, 1972: 11). Second, grotesque ambivalent tensions and effects always concern the body. Issues of the body and bodily functions stand as crucial for any theory of the grotesque (Pimentel Biscaia, 2011).

The aforementioned Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* ([1965] 1984) is certainly one of the most important reflections in the field of attempts to theorise the grotesque. Bakhtin thinks about the grotesque, and specifically the meaning of the Renaissance grotesque, in the context of the culture of folk humour and the carnivalesque<sup>3</sup> and, in doing so, seeks above all to revive or point to the often lost and forgotten positive side of the grotesque, without losing sight of its inherently ambivalent nature.

Even though, as Bakhtin emphasises, what is considered grotesque is always tied to a historical context, “grotesque imagery is of an extremely ancient type; we find it in the mythology and archaic art of all peoples” (Bakhtin, 1984: 30). At the heart of the grotesque, then, is its indestructible transhistorical essence, captured by the grotesque image at the centre of which is the grotesque body, as is evident from the very origins of the grotesque. In its search

for the grotesque's kernel, the theory therefore most often resorts to the etymology or supposed origin of the grotesque itself, to the aforementioned paintings of the Roman underground Domus Aurea, from Nero's time, discovered in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century in High Renaissance Italy beneath the Baths of Titus, which depicts hybrids between humans, animals and plants. They were the work of the Roman painter Fabullus, who was commissioned by Nero to paint the Domus Aurea in a style dating back to 100 BC (Dacos, 1969 in Chao, 2010).<sup>4</sup> The grotesque body is "the epitome of incompleteness" (Bakhtin, 1984: 26), it is "the unfinished and open body [...] not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (Bakhtin, 1984: 26–27). Therefore, the "grotesque body is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (Bakhtin, 1984: 26). As such, it "forces us to question what it means to be human" (Edwards and Graulund, 2013: 3). The major discomfort caused by the grotesque therefore stems from the fact that the grotesque "is a discourse that is, perhaps more than any other, concerned with questioning and unsettling assumptions about what is human and what is not human" (Edwards and Graulund, 2013: 84). The grotesque image of the body thus fundamentally complicates the process of subjectivation and, consequently, the process of speciation. If Bakhtin writes of grotesque realism, Chao, following Lacan, writes of the grotesque *real* (Chao, 2010).

Since the grotesque body is in fact never simply and strictly a single, individual body, but an open, never finished body, the processes most closely related to the grotesque are precisely those in which the body crosses boundaries, i.e., according to Bakhtin, birth, death, banquet.

If we have so far dealt mainly with the image of the righteous and partly with the content of their banquet, it is worth pausing, at least for a moment, on the image of what the righteous are actually doing, on the very fact that it is a banquet, a fact that is not irrelevant to the debate on the grotesque. For Bakhtin, it is the grotesque image's organic connection to temporal change and ambivalence that allows it to "become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and of historic change which appeared during the Renaissance" (Bakhtin, 1984: 25). The image of the righteous is thus Renaissance in this sense.

And, although it was previously mentioned that Agamben identifies the scene as the "the last in every sense, since it concludes the codex as well as the history of humanity" (Agamben, 2004: 1), and added that the last is in a much more incipient sense, in the sense of Derrida's apocalypse, judgement and revelation, the latter sensibly fits the role that the banquet plays, according to Bakhtin, as "the potentiality of a new beginning instead of the abstract and bare ending" (Bakhtin: 283). And here we see the "positive" half of this grotesque banquet, where the end meets its beginning. But above all, the banquet is a state of in-between, a suspension of a suspension, a shared moment of sitting at the same table, doing the same thing together, nothing has started yet, hardly anything has finished, we are eating, drinking, the music is playing.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4

In *A-cogito* (2016), Aleš Bunta speaks of the grotesque in a slightly different but partly very related sense. He develops a theory of the grotesque at the intersection of Foucault's biopolitics and pornological art, thinking of the grotesque in relation to perversion and power. Bunta draws on Foucault's 1974–75 lectures, published under the title *Les anormaux*. Foucault examines the grotesque in two contexts: the role of the psychiatric expert in trials and the concept of the grotesque sovereignty. For more on this, see Foucault (2003) and Bunta (2016). But what is important for us here is twofold. First, Foucault uses examples of grotesque sovereignty to show that although grotesque sovereignty has its historically specific manifestations, it also retains a transhistorical core, a minimal common denominator, similar to the grotesque image. Moreover, whether by strange coincidence or not, Foucault places Nero at the „beginning“ of grotesque sovereignty, the same Nero who commissioned the paintings of the Domus Aurea. And second, that the grotesque necessarily fuses the apparently irreconcilable and from this fusion produces its grotesque effects.

#### 5

The final example of pornological art Bunta examines in the aforementioned *A-cogito* (2016) is the work of the anonymous comic artist Dolcett. In the image he analyses, we see Karen, who has allowed herself to be mounted on a pole on which she is now spinning on a spit, with a young couple standing next to her, "preparing" Karen for a "banquet". Even if Bunta's analysis focuses primarily on the grotesque effects of power, we can recognise a number of other grotesque dimensions in Dolcett's ambivalent image, which we have developed here. For Karen has "(half) inhabited the form of a pig" (Bunta, 2016: 190), and this specific preparation for the ►

► banquet, which Bunta points out at the beginning of his analysis as speaking to the state of contemporary society, is of particular interest to us in the context of what are supposed to be the words of the author, the comic Dolcett, as quoted by Bunta, that the new regime Karen announces “solves the ecological crisis by eliminating the pressing problem of animal husbandry, which becomes unnecessary, as housewives compete to see who will be the first to throw themselves on the grill instead of the cutlet in an act of heroism” (2016: 202). Dolcett’s image thus also speaks to the specific, guilt-ridden, carnivorous fantasies perfectly embodied by the Ameglian Major Cow (aka Dish of the Day), a species of artificially bred, sentient creatures bred to want to be eaten. They appeared in the television adaptation of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. This particular perverse mechanism of justifying animal exploitation, in which animals in animal agriculture are seen as consenting to our exploitation, will be explored in John Sanbonmatsu’s forthcoming book *The Omnivore’s Deception: What We Get Wrong About Meat, Animals, and the Nature of Moral Life* (2025).

## Chimera

### (Post)grotesque

Edwards and Graulund, in tune with Bakhtin, emphasise that “[e]ach generation and each cultural formation has its own grotesque” (Edwards and Graulund, 2013: 136). The grotesque, or its understanding of the body, thus also returns in a specific, historically conditioned way within many contemporary or posthumanist understandings of corporeality. It resonates in concepts such as Donna Haraway’s cyborg, Stacy Alaimo’s trans-corporeality, Karen Barad’s intra-action, Achille Mbembe’s anthropomachinic or Paul B. Preciado’s somatheque, to name only a few. Stacy Alaimo’s feminist materialist concept of trans-corporeality, similarly to the grotesque, paradoxically starts at the human body, just to point to the fact that corporeality is always and inevitably part of what we call nature and the environment, even closer to us than our own skin (Alaimo, 2010), that human is fundamentally non-human, always a result of several intra-acting forces. Their theory derives some key insights from Barad’s concept of intra-action, developed in their seminal work *Meeting the Universe Half-Way* (2007), which has its starting point in quantum physics and is established as distinct from interaction. It refers to a fundamental flux between “things” that co-influence and co-constitute each other. Agency, therefore, is not conceptualised as an individual property but rather as a dynamic of forces (Barad, 2007).

Mbembe’s anthropomachinic, Haraway’s cyborgs, and Preciado’s somatheque all coincide at the point, as Marina Gržinić (2020) states, that

today, due to technological prosthesis, pharmaceutical products, and new digital technologies, it is almost impossible to determine where the boundary passes between natural bodies and those fabricated by the interventions of artificial technologies such as cyber implants, electronic prostheses, hormones, tablets, organ transplantation, and so on.

All this has not only replaced, but is a time-appropriate addition to Bakhtin’s outgrowths and bodily bulges. Mbembe’s entering of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with *Necropolitics* proposes to think of anthropomachinic as today’s human “firmly wedded to its animal and its machine” (179). This precisely corresponds to Preciado’s mutating “living political archive” that aims at decolonisation of the body (35), and is at the same time a-body-yet-to-come.

But before that we have Haraway’s chimerical cyborgs. Haraway, in her *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), states that “[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of

machine and organism—in short, cyborgs” (150). Thus, like the image of the righteous at the Messianic banquet, there is something mythical in the image of the cyborg, and this mythical is chimerical. As Pimentel Biscaia points out “[c]himera’ was initially used to refer to all the spoils of the Domus Aurea until some artists started to use it (often unaware of the existence of the word ‘grotesque’) to describe hybrid animals” (Pimentel Biscaia, 2013: 75).

Chimerical is therefore central or even overlapping with grotesque. In their text “Chimerical Figurations at the Monstrous Edges of Species” (2011) Jill Casid never mentions grotesque, yet they write of chimera as of a figure that “is intended to do some complicated historical and cultural boundary-defying work in pushing us to think human, animal, plant, and environment as a complex and dynamic assemblage without priority, hierarchy, or ground” (63). Casid analyses several examples of chimerical transplantation and figuration across time, genre and place with its focus on the bodily transformations. Casid understands chimera as a figure that, on one hand, stems from colonial hetero-patriarchal regimes of species, yet, on the other hand, within their necessary unexpected outcome, chimerical figurations carry the most beautifully terrifying potential of *change*.

Chimerical not only resonates in Derrida’s work on animality but is crucial and actually characterises it. Derrida, in one of his key philosophical meditations on animality in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), writes that his discourse on animals is chimerical. And what is more, one of his key concepts, which he presents in this work, the coined term *l’animot*, is chimerical.<sup>6</sup>

What all the above-mentioned concepts have in-common is the Agambenian “transience and inhumanity of the human” (Agamben, 2004: 30). Awareness of the structural composition of the self, the porousness and questionability of the line between human and non-human, is today highly pronounced and if the fundamental demarcation line between human and non-human is under threat, so is the humanist conception of the subject, premised on the abjection of the non-human. Our contemporary condition, therefore, on one hand represents an era of flourishing, at times even celebrating, the grotesque, and on the other poses a double threat to the grotesque, a threat of extinction (Harpham, 1982) or “of becoming merely a concept used to accommodate all sorts of disorder and contradiction” (Pimentel Biscaia, 2011: 107). In the following lines, we will closely examine two usages of the grotesque with the focus on grotesque bodies that speak precisely of this condition and the position of the grotesque in it. As we shall see, the grotesque is still a key part of the contemporary conception of corporeality, linked to the questioning of the boundaries between human and non-human.

## 6

Derrida turns directly to the “original” chimera, the Greek hybrid flame-spitting mythological multiplicity of animals in one body (head and chest of a lion, entrails of a goat, tail of a serpent), a child of Typhon and Echidne, which, despite being said to be invincible, is killed by Bellerophon (Derrida, 2008: 41).

## Mythic mites

In his article “Experiencing Biopolitics: A Personal Story” (2023), Hiroshi Yoshioka explores the tensions between biopolitics and necropolitics through three examples from his own life. In one of them, he focuses on the question of the perception of the body, the boundaries between human and non-human bodies, and the notion of what the human body should be like, a healthy and pure human body. Yoshioka departs from the question of parasitism and symbiosis, drawing on the work of his long-time friend, the parasitologist Koichiro Fujita, who gives the example of booths advertising facial soap products on the streets of Tokio. These booths are equipped with a microscopic camera and a monitor, and examine the skin on a person’s face, enlarging and zooming in on human skin to the point where you can see the mites that live on the skin, feed on the skin’s secretions and secrete a substance that regulates the skin’s acidity and inhibits the growth of harmful bacteria, which in turn keeps our skin clean. But when we break this symbiotic relationship by using soaps, the balance is upset and the skin becomes unhealthy.

As Yoshioka emphasises, for someone who is not educated about these symbiotic relationships and “not used to seeing microscopic creatures, it is natural to perceive the tick that in reality protects us as a grotesque and disgusting foreign body” (Yoshioka, 2023: 336).

Yoshioka describes the body of the mite as grotesque, and here we can recall Agamben’s description of the grotesque features of an ass. For what the booth does is to magnify the microscopic body of the mite precisely to the point where we not only see him fully, see him as a body, but also see his face, and while the mite becomes less non-human, we simultaneously become more.

If the grotesque at this point concerns the description of an unexpected body on what is supposed to be our body, it appears as a confrontation with “not necessarily... what we expect a body to look like” (Casid, 2011: 408) or, what is even more, *our* body to look like. It is a confrontation with the unexpected *species*, the impossibility of recognition in the image.

Mites present a threat to our image of self, our sense of subjectivity. It is not our face that looks back at us from the microscopic booth mirror, but a whole body on our face that looks back at us, our face ceasing to be *ours*. What we are confronted with is no longer a single, indivisible and closed body, but several bodies as one. The bond that the body of the mite forms with the supposedly human body, the way it questions what is supposed to be human, when the mite becomes an indispensable part of the human body, an indispensable part of us, is grotesque. The grotesque characterises this transition. Or rather, this is the grotesque *realism* of what we call *our* body.

Grotesque in this case aims at a specific conception of corporeality, at discomfort with bodily boundaries and forms, “[g]rotesque bodies [therefore] act as a nexus of cultural anxieties about the human body” (Edwards and Graulund, 2013: 45). Curiously, the



technology is this apparatus that confronts us with this reality, a microscopic camera with a monitor takes on the role of a mirror. Instead of an animal head superimposed on a human body, the human head is full of microscopic animal faces, whole bodies that only make possible a human face, a clean and healthy human face, a *normal* human face that can only be normal by being non-human.

Essential for the grotesque to be effective is “the materiality of its relation to the reality of the world around” (Edwards and Graulund, 2013: 12). In this sense, something else is even more *grotesque*: “the way power operates in these everyday situations” (Yoshioka, 2023: 336), the extent and the context in which *perfectly normal*, real, even beneficial symbiotic relations between our skin and mites are perceived as grotesque. As Yoshioka explains, this kind of symbiotic conception of our corporeality is an obstacle to pharmaceutical and medical industries, that “make more money when people do not understand their bodies as a complex symbiotic system with viruses, microorganisms and other living beings, but simply fear them as foreign bodies to be eliminated and imagine that they are protecting their bodies from these threats” (Yoshioka, 2023: 337).

## Seeds of change

In an interview with Anna Campbell and Jill H. Casid (2023), the latter, when describing a body in the Necrocene,<sup>7</sup> speaks of “a body disintegrated, a body dispersed” (Gržinić et al., 2023: 408). They give an example of a seed, a hibernating seed as an example of a body not-yet-body-yet-body that we are at the same time also unable to describe as either dead or alive. Casid maintains that this body carries a “tremendous potential”, since it avoids “the regime of the visible, surveilled body that looks like a body and it holds no promise for those of us who don’t resemble that form” (Gržinić et al., 2023: 408). Casid continues:

And that’s why I see what I would call a process of a kind of queer or trans deformation too. And in that echo also the echo of the deformed, right?

The deformed that would be understood to be not only lacking the proper appropriate form, but to be more than grotesque, to be unable to perform what is expected so that alliance also with disability and ability feels really crucial here as a way of imagining something that’s both anti- or before the human and after the human. (Gržinić et al., 2023: 408)

According to them, the deformed, as lacking what is commonly perceived as an appropriate form of the body, is what is considered grotesque. Grotesque here serves as a key point of reference, but a point that one must refrain from and go beyond. Casid’s concep-

**7**  
As Jill Casid points out, they use the term Necrocene instead of the more commonly used Anthropocene or Capitalocene, the latter coined by Andreas Malm, in order to draw attention to death, to the role death plays in our contemporary era. The concept was first used by historian Justin McBrien. Casid’s aim with using it is not to replace other coinages but to think with and through them. Necrocene expresses what the other terms do not – the starting point of capitalism was not only the transatlantic slave trade, but the genocide of indigenous peoples at the core of the processes of colonisation, settlement and transplantation.

tion of a non-normative and fundamentally non-human, or rather inhuman, corporeality thus draws from the grotesque tradition, but at the same time show the necessity to reach beyond it in order to fully embrace contemporary corporeality.

So even if the grotesque withdraws from other conceptualisations, from more contemporary articulations of corporeality, it still acts as a kind of fulcrum that either has to be transcended or helps us to define a specific bodily discomfort in relation to the *species* of the body, which is never just a body with smooth and clearly defined boundaries, which measures up to the fact that the normal body can only be a non-human body, always already deformed, always already a body bound to its environment.

If Bakhtin announced the death of the grotesque, Pimentel Biscaia sees the fact that “critics have used Bakhtin to demonstrate that the grotesque lives on and thrives” (Pimentel Biscaia, 2011: 116) as ironic. We could rather argue it makes perfect sense, precisely because it is grotesque, if the death of the grotesque is announced we must be aware of the fact that this could only be, with Bakhtin, “a pregnant death” (Bakhtin, 1984: 25), or a seed, only seemingly dead, always on its way to a new beginning.

The *species* of our species thus returns again and again, as a bird-headed man from the cave painting of Lascaux so beloved of Bataille, as Löwenmensch, a statue of a man with a lion’s head from 40,000 years ago, as mites on our facial skin, mythical chimerical cyborgs, as the scene depicted in miniature in the 13th century Hebrew Bible with which Agamben begins the first chapter of *The Open*.

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## Vedno smo bili groteskni

V članku raziščemo potencial groteske za nespeciesistično pojmovanje telesa, pomen groteske za drugačno predstavljanje vrste. Kot poudarja Giorgio Agamben, se *vrsta* [species] nanaša na pojavnost, na to, kar vidimo pred seboj. Iz tega sledi, da je »protispeciesizem« povezan z re-artikulacijo, z radikalno drugačnim pojmovanjem pojavnosti [species]. Ta potencial prepoznamo v groteskni podobi, pri čemer sledimo pojmovanju groteskne telesnosti Mihaila M. Bahtina, ki korenini v mešanju človeških in nečloveških elementov. Nadalje Bahtin v svojem delu *Ustvarjanje Françoisa Rabelaisa in ljudska kultura srednjega veka in renesanse* ([1965] 1984) poudarja, da je groteska po eni strani kulturno in zgodovinsko pogojena, po drugi strani pa ima določeno transhistorično jedro. To jedro se najprej nanaša na sposobnost groteske, da na nerazrešljiv način združi tisto, kar naj bi si bilo nasprotno, grozo in smeh, človeško in nečloveško, smrt in življenje itd. Drugič, ambivalentna napetost groteske in njeni učinki vedno zadevajo telo. Vprašanja telesa in telesnih funkcij so ključna za vsako teorijo groteske. In ravno tukaj lahko najdemo protispeciesistični potencial groteske.

Članek je v grobem razdeljen na dva medsebojno povezana dela. V prvem analiziramo protispeciesistični potencial podobe, s katero Agamben odpre svoje delo *Odprto. Človek in žival* ([*L'aperto: L'uomo e l'animale*, 2002], 2004), prizor, upodobljen na miniaturi v hebrejski Bibliji iz 13. stoletja, ki predstavlja podobe pravičnikov z živalskimi glavami na mesijanski pojedinini. V drugem delu se osredotočimo na sodobne artikulacije grotesknih telesnih podob, s posebno pozornostjo na to, kaj se dogaja z grotesko danes, v dobi, za katero se zdi, da je v celoti groteskna. Ugotavljamo, da ta skoraj zastareli in vedno marginalni estetski koncept, ki ni več niti pojmovan kot tak, deluje kot diskurzivni označevalec, ki zajame specifično nelagodje glede telesnih meja, glede *pojavnosti* [species].







# The Non-human Animal Between Metaphor and Metamorphosis

*We lack language at present in which we think about and represent  
animals as animals in ways that are not metaphorical*  
(Erica Fudge, 2002: 12).

## Introduction

Quoting Erica Fudge opens up a problem which in essence concerns the debate around non-human animals in general and in literature in particular. Her thinking can also be expressed in the form of a question: Is it possible to talk about non-human animals directly? My answer is clear: It is not possible, because language cannot talk directly about other things, either. Our everyday language creates the illusion that with it we can convey exactly what we want to – and that the person hearing it will also understand it in that way. Yet, the fact is that this is an illusion, albeit a very practical one, since it enables communication. But there are always problems with communication. Philosophers of language and linguists (for instance, Oswald Ducrot) in fact established long ago that no statements can be produced without something unexpressed. This is highly dependent on context, which can never be entirely considered precisely because of the very nature of language.

## Difficulty of representing otherness

1

This difference and, consequently, the problematic nature of the relationship between the I and the not-I is an old philosophical problem which was explicitly formulated by J. G. Fichte in his fundamental work *Doctrine of Science (Wissenschaftslehre)*.

2

The notion of the *Umwelt*, introduced by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll, means that art and the world are inseparable, since art interprets the world for the organism. Every organism has its own *Umwelt* based on its own sensory and cognitive abilities and the history of its interactions with the world. The interaction of *Umwelten* forms the semiosphere, a common space of creation of meanings. (Uexküll, 2015)

In everyday communication, for practical reasons, we tend to forget about the tropological dimensions of speech. We only become aware of these when we are dealing with specific speaking positions, for instance when these involve the art of words, where it is possible to observe various ways of representing the world. It is at this point that things inevitably get complicated, since the concept of representation is on the one hand closely tied to the tropological dimension of text, especially through metaphor, while on the other hand, metaphor is a textual strategy that can also have an effect in terms of anti-representation. This does not really signify the abolishing of representation, but the abolishing of its limits. (Rancière, 2003: 128 in Benčín, 2005: 81) But, the question is, how?

Whenever we come across the word “representation”, its prefix “re-” implacably places itself between us and all other reality. In other words, everything we understand as “not-I”.<sup>1</sup> It is true that language is first and foremost a means of making oneself understood, that is, of overcoming the distance between “I” and “others”, but at the same time it is the cause of that distance, which can appear as an unbridgeable gap. The situation is further complicated by the fact that this gap also opens up within language and within the subject (Kernev Štrajcn, 2016: 183–184). Language is therefore in us and at the same time around us. This is the reason why there are constant crises of language and crises of subject, the human subject, who tries in every way to emerge from the cage of language and of mind, to enter the area of pre-reflexive states and achieve “the open,” where non-human animals already dwell. This is the zone of indeterminacy, which serves as a space for the meeting of human and non-human animals and is therefore a limit and possibility, a challenge and opportunity, for both. It signifies the establishing of mutual relations in which the non-human animal is not objectified and does not serve as a mirror of the human.

## The concept of “the open” between philosophy and poetry

“The open” is meant here in the sense developed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his work of the same title. He took the concept from Heidegger, where the expression “the open” indicates a space that allows the *Umwelt*, as the frame of reference specific to every animal species and also to every individual organism, to transform itself into a world that is different from the world that the organism shares with all other organisms (Agamben, 2002: 39–41).<sup>2</sup> Agamben takes Heidegger’s conception of “the open” as a basis for his own new understanding of the relationship between human and animal that is critical of humanism. In contrast to Heidegger’s reading of the eighth of Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*, Agamben believes that the word “open” as used by Rilke in the Eighth Elegy undergoes an essential reversal that, according to Agamben, allows us to doubt Heidegger’s

interpretation of this word. For Rilke, it is the animal, not man that “sees the open”. Man, whose eyes have been “turned backward” always has the world in front of him, is always facing it. That is why man, as Agamben understands it in his interpretation of Rilke, never reaches the pure space of the outside, unlike the animal which moves in the open. The animal sees that which the fear of death prevents man from seeing: the world in its direct interconnectedness. Openness is a space of relation, in other words an intermediate space, a zone of indeterminacy and undecidability, common to both animal and man (Agamben, 2002: 51–60).

This space is constantly subjected to persistent attempts at conceptualisation, but constantly evades them. Everything indicates that it is not possible to enter it directly, but only via a detour, which leads through artistic works, through poetry, for instance. Why poetry? Because the poetic idiom is the linguistic environment in which we can most easily come into contact with the non-human animal as a being of flesh and blood. At first glance this seems to be a paradox, one that is most radically formulated by Coetzee, or rather by his heroine, the writer Elizabeth Costello, in his *The Lives of Animals*. In her lecture, she explains to the university audience why it is necessary to read poetry:

If I do not convince you, that is because my words, here, lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness, the unabstracted, unintellectual nature, of the animal being. That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language. (Coetzee, 1999: 65)

Poetry is therefore the thing that enables us to actually sense the living, physical presence of animals.<sup>3</sup>

We will therefore proceed in the field of poetry and, at the same time, in the field of thought, since, in the words of the Argentinian poet Roberto Juarroz (1925–1995): “Poetry and thought / are precisely / the most opposed to death / because they are / its most faithful witnesses” (Juarroz, 1995: X/19).

This is also affirmed by Derrida, who writes:

For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has essentially had to deprive itself of. It is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetical thinking. (Derrida, 2002: 377)

In this regard, we must first face a paradox: How can the poetic idiom, which is most intensively metaphorical, also be the idiom that is closest to the non-human animal?

There are several reasons for this. At first glance, it would seem that the nature of prose is closer to the non-human animal than the nature of poetry, but the opposite is, in fact, true,

### 3

It seems important to mention that this quotation continues and ends as follows: “and if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner” (Coetzee, 1999: 65). To follow this advice means to pass from the sphere of poetry and theory to the extra-textual reality of animal activism. This, in my opinion, raises one of the key problems of critical animal studies: when we ask ourselves how and to what extent, if at all, theoretical considerations affect activist action. And if they do, what are the mutual relationships between activism, theoretical thinking and poetry and how do they appear?

as Coetzee has already pointed out. Furthermore, this recognition can be reconciled with Lotman's famous thesis about prose as a secondary modelling system or, to put it differently, as a phenomenon that arose after poetry and is therefore structurally more complex.

### **What is it like to be the other?**

The resolution of the aforementioned paradox resides in the method of conceptualising the metaphor and can be found within its countless definitions. Here "metaphor" should not be understood as a deflection from the norm, not as a means of convincing, not as a substitution and not as an evocation of similarity. It should be understood in the interactive sense and consequently also in the cognitive sense as a discursive strategy, the purpose of which is to change the viewpoint from which we grasp the phenomena of this world (Ricoeur, 1975: 309); and also as the strategy that addresses the incommensurability of two entities. This should result in an expansion of our receptive capacities, the spreading and cultivation of sensory perceptions or "spiritualisation of the senses", as the phenomenon was dubbed by the Slovene poet Jure Detela (1951–1992), who consistently steered away from metaphors, since they supposedly enable an aggressive identification between entities. Therefore, he himself "never wanted to give plants, animals, streams, rocks or seas names that reduce them merely to emblems and thereby use them in metaphors as an Aristotelian logical form, which limits and enslaves beings, for each phenomenon has many causes and consequences, not just one single one." He was convinced that it is disrespectful for a poet to "equate himself to plants, animals, streams and mountains," for "beings are *not equal* amongst each other" (Detela, 2011: I/189) [my emphasis]. It is clear from this that Detela was thinking principally of the metaphor as a substitution, not the metaphor as an interactive and cognitive process.

A similar position of rejecting metaphors is taken, as we shall see below, by Deleuze and Guattari, who thus introduced a new concept, that of metamorphosis, as a kind of anti-representational metaphor, if one may put it that way. Their theory was developed mainly on the basis of Kafka's literature and was tied to the concept of becoming, particularly "becoming-animal," to a concept that should in no way be understood metaphorically but rather metamorphically. And this metamorphosis is at work in all of Kafka's animal stories, not only in the *Metamorphosis* itself. Acts of becoming-animal are "absolute deterritorialisations, at least in principle, that penetrate deep into the desert world invested in by Kafka" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 13). A metamorphosis is never the fruit of identification. Becoming an animal function in Kafka's stories as an object of consideration and has nothing metaphorical, allegorical or symbolic about it. It is, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, a conjunction of two deterritorialisations, that which the human imposes on the animal by forcing it to flee or to serve the human; and that which the animal proposes to the human

by indicating ways out or means of escape that the human would never have thought of by himself (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 35). In this sense, the becoming-animal means making a shift, tracing a line of flight, crossing a threshold, achieving a kind of permanent continuity that is important only to itself, where all forms and meanings, signifiers and signifieds break down. Then, an intermediate zone of variation opens between human and animal that affectively influences language. The consequence of this is that language opens itself to an intensive, non-signifying use of words. This triggers a process of deterritorialisation of language, always in the direction of becoming-animal.<sup>4</sup>

But if I may return for a moment to Detela, I can only concur that we beings are truly not equal amongst each other. This means that the feelings of another, regardless of whether this is a human or non-human animal, to a large extent remain a dark continent. We can never feel exactly what another is feeling. As the American philosopher Stanley Cavell points out in his introduction to *The Claim to Reason*, we all feel a sense of separateness from one another (Cavell, 1979: XIX).

Yet, everything points to there being a consensus that a continuous questioning of what it is like to be the other is the only ethical stance. Especially when the other is a non-human animal, for example, a bat. Here, of course, there is an instant allusion to one of the fundamental texts of animal studies, Thomas Nagel's paper "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (1974). Another text of vital importance is the treatise by John Berger, whose title is also set in the form of a question, *Why Look at Animals?* (2009). Both texts deal not just with animal ethics, but also with the issue of animal representation. However, while Berger's is explicit, since it talks about animals as the first metaphor, Nagel's is implicit, but perhaps for that reason is even more far-reaching. This is a text that has been widely cited and heavily criticised.

Among other things, Nagel has been criticised for not taking sufficient account of contemporary scientific findings on bats and for not laying down a criterion for how to distinguish between creatures that have consciousness and those that do not. The American zoologist Donald Griffin, who discovered (with Robert Galambos) the phenomenon of echolocation in bats, accuses Nagel of having a negative effect, through his sceptical viewpoint, on the development of scientific research. The American philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett even claims, in his book *Consciousness Explained* (1991), that "the structure of a bat's mind is as accessible as the structure of a bat's digestion" (Dennett, 1991: 447 in Salzani, 2022: 88).<sup>5</sup>

These criticisms notwithstanding, Nagel's insight into consciousness, which is not an exclusively human domain, is still relevant, as is his question. No one doubts that bats have experiences, just like all other mammals, says Nagel, who explains why he chose bats and not, say, wasps: because "if one travels too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is experience there at all" (Nagel, 1974: 438). Although bats are closer to us than many other species, it is true that a bat is a form of life that is essentially

**4**  
"What Kafka does in his room is become animal, and this is an essential object of his stories" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 35).

**5**  
For more on criticisms of Nagel's position, see Salzani, 2022: 88-92). The first person to begin looking at bats scientifically was the physiologist Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799), who conducted gruesome experiments designed to interrogate bats' special sensory capacities. Naturalists continued to practise his methods throughout the nineteenth century. Salzani, on the other hand, favours non-invasive observation based on the notion of "attention" (Salzani, 2022: 88-92) <https://doi.org/10.54103/balthazar/20313>.

alien to us. The bat's perception of sound is unquestionably a form of perception, but it is not something that we ourselves could experience and fully imagine. This is the origin of the difficulties surrounding the question "What is it like to be a bat?" Nagel also emphasises that he is above all interested in finding out what it is like *for a bat* – not for a human – to be a bat. If we try to imagine this, we are limited to the resources of our own mind. The best evidence of what it is like to be a bat would come from the experiences of bats, if only we knew what they are like. But these are experiences that are beyond our capacity to comprehend. The problem is not only limited to the relationship between humans and animals, it also exists between one person and another (Nagel, 1974: 439–440). Nagel reflects on the relation between facts on the one hand and conceptual schemes or systems of representation on the other. His realism about the subjective domain in all its forms implies a belief in the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts. He does not think it impossible that there are facts which a human being will never be able to truly comprehend or represent, simply because our mental and physical structure does not permit us to operate with concepts of the requisite type. However, he comes to the conclusion "that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in human language. We can be compelled to recognise the existence of such facts without being able to state or comprehend them" (Nagel, 1971: 441). Whatever the status of facts about what it is like to be a bat, these appear to be facts that embody a particular point of view. It would, therefore, be necessary to take up precisely this point of view, which for the time being is impossible, concludes Nagel, adding what for us is an essential assumption: "It may be easier to transcend these inter-species barriers with the aid of imagination" (Nagel, 1974: 442).

On the basis of this assumption, Nagel's question can be understood in various ways: as a rhetorical question that already implies an answer, or as a real question that anticipates either a positive or negative answer. There is also a third possibility: that the question be taken out of the context in which it functions as the title of a philosophical treatise and be treated instead as a lyrical question. Taken in this way, the question demands a suspension of direct responses, since it does away with the answer suggested and affectively enhanced by the rhetorical question. In this state of suspense, it thus opens up an unexpected horizon of possible meaning (Jauss, 1998: 254). It is therefore possible to conclude that although I do not know what it is like to be a bat, I can try to imagine it.

That is why I turn now to poetic texts, specifically those that refer to bats. Having analysed several examples of poetry on this topic, I have chosen four that deserve special attention: *Bats' Ultrasound* by the Australian poet Les Murray (1938–2019), a fragment from the short poetic narrative or prose poem *Bats' Celebration* by the Slovene writer and poet Iztok Geister (b. 1945), the poem *Karlsbad Caverns* by the English poet Ted Hughes (1930–1998) and the poem *The Bat* by the American poet Emily Dickinson (1839–1886).

My intention is to show how metaphor functions in the above texts, on the one hand in the sense of interactional and cognitive processes, as understood by Ricoeur, and, on

the other, in the sense of the metamorphic processes discussed by Deleuze and Guattari. Ricoeur and the theorists he cites (Black, Beardsley, Johnson and Lakoff) share the belief that there is metaphorisation in the essence of all cognitive processes, regardless of the functional type of language in which communication takes place. Deleuze and Guattari, like Ricoeur, although in a different theoretical context, reject the division into literal and transferred or figurative meaning. They see metamorphosis as the opposite of metaphor, although in no sense equating it with literalness, since for them:

There is no longer proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the world /... / It is no longer a question of resemblance between the comportment of an animal and that of a man; it is even less a question of simple wordplay. There is no longer man and animal, since each deterritorialises the other, in a conjunction of flux, in a continuum of reversible intensities /... / The words themselves are not “like” animals, but in their own way they climb about, bark and roam around, being properly linguistic dogs, insects, or mice. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 22)

Deleuze and Guattari reject the Saussurean conception of the sign or its “signifying regime” and believe that language, with its illocutionary power, can reconfigure reality, which means that it not only functions representationally, in other words metaphorically, in the sense of the stabilisation of meaning, but also interactionally, in the sense of the destabilisation of the system (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987). The metamorphic process takes place rhizomatically, meaning that it breaks down the hierarchy of the structure, while metaphor operates at different, though parallel levels. It is therefore possible to say that the metaphor of Deleuze and Guattari is both interactional and metamorphic.

Even at first glance there is no doubt that bats function, in all the poetic texts mentioned, as actual living beings of flesh and blood. This is especially interesting, since – along with mice, rats, pigeons, crows, nutrias and certain other species – they belong to a not fully defined group: “officially” they are neither domestic nor wild animals.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the bat is a distinctly Deleuzian animal, understood as a multiplicity, since we know that bats live in large colonies.

It is, therefore, not possible to treat them as anything other than actual living beings, but the language that articulates them thematises a series of transformations taking place at one single level, where each metaphor is deterritorialised and becomes a metamorphosis. The possibility thus opens up of manifold becomings, for example becoming-animal. A consequence of this is the establishment of an intermediate zone between the human and animal poles, a zone of intense variations that feed back into the linguistic material. “Everything in the animal is metamorphosis,” say Deleuze and Guattari, “which is simultaneously the becoming-human of the animal and the becoming-animal of the human” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 35).

## 6

It is true, however, that realisations about the beneficial function of bats, since they prey on insects and especially mosquitoes, have led to them being protected for some time now. But the background to this positive relationship is once again the benefit to humans.

## Les Murray: Bats' Ultrasowund

Les Murray's short poem Bats' Ultrasound appeared in a book with the telling title *Translations From the Natural World* (1992), in the section called "Presences". Here it is in its entirety:

Sleeping-bagged in a duplex wing  
with fleas, in rock-cleft or building  
radar bats are darkness in miniature,  
their whole face one tufty crinkled ear  
with weak eyes, fine teeth bared to sing.

Few are vampires. None flit through the mirror.  
Where they flutter at evening's a queer  
tonal hunting zone above highest C.  
Insect prey at the peak of our hearing  
drone re to their detailing tee:

ah, eyrie-ire, aero hour, eh?  
O'er our ur-area (our era aye  
ere your raw row) we air our array  
err, yaw, row wry – aura our orrery,  
our eerie ü our ray, our arrow.

A rare ear, our aery Yahweh. (Murray, 1992)

The poem, which describes the life of bats, is, as we see, focused mainly on their communication, and there is just one sign indicating a human speaker (Insect prey at the peak of our hearing). Our hearing is therefore something completely different from their hearing, since humans in their own environment rely far more on vision than on hearing for orientation, while bats, and many other animals, can "see" through their hearing. This is echolocation. Thus, for instance, the whale in another of Murray's poems, entitled *Spermaceti*, says: "I sound my sight in peer and long tones."

We may observe that Bats' Ultrasound begins by evoking certain characteristics of bats with which we are more or less familiar. But, in the first line of the second stanza (Few are vampires), there is a shift from the zoological to the semantic field of folklore tradition. This "vampire tradition" is, however, immediately rendered ironic when the very next sentence informs us that "None flit through the mirror". It is well-known how closely vampires are associated with mirrors, as well as the fact that in the human imagination they



represent a kind of “missing link” between humans and animals. As already mentioned, they can also be linked to the concept of becoming-animal, multiplicity and writing. This has nothing to do with signifying, and ideology, but with observing and mapping, even of areas that do not yet exist: “One writes, then, on the same level as the real of an unformed matter, at the same time, as that matter traverses and extends all of nonformal language: a becoming-animal like Kafka’s mouse, Hofmannsthal’s rats, Moritz’s calves” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 240 ff).

Here we are still in relatively familiar territory, but the phrase “at the peak of our hearing” already heralds some unknown landscape, until the words in the third stanza, through sound-colouring and the distinct breaking of English grammar rules, completely transport us, in the sense ascribed to the term deterritorialisation. In other words, the reader is drawn into an entirely unknown environment of myriad transformations and becomings, which is graphically enhanced by the use of italics.<sup>7</sup> Its presence transcends the boundaries of human language and confront us with an interplay of knowledge and ignorance, with an excess that allows contact with the vitality of other, different lives (Malay, 2018: 223).

The third stanza is of clearly hybrid character, simultaneously human and bat. It evokes a sense of mysteriousness and, among other things, tells us that is not possible to grasp objective reality in language. Animal presence exceeds the limits of language and pushes us into an interplay of knowledge and ignorance, of the known and the unknown. Translation, as Murray understands it, is a way in which all languages, both human and animal affect and transform each other, creating a common hybrid space.

We are therefore faced here with an attempt at intersemiotic translation (and here it is worth remembering the title of Murray’s collection: *Translations from the Natural World*), which, like the transfer from one language system to another, is also a kind of metaphorical process. This has been interpreted by Michael Malay, a literary scientist and native English speaker. I therefore offer a summary of his interpretation of the third stanza of *Bat’s Ultrasound*. In it, the poet translates the language of bats into English phonemes and syllables, juxtaposed into a set of linguistic doublings, such as “eyrie”, which Malay suggests might be read as “erie”, while “eyrie-ire” can be heard as “here you are”; as though the bats are greeting each other as they set off to hunt in the twilight. Similarly, for “raw row”, suggesting a meaningless screeching, we might hear “raw roar” (hunting yawps), while “aura our orrery” suggests an image of bats flying “over our area”, although we cannot miss the evocation of aura. “Orrery”, Malay explains, is a term for a mechanical model representing the motions of the earth and moon around the sun. The word “wry” is a wink at the poem’s readers, implying that people, even native speakers of English, are unable to unravel all these sequences of sound from an alien aural landscape. The poem thus offers a translation while simultaneously withholding it. It speaks for the bats but offers its own articulation of their communication (Malay, 2018: 163).

## 7

This highlighted graphic aspect shows that it is also possible to read the poem in the light of Derrida’s concepts of writing and trace, as developed in his work *Of Grammatology*.

We may observe that Malay's analysis, with its intensive search for meanings, moves at the level of interpretation, and thus also of linguistic representation, which Murray's poem far exceeds when, with its visions and auditions, it extends into an area outside human language, where this opens itself to its most intensive (i.e. a-signifying) use. A process of deterritorialisation is triggered, and with it the minor use of language. This is, of course, not merely a question of translating meanings and guesswork, but a linguistic process that creates a hybrid space in which all languages, human and animal, affect and transform each other, where words no longer represent things but themselves become things, ready for transformation or self-transformation when they start to live their own life, which triggers an affect in the receptor like a new way of feeling when departing from established identities on the path to unknown worlds, metamorphosed into new forms of life.

Yet, we can also approach this poem from a different perspective and say that the wording of the third stanza, when the power of human language as a means of understanding fails, traverses from the ontic to the ontological level. This shift enables the operation of an interaction metaphor, in the light of which the whole poem needs to be read again, including the fourth, single-line concluding stanza: "A rare ear, our aery Yahweh". Here it would seem at first glance that with the evocation of Yahweh there is a reterritorialisation in the text, in other words a return to the known framework. But the poem does not do this without leaving an implicit message, since here "Yahweh" does not appear as the all-seeing God's eye of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but as an ear. At the same time, this concluding verse leads us in various intertextual directions. For instance, to Shakespeare's Ariel, the spirit of the air, who sings: "On the bat's back I do fly / After summer merrily." (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 5, Scene 1).

### **Iztok Geister: Bats' Celebration**

Precisely this couplet, which evokes the enchanted atmosphere of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* and at the same time hints at the impossibility of objectively capturing a beyond-text reality in language, could easily function as the motto of Izток Geister's Bats' Celebration, since this also involves a type of poetic fable, politically engaged and with strong ironic undertones.

When the pale glow of the computer screen blinds the beauty of the day,  
the small ones take part in the spiritual ritual. They quietly flutter through the  
hidden corners of untouched desires ...

Their angular faces are so cute and innocent; horseshoe-shaped sonar  
folds of skin hang above deeply yawning mouths. A receiving pit is carved  
into them, and a grotesque transmitting horn protrudes above each of them.

The mouse-like eyes are lost in the furry cheeks and the rabbit-like ears are large and responsive.

The anxiety is the name of cherry-like blueness that drowns in the deep. The sombre ones surf wide, never getting entangled in the electric wires, never becoming snared in the fishermen's internets. At dusk they open their umbrellas. At dawn they put on their raincoats. They flutter like drizzle and do not care for the golden dust of the night.

They do not float like clouds. They hang upwards like drops, extended and focused. Like a stalactite they extend into the deep shadow of gloom. They descend from the ceiling as the day sets. From the sinking ship of the liturgical echo, they fly into the world of scraped knees, into the discotheques of skimmed wings, between the supply and demand of stars and into the silent slaughterhouse of democracy." (Geister, 2001: 5)

It is clear from the text that the speaker is intimately familiar with bats, including in the strict zoological sense. This could be why it is easier to follow the interaction between nature, represented by the *Umwelt* of bats, and culture, as represented by the world of technology and the world of politics. This interaction makes it possible for the whole of Geister's text to function as a single, extremely complex interactive metaphor.<sup>8</sup>

Here, just as in Murray's poem, we can observe a process of deterritorialisation that leads to the concept of becoming-animal, although in a slightly different way: through the constant transition of currents of different speeds, through the alternation of nearer and further planes. The consequence of this is that the semantic fields of human and bat culture are constantly alternating and interweaving to the point of unrecognisability, in such a subtle fashion that it is impossible to ascertain when the poem is talking about people and when about bats. As receptors of Bats' Celebration, we can observe how existing and established forms of life begin to break down and transform in a bidirectional process of transformation or flight from established identities towards becoming, where, through the reciprocal action of subjectivity and its *Umwelt*, new forms of life emerge that shape new hybrid spaces of intermediacy or zones of closeness with the animal. Becoming does not mean a transformation from one entity into another, it is an expression of intermediacy, in which both entities change but at the same time remain the same.

Despite some poetically extremely effective comparisons (They hang upwards like drops, extended and focused. Like a stalactite they extend into the deep shadow of gloom.), one cannot talk about any kind of evocation of analogy in Bats' Celebration. It is more a question of the "difference that makes a difference".<sup>9</sup> The thematisation of the latter is enabled by a special logic that constantly questions the intersection between the tropological-linguistic dimension of the text and its extra-linguistic contexts.

**8**  
Interaction metaphor is a textual strategy that, by enabling bilateral correspondence and transition between two or more domains, creates similarities and does not merely reproduce. For more on this, see Max Black, 1998.

**9**  
Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) used this phrase to express a particular understanding of the concept of information based on the notion of difference and its effects. The phrase suggests a kind of message about differences that affect the state of a complex system. This creates feedback loops, non-linear dynamics and other phenomena characteristic of a cybernetic system such as a living organism (Bateson, 1979: 92).

In this sense, the reader's orientation is destabilised by the initial sentence: "When the pale glow of the computer screen blinds the beauty of the day, the small ones take part in the spiritual ritual." Here, an element of the technological dimension of the human world is placed alongside the ambiguous meaning of the phrase "the small ones", which could refer either to people or to bats, or even to something else, to "beings from alien worlds". These beings, despite the ironic nuance that is also present, are connected with a spirituality (take part in the spiritual ritual) that introduces, between the human and animal (chiropteran) semantic fields, a dimension of the beyond or something irrational and demonic, masterfully aestheticised (The anxiety is the name of cherry-like blueness that drowns in the deep.), which can be understood with a greater or lesser degree of ironic distance, depending on the point of view of the receptor. Relations are formed between semantic fields (theological, technological, political, ethical) that do not delimit these fields. Rather, their mutual mapping allows their partial overlapping and the formation of intermediate spaces where metamorphic processes take place. Here, everything we know about the bat's world alternates rapidly and seamlessly with the utterly unknown, so that we forget that words are supposed to represent things, rather as happens in Murray's *Bat's Ultrasound*, although with some differences. In *Bats' Celebration*, for example, a more pronounced and thus more effective ironic distance can be perceived. More effective because it cannot be separated from political engagement. The world of words and the world of things are thus no longer alienated domains. Yet it is precisely here that extreme caution is required, since the specific nature of their connection has nothing to do with the modernist poetics of the symbol. It is wholly defined by concepts (or new ways of thinking), percepts (new ways of seeing) and affects (new ways of feeling), as posited by Deleuze and Guattari in their jointly written fundamental works.

### **Ted Hughes: Karlsbad Caverns**

Although no actual connections can be traced between the English poet Ted Hughes and the two French philosophers, from the point of view of critical animal studies it is possible to detect in the former's work an enthusiasm for the creative potential of becoming, transitioning, multiplicity and the heterogeneity of forms of organic and inorganic life. It is, therefore, a good idea to read the majority of Hughes's animal poems, not only *Karlsbad Caverns*, the poem discussed here, in the light of some of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, particularly that of metamorphosis as anti-metaphor, which among other things is enabled by the notion – typical of the two French philosophers – of the machine or mechanical operation, as defined in the first chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*: "Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative: machines driving other machines and being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 8). The

authors expressly point out that in their theoretical context the machine is no metaphor. It should be understood as an anti-metaphor or metamorphosis, similar to the concept of becoming, that enables the constant deterritorialisation of desires, understood as the creative force that connects organic and inorganic machines and operates in all the dimensions of our reality. It functions as a process of transformation; given that “desiring-machines” are everywhere, they are a universal method of linking heterogeneous elements that leads to the formation of a zone of indeterminacy and indistinctness, to the thematisation of a kind of non-relation (incommensurability). This is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari, influenced by the theory of Jakob von Uexküll, understand as “unnatural participations” (in French: *noces contre nature*). They point out that this involves the non-parallel development of two entities, such as the wasp and the orchid in Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 241–242). In Hughes’s poem, the protagonists of this process are bats in connection with organic and inorganic entities.

Since the poem *Karlsbad Caverns* is quite long, I shall only quote a few extracts, beginning with the two stanzas that thematise the concept of “unnatural participation” and relate most directly to the bats’ “batness”:

The bats were part of the sun’s machinery,  
Connected to the machinery of the flowers  
By the machinery of insects. The bats’ meaning

Oiled the unfailing of the earth.  
Cosmic requirement – on the wings of a goblin.  
A rebuke to our flutter of half-participation. (Hughes, 1998: 99)

We can observe that this excerpt, as in the case of Geister’s text, evokes a kind of synaesthetic spectacle in which the semantic field of the bats rhythmically intervenes in various directions: first it establishes an interaction with the semantic field of the sun and the earth, the semantic field of flowers and the semantic field of insects. Then, the semantic field of the bats is mapped onto the semantic field of the cosmos, which extends into an irrational dimension (“on the wings of a goblin”), in the direction of the inscrutable attractiveness of the underground world and, at the same time, fascination with the eternal riddle of bats, these perfect yet inaccessible beings, “beings from alien worlds”, with which nevertheless we share the world, something that the poet sees as a unique paradox. If we look at the two stanzas from the point of view of reception, it is possible to say that the function of synaesthetic spectacles, which have a distinctly poetic effect, is the expansion of our perceptual abilities or the cultivation of the sensory. It is thus a process that might transform readers, via all the senses, into an audience that would systematically reject accepted ideas and become capable of forming new views of the world.

Karlsbad Caverns first appeared in *Birthday Letters* (1998), Hughes's last poetry collection, published ten months before his death. All the poems in the book cover the poet's relationship with Sylvia Plath.

Taken as a whole, the poem talks about the summer of 1959,<sup>10</sup> when Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath were travelling through the USA and stopped at the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, a cave complex that is famously home to numerous colonies of bats. The pair were enthralled at the sight of a multitude of bats setting off to hunt at dusk.

We had seen the bats in the Karlsbad caves,  
Thick as shaggy soot in chimneys  
Bigger than cathedrals. We'd made ourselves dots

On the horizon of their complete world  
And their exclusive lives.  
Presumably the whole lot were happy – (Hughes, 1998: 99)

But, that evening, the bats returned to the cave with unusual haste, having sensed a storm in the air: "Wings above their heads like folding umbrellas / They dived out of the height / Straight back into the cave – the whole cloud" (Hughes, 1998: 99).

Although there is no doubt that in the background of this poem, full of a variety of metaphors and symbolism, there is a subtle comparison between the lives of humans and bats, this essential orientation does not prevent the bats that inhabit the caves from being treated as concrete living creatures of flesh and blood, always observed within their own multiplicity:

For half an hour was it, an upward torrent  
Of various millions of bats. A smoky dragon  
Out of a key-hole in earth,  
A great sky-snake writhing away southwards  
Towards the Rio Grande. (Hughes, 1998: 99)

Despite the fact that the poem thematises the complex issue of the relationship between Hughes and Plath and a distant premonition of its tragic end, while in the bats it reveals the perfection of their way of life – "And that was how it should be. / As every night for how many million years? / A clockwork, perfected like their radar" – the interactions between semantic fields and the metamorphic processes deriving from them, combined with the successful avoidance of a substitutional metaphor, successfully prevent readers from seeing in the bats a mirror image either of themselves or of the poet. Hughes's way of expressing the bats' essence in words confirms, at every rereading, an idea he once expressed himself that is surprisingly reminiscent of the Deleuzian-Guattarian attitude towards literary words that become things and belong to several senses simultaneously:

Words that live are those which we hear, like 'click' or 'chuckle,' or which we see, like 'freckled' or 'veined,' or which we taste, like 'vinegar' or 'sugar,' or touch, like 'prickle' or 'oily,' or smell, like 'tar' or 'onion.' Words which belong directly to one of the five senses. Or words which act and seem to use their muscles, like 'flic' or 'balance.' (Hughes, 1967: 17)

## 11

It is generally known that Dickinson only published a few poems in her lifetime but left an enormous quantity of unpublished poems for posterity.

### Emily Dickinson: The Bat

A similar – if slightly different – attitude towards words can be observed in Emily Dickinson, a poet who masterfully interpolates dashes (often functioning as aposiopesis), as though thematising the impossibility of language, while at the same time offering us a model of writing that successfully introduces grammatical, syntactic and semantic anomalies to poetry in utterly unexpected places. It therefore seems reasonable to proclaim her a “minoritarian author” (in the sense of the term used by Deleuze and Guattari, of course). Given what we know about her,<sup>11</sup> it is easy to conclude that she was writing for people who are still to come – and also for animals. It is no surprise, then, that many of her poems have an enigmatic effect or can be read as axioms. Among the more considerable enigmas is the poem *The Bat*, which despite its typical characteristics only rarely appears in anthologies. It consists of a description and a slightly distanced evocation of a bat, which the speaker treats as a representative of its species, as the one bat that stands for the entire order of Chiroptera, but at the same time as an individual. Since the poem is short, it can be quoted in full:

The bat is dun with wrinkled wings  
Like fallow article,  
And not a song pervades his lips,  
Or none perceptible.

His small umbrella, quaintly halved,  
Describing in the air  
An arc alike inscrutable, –  
Elate philosopher!

Deputed from what firmament  
Of what astute abode,  
Empowered with what malevolence  
Auspiciously withheld.

**12**

Positive or animal-centred anthropomorphism is the use of anthropomorphism that elicits empathy. It reflects a differentiation between human and animal, but always in such a way as to maintain a connection.

**13**

At this point it is worth remembering Dickinson's phrase in a letter to her friend Higgins, where she is talking about her dog Carlo and offers the following lucid thought with regard to animals in general: "they know – but do not tell" (Dickinson, 1986: 404).

To his adroit Creator  
 Ascribe no less the praise;  
 Beneficent, believe me,  
 His eccentricities (Dickinson, 2003: 144).

The poem is written in free verse, although with iambic tetrameter appearing here and there. While it has no consistent rhyme scheme, the repetition of certain sounds, particularly the "a" sound, takes on the role of formal organisation and thus the poem has no need of marked rhymes (Vendler, 2002: 467). The bat is thematised as a concrete living creature and his or her belonging to a specific species is only implicitly present. The lyrical description, which establishes an interactional relation with reflection, is a long way from traditional, folklore, mythological perceptions of bats, and even further from any kind of utilitarian view of the animal. It is a description that makes no claim to be scientific, yet some knowledge of natural science is nevertheless apparent (And not a song pervades his lips, / Or none perceptible). And although positive anthropomorphism may be observed in the poem (in the use of the phrase "elate philosopher")<sup>12</sup>, there is not a single substitution metaphor to be found (the exclamation "Elate philosopher!" is a personifying device), while the poetic speaker herself never identifies with the bat even for a moment, although she does not hide her admiration, gradually passing from distanced description to similarly distanced admiration and even fascination. She particularly emphasises the aesthetic dimension of the bat's movement, while the dash at the end of the line alludes to the bat's inaccessible and ineffable essence (Describing in the Air / An Arc alike inscrutable, –). Yet, her fascination somehow hangs in the air and it is impossible to find its true origin, or a reason for it, or an interpretation of it. That is why all that remains to the speaker is an almost hymnal evocation of the Creator (To his adroit Creator / Ascribe no less the praise), to whom praise is given for creating such a perfect and, at the same time, mysterious creature as the bat.<sup>13</sup>

Here the reception of the text ascends from the ontic level to the ontological level and crosses into a space that surpasses the human mind. Notable here is an additional appeal to the reader (Beneficent, believe me, / His eccentricities) which introduces to the text the slightly didactic note that is evident in many of Dickinson's poems. The expression that concludes the poem and is semantically most prominent is "eccentricities", which is hardly surprising if we take into account the broader context of Emily Dickinson's life. It could be said that eccentricity plays an even more important role in the context of her poetry than it did in her life. Yet, as soon as we adopt once again the viewpoint of critical animal studies, we observe that the phrase "his eccentricities" that concludes the poem, thus highlighting the position of the interactional metaphor, acts as an intermediate zone, i.e. as a zone of indeterminacy and undecidability, a space of interaction, not as a mapping of identity between the human (the eccentricity of the poet) and the animal (the eccentricity of the bat).



We do not, however, understand them in their universality but in their singularity: the human embodied by the poetic speaker, and the animal embodied by the bat. The speaker, placed in the intermediate zone between the human and the animal, is fully aware of the presence of a more-than-human other and reflects intensely upon him or her, but despite her knowledge shows no intention of mastering the object of her observation in any way. She knows that she cannot fully know him or her, that it remains a mystery to her. This attitude, which could be described as a special kind of mindfulness, awakens wonder at the inscrutable perfection of the bat as a “being from an alien world”, a desire to reach beyond oneself and one’s real environment and, above all, a desire to find a way out or the possibility of escape, something that Emily Dickinson thematises most eloquently in another poem, where she writes: “I never heard the word “escape” / Without a quicker blood, a sudden expectation, / A flying attitude” (Dickinson, 2003: 25).

## Conclusion

If, to end with, we look at all four poetic texts again, we observe that each in its own way confronts us with the unique invention of poetic language, the search for a way out, while metaphor functions interactionally or becomes metamorphosis. On the one hand, this causes the reader to doubt the possibility of objective representation of a non-human animal, since an animal can never become a perfect object of cognition, while on the other, it points decisively to opportunities to escape from fixed identities towards the possibility of entering the zone of intermediacy, the zone of closeness with the animal, the zone of encounter between the human and the more-than-human other, towards the creation of other forms of life. Through its visual appearance and sound image, it evokes that which is beyond human language and thus also beyond any dividing line between nature and culture. More than that, it does away with that dividing line. Words can no longer be ascribed neither to the uttering subject nor to the subject of the utterance because they reach beyond both. He or she who writes, if he or she writes in such a way as to drive language to its extremities and even try to push it beyond its limits, is no longer a writer-human, but a writer-rat, a writer-nutria or a writer-bat. In short, when a person writes, it is then that he or she is at his or her most animalistic. But this writing is not and cannot be distinguished from particular metaphorical dimensions of language.

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## Nečloveška žival med metaforo in metamorfozo

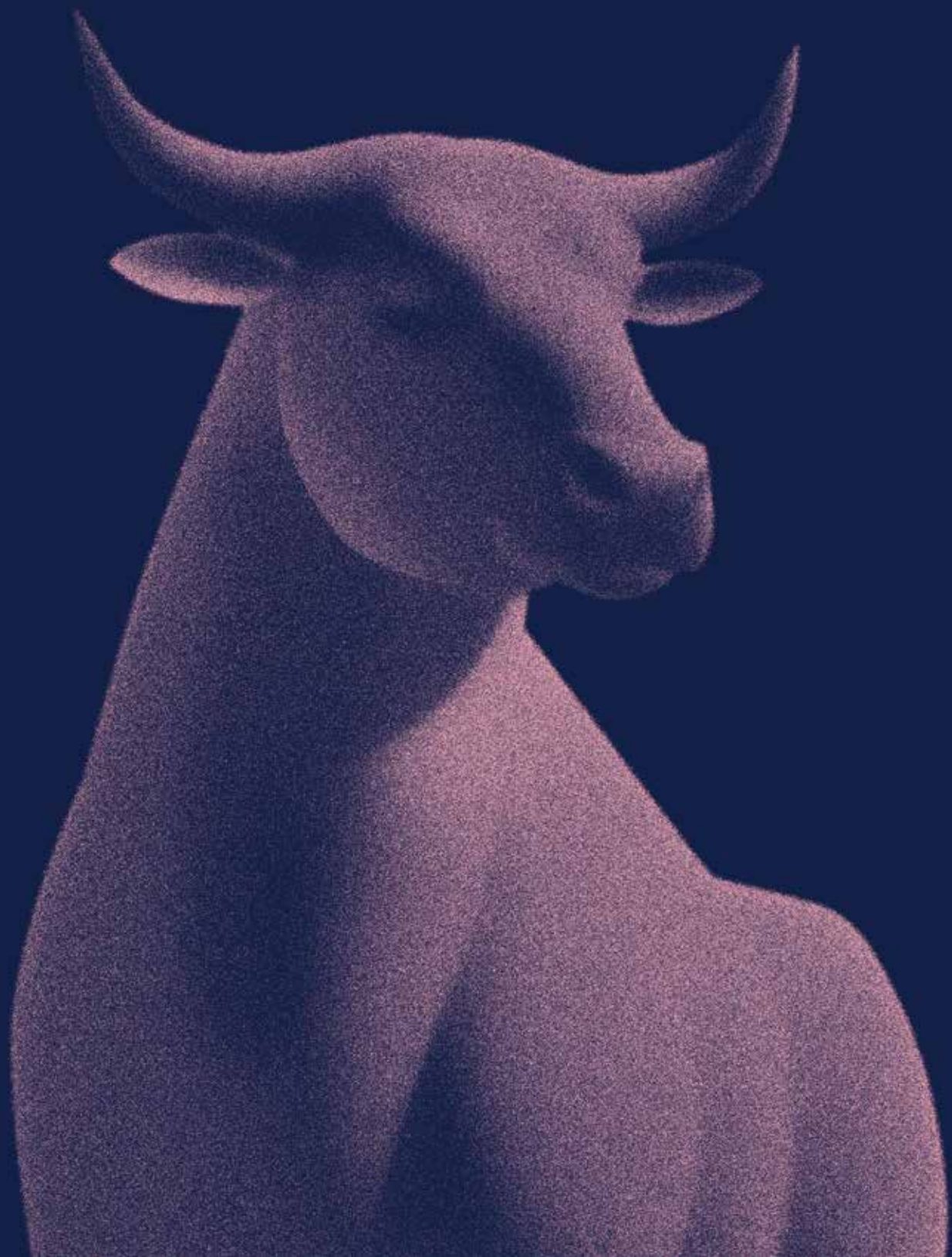
Prispevek je fragment obsežnejšega besedila v nastajanju, posvečenega pojavljanju nečloveških živali v književnih delih. Utemeljuje se v prepričanju, da je tropološkost bistvena značilnost našega jezika nasploh in literarnega jezika posebej, a je hkrati tudi lastnost jezikov nečloveških živali. Mogoče se je strinjati s filozofoma Thomasom Nagelom in Stanleyjem Cavellom, ki menita, da je nenehno spraševanje o tem, kako je biti drugi, edina prava etična drža; še zlasti tedaj, ko je ta drugi nečloveška žival. A je obenem mogoče pritrditi tudi teoretiku in pisatelju Johnu Bergerju, ki je postavil tezo o nečloveški živali kot prvi metafori v zgodovini umetniškega ustvarjanja. Toda zavedati se je treba, da je nečloveška žival tudi drugače neločljivo vezana na tropološkost. Načini sporazumevanja nečloveških živali (geste, oglašanja, premiki) so namreč že tisočletja pred razvojem človeške govornice poznali metaforično razsežnost v medsebojnem sporazumevanju, kot je že pred časom ugotovil ameriški filozof Gregory Bateson, pozneje pa je njegovo hipotezo razvil Brian Massumi. Njene različice najdemo tudi v sodobnih člankih s področja zoosemiotike.

Glede na to je izhodišče prispevka na videz paradokсна misel, da je pesniška govornica, ki je najintenzivneje metaforična, hkrati tudi najbližje nečloveškim živalim kot konkretnim živim bitjem.

Besedilo skuša na podlagi premisleka nekaterih pojmovanj metafore osvetliti ta paradoks. Pri tem se opre po eni strani na interakcijsko teorijo metafore, ki jo je med drugimi najprepričljivejše razvil Paul Ricoeur, po drugi strani pa na koncept metamorfoze, ki jo je mogoče označiti tudi za antimetaforo, ter na koncept postajati-žival, kakor sta ju razvila Gilles Deleuze in Félix Guattari v delih *Kafka* in *Tisoč platojev*. V luči tega članek analizira štiri pesniška besedila: pesem Ultrazvok netopirjev avstralskega pesnika Lesa Murrayja, odlomek iz poetičnega eseja Pirovanje netopirjev slovenskega pesnika Iztoka Geistra, pesem Karlsbad Caverns angleškega pesnika Teda Hughesa in pesem The Bat ameriške pesnice Emily Dickinson. Pri tem besedilo, poleg že omenjenih konceptov francoskih filozofov, upošteva tudi nekatera dognanja zoopoetike v njenih presečiščih z zoosemiotiko.

Na podlagi omenjenih teoretskih izhodišč si prispevek prizadeva prikazati, kako vsa štiri besedila s svojo grafično in zvočno podobo, ob iznajdevanju specifičnih govoric bralstvo usmerjajo onkraj domene človeškega jezika in onkraj ločnice med naravo in kulturo, še več, to ločnico celo ukinjajo.





# Revival of Interest in the Realistic Animal Painting of Rosa Bonheur

## Introduction

I will reflect on historical, positive changes in attitudes towards animals in the context of the philosophy of art. At the very heart of European philosophy is the self-proof of man at the expense of animals, which persisted deep into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I want to show how art has contributed to improving attitudes towards animals. I will delve into an example from the world of painting animals by a French painter from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899). In October 2022, the *Musée d'Orsay* in Paris dedicated a large retrospective exhibition to this artist, marking the bicentenary of her birth – after nearly a hundred years of obscurity.<sup>1</sup> We will follow her artistic path, ascent, fame and decline, and above all, the reasons for the renewed interest in her paintings of animals.

Ecofeminism emphasises that the domination over women and animals throughout history has called for a change of view, away from anthropocentrism, which has also impacted on the genre of animal painting. Increasingly, the value of Rosa Bonheur's animal paintings lies in the fact that she focused on the beings that were previously either of lateral, secondary, illustrative importance, or were anthropomorphised in symbolic, mythological, historical and genre depictions. Bonheur, in contrast, painted them in their ordinary, everyday interactions, especially in rural environments. And she went even further: she felt the same affection for all animals. As the main curators of the exhibitions in Bordeaux (1997) and then in Paris (2022), Sandra Buratti-Hasan and Leïla Jarbouai wrote

**1**

In 1865, she was the first woman to be awarded the Legion of Honour for Fine Arts.

in their forewords to the anthologies that the artist's general affection for domestic and wild animals caused some headaches: "At exhibitions, we would rather show magnificent roe deer, lions and dogs, everything, just not cows. Rosa Bonheur taught us to love cows, too, looking at animals without hierarchy and at their individuality" (Buratti-Hasan, Jarbouai, 2022: 11).

This is where the artist's modernity lies. Her paintings of animals help us to think of present times. Her work ethics and compassion for animals also speak to the generations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She was a pioneer of animal protection and was a member of the *Animal Protection Society* from its inception (in 1845). On the other hand, she was a woman entrenched in her time (who loved eating cutlets and practiced hunting). Her life and work are inseparable: her guiding life principle was to paint animals, and this was rooted in her love for them. Thus, she created thousands of works of art. According to the curators, her paintings show neither traces of anthropocentrism, nor sentimentality, but rather interspecies communication.

## A Harbinger of Progressive Ethics

Since her beginnings, Rosa Bonheur focused on painting animals such as domesticated animals used in agriculture. She first studied her animal models in detail, in their natural environment as well as in urban scenes such as slaughterhouses. She did not regret any personal sacrifice for this: in order to depict the bodies of domesticated animals as faithfully as possible, she watched their slaughter up close for months and months and waded through their blood in Paris slaughterhouses. Before embarking on studies for her painting *The Horse Fair/ Le Marché au chevaux* (1853), she spent a year and a half attending a weekly horse fair in the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris, dressed as a man, for which she had to apply for permission at the prefecture of Paris. Even in the urban Paris environment, she was primarily interested in the world of animals. For an accurate depiction, she was ready to do anything:

Oh! You must really adore the art to endure the pools of blood, in the midst of animal slaughterhouses. – I also had a great passion for horses; and where could I study these animals better than at fairs, mixed with horse dealers? (Andrews, 2022: 24)

She made a number of sketches for each painting based on her excellent knowledge of the anatomy of animals; she had a good knowledge of scientific studies, zootechnics. However, she was not interested in a dry, objective depiction of the animals; she strongly emphasised the psychological aspect: the welfare of animals through their own eyes, pos-



ture or movement, the atmosphere of space or landscape. Her style could be classified as psychological realism and naturalism, within figurative painting. The following words are attributed to her:

I only really liked to be among animals, I observed passionately their ways. One thing that I observed with special interest was the expression of their gaze: the eye being the mirror of the soul for every living creature. The expression of willpower and sensations of beings that by nature have no other means of expressing their thoughts. (Foulquié, 2017: 28)

Our intention is not only to admire the virtuosity of the artist's paintings of animals, but her extreme sensitivity in studying and exposing the emotional side of animals. She does not paint an individual animal impersonally, but as a special, unique creature that is more than just a member of its own species. Rosa Bonheur's *oeuvre* reveals her progressive ethics, which makes her so modern, so special and worthy of attention as a part of critical animal studies. Her contemporaries were not sufficiently aware of the modernity of her thought. As younger artists emerged, turning away from figural, realistic painting, they criticised her remarkable ability to depict animals realistically as obsolete, and therefore did not pay enough attention to the ethical message of her art.<sup>2</sup>

## A Serious Challenge to Art History

In 1857, the painter Édouard-Luis Dubufe painted a portrait of Rosa Bonheur, at the time aged 35, gazing seriously, as though seeing a vision, into the distance. With her right hand, she leans towards and hugs an ox, which calmly, almost proudly, looks upfront, at us. This is a portrait of the artist as an animal painter, but also a portrait of the animal. The relationship between the portrayed woman and the ox is relaxed, homely, she is leaning towards him without any fear, relying on him so much that she does not even have to look at him (Figure 1). The portrait was painted outdoors. Likewise, Rosa Bonheur also strived to paint animals in their natural environment. Some speculate that this is a joint work by two painters, Dubufe and Bonheur, and that it was she who portrayed the animal (Foucher Zarmanian, 2022: 20).

Valérie Bienvenue believes that the painter should be admired not only for her zoological accuracy, but also for her tremendous empathy for animals, which is expressed in depictions of their faces and their eyes: "The genius of Bonheur is manifested in the fact that within this type of art she created a new genre that she mastered perfectly: the animal portrait" (Bienvenue, 2022: 126). In this way, she facilitated an interspecies communication. Contemporary animal studies, which seek to emphasise the importance of interspe-

**2** The definitions of the concepts of critical animal studies, ecofeminism, anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism can be found in Slovenian humanities, for example, in Marjetka Golež Kaučič (2023), Tomaž Grušovnik, Branislava Vičar and Vesna Liponik (2023).



*Figure 1:* Édouard-Louis Dubufe and Rosa Bonheur:  
The Portrait of Rosa Bonheur, 1857, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosa\\_Bonheur\\_with\\_Bull,\\_by\\_E\\_L\\_Dubufe.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosa_Bonheur_with_Bull,_by_E_L_Dubufe.jpg)



*Figure 2:* Rosa Bonheur: Sheep by the Sea, 1865,  
Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosa\\_Bonheur\\_-\\_Sheep\\_by\\_the\\_Sea\\_\(1865\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosa_Bonheur_-_Sheep_by_the_Sea_(1865).jpg).

cies ethics, have therefore become interested in her work. They want art history to rewrite its studies, with a greater emphasis on the flows of animal painting. The author refers to Lynda Birke, who accentuates how the perspective taken by animal studies poses a serious challenge to art history, for this requires a radical reversal of the *status quo* and a better understanding of new ideas. Interest in Rosa Bonheur's *oeuvre* has also seen a revival due to the animal ethics it expresses (Bienvenue, 2022: 127).

The artist depicts beautiful scenes. Her paintings radiate grace, tranquillity, the calm life of animals and nature. She shows us, as Sandrine Andrews observes, even the idyllic view of forests, pastures, work in the field and the animals themselves. There is something dreamy in the world of Rosa Bonheur, a great desire and pleasure to recompose the real, countries, mountains and animals, and what is most beautiful about them. It shows us a world that no longer exists or one that never fully existed in this way (Andrews, 2022: 6). In her paintings, mute animals speak out. When they are not placed in an idyll environment, the painter compassionately highlights their helplessness (dog), the torment and the endurance of draught animals (cattle) and the compliance of other farm animals (sheep) (Figure 2), their passivity and dependence on the owners, as well as their resistance (horse) on occasions. She never depicted motifs from a Paris slaughterhouse. Her work is distinguished from genre painting by every day, naturalistic motifs of rural life. Her depictions are, for the most part, not provocative, neither in content nor in style. They are sensitive to animals, but they are not socially engaged, and do not emphasise the distress of people.

### **Even though a Woman Artist, the Highest Recognition at Home and Abroad**

As early as her first works, Rosa Bonheur achieved tremendous success at the Paris *Salons*, which also held world exhibitions. She sidestepped the *clichés*: in spite of being a woman, she had strong support from her fellow French painters and art critics (and later English and Americans), who had high regards for her as an animal painter. Among the artists, there was mutual admiration between Bonheur and Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), and she was much appreciated by J.-B. Camille Corot (1796–1875) and the poet and art critic Théophile Gautier (1811–1872). She herself greatly admired the paintings and studies of Théodore Géricault's horses, considered already to have a “modern sensibility” (Miller, 2022: 102), exposing the emotions of animals, including their suffering and misery. One of the critics noted that her canvases are “perhaps less heroic, but more real as much as possible” (Ibid.). Before her, no woman painted large canvases of animals, neither domestic nor wild. Only male painters were trained for that. Her work is often compared to the painters Jacques Raymond Brascassat (1804–1867) and Constant Troyon (1810–1865). If one was to place her alongside painters of similar style, such as Corbet,

**3**  
The last owner of this painting, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, donated it in 1887 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

**4**  
As a child, Rosa Bonheur was most inspired by animal characters in the works of the Scottish writer Walter Scott (1771–1832).

Delacroix and Géricault, and at the same time apply Kant's division of aesthetics into the analytics of the beautiful and the analytics of the sublime, then her works belong to beautiful rather than to sublime themes. However, this is already a simplification. Each painting is a world in its own right: for example, the motifs of *The Horse Fair* are not something special, but the forceful energy of the scene, pushing or forcibly stopping and flogging the horses, in short, the violence of the drovers, and, on the other hand, the fierce resistance of the horses, the pain and the agitated gazes of both animals and humans, lead the viewer into a whirlwind of agitated emotions.

During the time her artistic career was on the rise, she received the highest artistic recognition as well as political support. After her initial successes in France, she also managed to reach to the British and American art markets, which was largely thanks to her pioneering actions in not only leaving the trade in her artwork to occasional exhibition sales, but choosing a private agent or art dealer, Ernest Gambart (1814–1902). Although of Belgian descent, Gambart spent a lot of time in Paris and Nice, as well as in London, where he had close contacts with local exhibitors and art dealers, who themselves knew American exhibitors. When Gambart and Bonheur jointly promoted her painting canvases, she forged strong and valuable ties with English and Scottish painters, and even with the British Queen Victoria, who also admired her paintings, especially *The Horse Fair*, which was for a time on display at Windsor Castle (in 1855).<sup>3</sup> As soon as Bonheur finished a new painting, Gambart took it abroad. Thus, she was increasingly appreciated and admired in the Anglo-American market, whereas in France, where visitors to the Salons had fewer and fewer opportunities to see her works (more precisely, from 1867 on), she fell into oblivion.<sup>4</sup>

The French, as well as the English and the Scots, liked the realism of her works. They were the first to point out that Bonheur painted animals as she herself knew them from her everyday life. Her paintings were not committed to the historical genre, where animals had a strictly defined, limited and symbolic role, so the images of animals in her paintings did not, and still do not, look artificial. Some animal scenes are placed in an urban environment, evoking nostalgic feelings. The picture of horses driven to the fair, *The Horse Fair*, represents “a link to the past, a link between tradition and modernity, for the Paris horse fair was already old, but still retained its position in the capital” (Foulquié, 2017: 39). All these were the reasons for her paintings of animals to be well received by the French public. In the painting *The Horse Fair*, the English discovered a new way of representing animals, with a deep sense of loyalty to reality, to the event, the movement and the energy radiating from the horses, while at the same time they appreciated the painter for being able to preserve the morphological truth of cold-blooded races. They found she was more convincing than their painter Edwin Landseer (1802–1873), whose images of horses were too static and sweet.

Rosa Bonheur also received a warm reception in the United States. *The Daily News* described her in 1855 “as the greatest painter of rural scenes in France, perhaps in the

whole world” (Foulquié, 2017: 42). Based on this picture, American horse breeders became interested in “la race percheronne” (species of horses from the region of Perche), which then became very widespread. After such a positive reception in America, French breeders began to be more interested in breeding these horses. Another question is whether this artistic trigger for the mass breeding of horses was also good for the horses themselves. This breeding brought great economic benefits to the Americans due to the usefulness and resilience of that breed of horse. Even today, Rosa Bonheur’s paintings are of interest to veterinary medicine, zootechnics and cultural anthropology because she depicted races and species of animals with such precision (her almost documentary-like depictions are even more valuable now as certain species and breeds of animals that she portrayed later became extinct).

Also, very popular at the time were engravings made using originals, which enabled mass technical reproduction of the originals. It was not unusual for the artists of the time to consider that the image they had painted was the key, bearing the seal of originality. Therefore, in their view, as the original form of reproduction, engravings did not present any threat to their authorship. So, in 1855, Thomas Landseer, brother of the famous English animal painter Edwin, made an engraving of the painting *The Horse Fair*. The popularity of Rosa Bonheur in the United States had been such that the *Koch & Fisher* company made a porcelain doll (22 cm in size) with her image and named it after her. Many families owned her works. Her paintings, especially of horses, as well as of bison and other animals discovered by the conquerors of the Wild West, personified the myth of the origins of the American nation. These were imbued with the aesthetics of nature, with conquering campaigns into the wilderness, as if there had been no one there except animals, although some areas had previously been inhabited by indigenous people.

### **Decline, Oblivion and Revival of Interest in the Artist**

Exhibitions at the Paris Salons lost their relevance after 1870. At the turn of the century, with the arrival of the avant-garde movements, the importance of institutions, including academies, was in decline. The attitude towards representational art was changing. Artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were being forgotten, including Rosa Bonheur. From the point of view of the artistic currents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, her style of painting was considered old-fashioned, and her approach to art, based on imitation and figuration, outdated. She could even be considered to have been very lucky to be so famous, worshipped and rich during her lifetime. Also, from the political point of view, she belonged to the old regime (the Second Empire): in 1865, Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoléon III, awarded her the title of Knight of the Imperial Order of the Legion of Honour as an outstanding artist. Then, in the time of the Third Republic, in 1894, she received the honorary title of

Rosa Bonheur was also greatly influenced by the fate of her mother, who, at a time when her husband, Rosa's father, joined the Saint-Simonian community, took care of the family, including four children, alone. When Rosa turned eleven, her mother became ill due to the poor conditions of her life. She eventually died and was buried in an unmarked communal grave because there was no money for a burial in a grave of her own. Supposedly, Rosa then swore that she would never marry and would live independently, supporting herself with her own work. Her father also supported her in this.

First Officer of the Legion of Honour, as the first woman in France. The Empress herself sympathised with the ideas of Saint-Simonism and supported women artists (when viewing one of the paintings that Rosa Bonheur painted to her specifications, she supposedly exclaimed that, from what she saw, genius had no gender). The political elite were not bothered by the rural theme of her paintings, nor by the fact that the animals in her depictions were no longer carriers of sublime, symbolic, mythological, religious and historical content. This affirmative and respectful attitude of the Empress towards the woman artist shows political authority in a different light from that to which we are accustomed.

At a time when there was no legislation on trafficking wildlife, Rosa Bonheur set up an actual zoo next to her home near Fontainebleau, housing lions, chamois, roe deer, sheep, parrots, horses, cats, dogs, monkeys, wild boars and hares. (Figure 3). The boundaries between wild and domestic animals were thus blurred. As she lived with animals on a daily basis, she also attended their deaths, suffering, and even the kind of violence inherent to life. Moreover, she cared for the animals herself, with the help of a veterinarian. It is known that at the end of their lives, she herself took care of their death so that they would not suffer too much in the last moments. Unfortunately, not all stories ended well. Among other things, she domesticated a pair of lions, who then had their own offspring. Due to her numerous promotional trips around France and abroad, she handed over the family of lions to the Paris Zoo, where the adult male fell into depression due to sadness, and eventually died a year later, despite Bonheur occasionally visiting them. Some also remarked on the fact that, despite their care, the animals at her zoo were also caged to serve as models.

Rosa Bonheur lived a rather solitary life. She did not associate much with her peers, and she emigrated early on from the city centre of Paris, where she lived as a young painter, because people who admired her harassed her too much at her home and while working in her studio. She never started a family, did not feel inclined towards men, but rather lived for four decades together with Nathalie Micas, whom she met during her teenage years in Paris, when portrayed by her father, himself a painter.<sup>5</sup> She spent the last two years before her death together with American painter Anna Klumpke, still at her home near Fontainebleau. She advocated for gender equality, following the views of her father, who was a passionate supporter of Saint-Simonism. She became a symbol for the defence of lesbianism, probably inadvertently, for she herself did not explicitly or publicly confirm her sexuality, although she most likely expressed it privately. Her sexual orientation cannot be gleaned from her paintings. After the death of the artist in 1899, her partner, Anna Klumpke, the only custodian of the artist's legacy, worked hard to preserve her memory. She opened the artist's studio to the public as well as a museum of her works at the Château de By-Thomery, as recorded in her biography *Rosa Bonheur; Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre (Her Life, Her Work)* in 1908, and organised exhibitions around the world. "And yet ..., Rosa Bonheur was immersed in obscurity" (Brault, 2022: 62). Art history books of the 20<sup>th</sup>



*Figure 3:* Rosa Bonheur. Seven Studies of Wild Boar,  
Wikimedia, Sept études de sanglier - Rosa Bonheur - MO RF 1309.png, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/  
File:Sept\\_%C3%A9tudes\\_de\\_sanglier\\_-\\_Rosa\\_Bonheur\\_-\\_MO\\_RF\\_1309.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sept_%C3%A9tudes_de_sanglier_-_Rosa_Bonheur_-_MO_RF_1309.png) Rosa Bonheur.

century hardly mention her. However, due to the modernity of her spirit, as recognised by the humanism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, her work is finally beginning to interest researchers. Rosa Bonheur's artistic path does not match the image of later artists of the modern era, rebellious and poor, and whose originality and aspirations are overlooked by the academic community as well as by the public. She believed in studying, in tradition, where her mastery had been proved. She earned her fortune by selling her paintings, especially abroad, and that allowed her to maintain her home and her zoo. After 1880, she noticed impressionistic tendencies towards outdoor painting. She had been doing it all along, and in order to portray animals as faithfully as possible in their natural environment and in an authentic atmosphere, she travelled throughout France all the way to the Pyrenees, as well as to the Scottish and English landscapes. She was also technically advanced: she relied on photographs in her work and had electricity installed in her home so that she could paint late into the night in her studio.

Her goal is not to capture on canvas the perception of a certain sequence of moments (like the Claude Monet series); she wants to talk about the essential and unchanging character of nature: representation, the fruit of memory, revived by decades of documentation, is for her a synthesis of elements that she studied in nature, almost always several years earlier. (Quinsac, 2022: 73)

## Conclusion

The example of animal painting by Rosa Bonheur shows that new findings and values in the present make us remember the past differently, both in terms of the history of painting, art history and philosophy of art. Under the influence of ecofeminism, gender studies and (critical) animal studies, interest in the painter's work has been revived in the last three decades, although, or precisely because, her name had not been included in the canon of the greatest artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The causes seem external, but how to distinguish external criteria from internal ones? Is this even possible and does it make sense? It is a reciprocal process: art has always been shaped in the spirit of time and contributed to its configuration. Later, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the avant-garde movements favoured revolutionary stylistic changes and pointed out people's hopeless existential position, and so the animal motif was less common. However, it is not entirely lacking, if we only think about the art group *Blue Rider* and the importance that its founders, W. Kandinsky and F. Marc, gave to horses and other animals. Artistic movements of the past and artists themselves can be considered in a more balanced way. We can appreciate their different approaches from a distance of one hundred or even one hundred and fifty years. Avant-garde



movements brought a lot of novelty, but the artists before them also renewed art. In art, an intrinsic continuity or evolution takes place, which prepares favourable ground even for large and abrupt changes in aesthetic and ethic views, content accents and styles. When we consider them retrospectively, they no longer seem so revolutionary.<sup>6</sup>

The return to animal painting, in this case to Rosa Bonheur, dating from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, indicates a change in understanding of the human-animal relationship, as well as more broadly of the environment and nature. In the philosophy of art, it will be necessary to scrutinise the fact that the public's interest in artists and art in general is strongly influenced by non-aesthetic criteria, that the wider social and cultural conditions and values influence the artistic creation and its reception, and *vice versa*. The notion of artistic autonomy also needs to be reevaluated. The fact that art is autonomous does not mean that it is not affected by social and other flows. In this way, Rosa Bonheur's realistic animal paintings have attained a new sheen.

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### 6

Irena Samide's analysis of the literary opus of the Austrian writer Marie Freifrau von Ebner-Eschenbach points out some of the similarities of women artists in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Samide, 2023).

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## Obuditev zanimanja za realistično slikanje živali na primeru Rose Bonheur

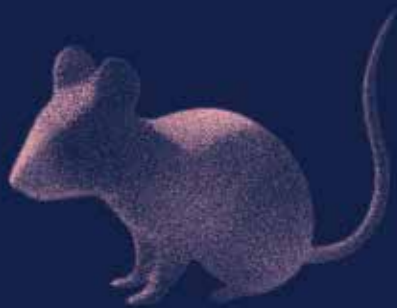
O zgodovinskih pozitivnih spremembah v odnosu do živali razmišljam v okviru filozofije umetnosti. Pokazati želim, kako je umetnost prispevala k izboljšanju odnosa do živali. Poglobim se v primer iz sveta slikarstva, v slikanje živali francoske slikarke iz druge polovice 19. stoletja, Rose Bonheur (1822–1899). Ob dvestoletnici njenega rojstva in po skoraj sto letih pozabe ji je *Musée d'Orsay* v Parizu posvetil veliko retrospektivno razstavo. Sledimo njeni umetniški poti, vzponu, slavi in zatonu, nato pa razlogom za obuditev zanimanja za njeno slikanje živali.

Rosa Bonheur se je že vse od svojih začetkov usmerila v slikanje živali, tako udomačenih (družnih in rejnih) kot prostoživečih. Za vsako sliko je napravila številne skice, ki so temeljile na njenem odličnem poznavanju anatomije živali; dobro je bila seznanjena z znanstvenim preučevanjem, z zootehniko. Vendar ji ni šlo za suh, objektivni prikaz živali; močno je poudarila psihološki vidik: počutje živali skozi njihov pogled, držo ali gibanje, pa tudi širše skozi atmosfero prostora, krajine. Posamezne živali ne slika brezosebno, ampak kot posebno, edinstveno bitje, ki je več kot zgolj pripadnica svoje vrste. »Genialnost Bonheur se kaže v tem, da je znotraj tega tipa umetnosti ustvarila nov žanr, ki ga je odlično obvladala: živalski portret« (Bienvenue, 2022: 126). Njen stil bi umestili v psihološki realizem in naturalizem, v figuralno slikarstvo. Od žanrskega slikanja jo ločijo vsakdanji, naturalistični motivi ruralnega življenja.

Skozi njen opus se pokaže njena napredna etika in ta je tista, ki jo napravlja tako sodobno, tako posebno in vredno pozornosti. Njeni sodobniki so se premalo zavedali modernosti njene misli. Ko so se utrjevali mlajši umetniki, ki so se odvrčali od figuralnega, realističnega slikarstva, so njeno izjemno sposobnost realističnega upodabljanja živali grajali kot zastarelo, zato tudi niso bili dovolj pozorni na etično sporočilo njene umetnosti. Kanon velikih umetnikov 19. stoletja je ni uvrstil v svoj izbor.

Za Rosa Bonheur so se začele zanimati kritične animalistične študije, ekofeminizem in študije spolov. Želijo, da umetnostna zgodovina prevrednoti svojo zgodovino, z večjim poudarkom na ženskih umetnicah in na animalnem toku slikarstva. Na pretekla umetnostna gibanja, na umetnice in umetnike je mogoče z daljše časovne razdalje in z novimi uvidi gledati drugače, bolj uravnoteženo, manj črno-belo. Vračanje k animalnemu slikarstvu kaže na spremembo ontološke in etične paradigme v odnosu človek - žival, pa tudi širše pri obravnavi okolja in narave. V filozofiji umetnosti bo treba vzeti pod drobnogled dejstvo, da na (ponovno, obujeno) zanimanje javnosti za določene umetniške tokove, umetnice in umetnike, močno vplivajo zunajestetski kriteriji, da širše miselno, družbeno in kulturno okolje ter vrednote vplivajo na umetniško ustvarjanje in na njegovo sprejemanje, tudi umetniške dediščine. Z drugih perspektiv so tudi slike živali Rose Bonheur na novo zasijale.





# Squirrel, Lynx, and a Field mouse. The Contribution of Austrian School Textbooks to a Speciesist Perception of Animals

## Introduction

Animals are almost omnipresent in the context of socialisation and education. Collective knowledge about how other living beings should be perceived as an animal species and also as a category of difference arises in the course of the developmental phases of children and young people and begins to be habitualised even before language.<sup>1</sup> The adoption of conventionalised “appraisal patterns” (Stibbe, 2021: 79) takes place within the framework of a wide variety of cultural practices. Alongside family, peer groups and mass media such as television, film, the internet and social media, school is one of the most influential factors. The institution of school has an educational function in two senses of the word: The knowledge imparted by schools has an informative effect on the one hand and moulds learning subjects on the other. Helmut Fend defines schools as “excellent instruments” (2008: 45) that have the task of moulding and training the consciousness of children and young people in a specific (socially desirable) way. Furthermore, Fend emphasises the social component when he explains that schools are

in Austauschbeziehungen mit den Interessen des politischen Systems, das in unterschiedlich legitimierter Weise die Interessen des Gemeinwesens vertritt” (in an exchange relationship with the interests of the political system, which represents the interests of the community in variously legitimised ways). (Fend, 2008: 45)

### 1

See Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus, which forms the basis of conscious actions but is simultaneously withdrawn from consciousness. Cf. Bourdieu, 2007, *The subtle differences*.

Textbooks as teaching and learning materials fulfil the function of providing and preserving knowledge that is considered socio-culturally relevant for teachers and learners. According to Thomas Höhne, the knowledge presented linguistically and visually in textbooks can be described as institutionally formed and socially recognised (cf. Höhne, 2003: 5), which is both politically and administratively legitimised and scientifically founded (cf. Höhne et al., 2005: 27). The textbook therefore contains the collective body of knowledge that corresponds to the common sense of a society and thus allows conclusions to be drawn about the self-image of a society (cf. Höhne, 2003: 18). The knowledge content represents the negotiated compromise of a large number of controlling and steering authorities and actors involved in the development process (cf. Höhne, 2003: 79; also Lässig, 2010: 207). As fragments of discourses, textbooks therefore contribute to passing on hegemonic social norms, values and perspectives on the world to subsequent generations (cf. Fend, 2008: 50). Linked to this is the discursive transfer of patterns of interpretation, attitudes and cultural practices, in which non-human beings are also involuntarily integrated and thus communicatively/materially appropriated.<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is therefore necessary to ask what children and young people learn about other animals in the socialisation space of school and what knowledge constructions can be found particularly in biology textbooks?

Animals in textbooks are, in Borgards' words, both semiotic and diegetic animals. They are (actually) text animals that refer to real animals (cf. Borgards, 2012: 89). The animal descriptions, information and knowledge conveyed in textbooks are linguistically characterised and pre-formed by their respective reference science (cf. Busse, 2018: 13). The teaching content about animals in textbooks contains an expectedly reduced knowledge that only requires partial representations of animals. At the same time, however, it can be assumed that the knowledge imparted is presented in a largely value-neutral manner due to its connection to the reference science of biology/zoology or contains purely factual knowledge elements that convey added educational value.

## **Aspects of textbook knowledge**

Textbooks are made available to all children and young people in Austria free of charge by the Republic of Austria as part of its free textbook programme (Schulbuchaktion). All regular schoolchildren are therefore permitted to make use of the necessary teaching materials as part of the so-called textbook campaign. Alongside other teaching materials, some of which are digital, the traditional textbook is still one of, if not *the* most effective learning medium in the classroom (cf. Ott, 2017: 2). On average, more than one million pupils at around 6,000 Austrian compulsory schools receive 8.8 million new textbooks every year, with more than 8,000 works to choose from (cf. Schulbuchaktion online, 2022). Textbooks are therefore an important educational policy instrument for placing socially dominant discourses (cf. Heitzmann and Niggli, 2010: 7–9).



In the context of critical textbook research at the end of the 1970s, Gerd Stein had already highlighted the key characteristics of textbooks with regard to their conception and function, which arise in the context of their creation and use. He characterised the textbook as an ‘informatorium’, a ‘paedagogicum’ and a ‘politicum’ (cf. Stein, 1979: 9–12). Thomas Höhne later adds that the textbook is not only an auxiliary medium for imparting knowledge in the classroom, but also a discursive venue for socio-political debates about what specific knowledge should be included in textbooks. Höhne argues that the production of textbooks is subject to its own rules of construction. In Höhne’s view, textbook knowledge is the object and result of social struggles that are fought out within a “Diskursarena” (discourse arena) (Höhne, 2003: 5). On the one hand, this refers to the normativity and selectivity of textbook knowledge. On the other hand, he refers to the considerable number of actors involved in the creation of textbooks as well as to the various instances that result on the one hand from the structure of publishers/author collectives and on the other hand from the composition of the official approval commission for textbooks. These groups occupy influential discourse positions and determine which elements of knowledge are defined as teachable and learnable and are consequently printed in the textbook (cf. Höhne, 2003: 18). Following on from Stein, Höhne therefore adds the additional label “Konstruktorium” (Höhne, 2003: 18).

Simone Lässig also confirms the political aspect of the textbooks, the texts and images of which imply socially dominant world views and are intended in particular to pass on to the next generations those values that have been judged to be particularly important by political elites (cf. Lässig, 2010: 203). The Ministry of Education (in Austria) has a ‘gatekeeper function’ (cf. Lässig, 2010: 206), as it also decides on the composition of the licensing bodies. In the context of the approval procedures for the authorisation of textbooks, information that is deemed relevant and less relevant or deemed unnecessary or undesirable can be excluded in this way.

In this constellation, the current curricula form a further exclusionary mechanism in terms of school policy, as they define the teaching content intended for the respective type of school and thereby include or exclude topics and subjects (cf. Künzli, 2009: 134). Curricula formulate the framework conditions laid down in the legal foundations of the school system in terms of content, didactics and methodology and thus concretise the educational mandate of the school. They form the obligatory frame of reference for publishers and author collectives as well as for teachers and school administrators as to what knowledge content is to be covered in lessons at which school level and once again allow a view of socially prevailing power and domination relations (cf. Künzli, 2009: 137).

To summarise, from the perspective of critically motivated textbook research, textbook knowledge is coded and selective knowledge that also appears to be almost invariable in the face of innovations in content and subject matter and in this context exhibits historical continuity.<sup>3</sup> Höhne sees this tenacious resistance to change as being due to the fact

**3** Examples of textbook research in general include Fuchs and Bock (2018) and Fuchs et al. (2014).

that both innovations and variability (cf. Höhne, 2003: 158) threaten to disrupt the existing reliability and stability of socio-cultural knowledge. On the one hand, the justification for wanting to depict reliable and consensual elements of knowledge in textbooks - which can only be partial and selective regarding the scope of topics and space - is understandable. On the other hand, a conflict becomes clear here, as the institution of school is obliged by various teaching principles a) to qualification and b) to quality. This means that the content taught in textbooks must fulfil a propaedeutic requirement and must be adapted to current social issues. With regard to animals, however, a glance at the textbooks gives rise to scepticism that the content taught there is always of a purely subject-related nature.

### Animals in schoolbooks

While in classic children's literature (e.g., fairy tales) the factual information is often rather subordinate and emotionalisation and/or moralisation mechanisms are often formed via the stories told, in which animal figures act as pedagogical mediators to convey a wide variety of messages (cf. Eitler, 2021: 122–145), animal representations in the learning media of the different school levels follow different modes of conceptualisation. Animals as a subject matter are dealt with in pre-school and primary schools in general knowledge lessons and are mentioned in the secondary school curriculum in the subject of *Biologie & Umweltkunde* (biology and environmental studies).<sup>4</sup> In the 5th grade, vertebrates and mammals are a key topic.

The textbook texts are adapted to the age groups of the children in terms of linguistic expression as well as form and style. However, in accordance with the teaching mandate in the curriculum, the content is intended to reflect science-based factual information. The knowledge elements represented in the textbooks are therefore, as already mentioned, orientated towards the reference science of biology or zoology. Biology, as the study of life, claims to provide fundamental knowledge about humans, animals and nature that is considered 'objective' and 'certain'. For a long time, knowledge about animals was only generated by zoological disciplines (see Borgards, 2016: 1). The knowledge currently communicated must therefore also be considered in terms of its historical dimension.

The presentation of subject-specific information in the textbook is typically based on definitions and descriptions of animals. Information is often articulated in declarative sentences. Definitions are a suitable linguistic means of establishing or stating something in an argumentative manner and thus establishing valid normative concepts (cf. Kienpointner, 1992: 252). Declarative sentences explain concrete findings, but also contain a persuasive element. Learners must assume that what they read in black and white in the textbook is correct or the so-called 'truth'. The selection of content-related and thematic knowledge elements in combination with the textual description and visual representation of the respective animal species in the textbooks is decisive in the creation of specific

ways of reading or interpreting animals. In the present analysis, affirmative to distancing conceptualisations of the various species were identified, which subsequently have an influence on a) how these animals are to be judged, b) what is thought sociocultural about the respective animal species and c) how they should be treated (cf. Bendel Larcher, 2013: 71).<sup>5</sup>

5

For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that teachers also play a key role in conveying the content of the textbook. However, this article focuses exclusively on the linguistic and visual representations conveyed in the textbook.

## Methodology

The textbook analysis discussed here in extracts operated under the social constructivist paradigm of critical discourse analysis and brought together the approach of linguistic discourse analysis by Sylvia Bendel Larcher (2015) and parts from ecolinguistics by Arran Stibbe (2015, 2021). Both approaches are based on the English-language Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The aim was to reconstruct the knowledge communicated in Austrian textbooks in the subject of *Biologie & Umweltkunde* using the example of various mammal species (cf. Schmid, 2024 for details). Language plays an essential role in the construction of social reality (cf. Berger/Luckmann, 2012) and the continuous reproduction of social judgement patterns: “Language is a powerful human tool and we must examine what role it plays in maintaining and perpetuating existing social structures, what contribution it makes to our hierarchically ordered classist, racist, sexist and anthropocentric world view” (Berman 2001: 267).

The analysis aimed to critically examine the discursive (re)production of knowledge in the biology textbooks authorised in Austria and looked at what is said from an animal ethics-informed perspective of human-animal studies in the dimensions of historicity, selectivity and facticity. This should contribute to the discussion about existing conventional patterns of thought (Arran Stibbe refers to this as “stories we live by”, cf. Stibbe, 2015) in dealing with non-human animals (as well as with the natural world). However, critical discourse research is not only the description and disclosure of prevailing power structures and social consensus, but also an active contribution to questioning these conventions and/or communicating counter-designs. In the words of Teun van Dijk, this means taking sides with “those who suffer most from dominance and inequality” (Van Dijk, 1993: 252).

Various levels of discourse production were considered in the context of the analysis: Firstly, there is the level of the individual texts. In addition to the text level, the institutional contexts of the school and biology/zoology as a science were also considered as places of origin of the discourse conveyed in the textbooks. In this context, historical source texts were also analysed as examples to identify intertextual references and thus make the structural stability of the discourse tangible.

## Body

The underlying data corpus consisted of 19 approved textbooks for the subject of *Biologie & Umweltkunde* in the 5th grade, secondary level I, which were determined based on the textbook lists of the Austrian *Schulbuchaktion* (a governmental textbook campaign) and were used up to the 2017/2018 school year or in previous years. A total of 20 mammal species were analysed in the study, which were determined based on their frequency of occurrence in the textbooks. The textbooks are used in Austria both in the *Neue Mittelschule* (new secondary school) and in the *Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen* (general secondary schools). Pupils in this school phase are around 10 to 11 years old and are in the late stages of childhood at the transition to adolescence. This age phase can be described as a sensitive phase of life, as the transition from primary to secondary school marks the start of a new stage of development in which intellectual and social performance requirements increase and value systems and identity concepts are formed and consolidated (cf. Hurrelmann, 2012: 78–80).

### Segmentation of textbook knowledge

The linguistic and visual representations of the various animal species (units of study) in the textbook texts were segmented and categorised thematically and in terms of content in several rounds of analysis. This served to structure the available knowledge attributes, which could then be differentiated pro forma into two types of knowledge. On the one hand, knowledge components were identified that belong to the type of biological/zoological specialist or specialised knowledge in terms of content and conceptualise a species from a largely biological perspective (this includes anatomical or morphological descriptions, but also source categories such as vertebrate, mammal, rodent, etc.). In addition, the depictions of animals are also interspersed with non-scientific elements that originate from other social areas and fields. These attributions are fed by every day or world knowledge and lie outside the realm of specialised scientific observation (e.g., categories such as mouse hunter, milk factory, best friend, etc.). De facto, however, the types of knowledge generated cannot be completely separated from one another, as they are ultimately subject to the same processes of social production.

### Strategies for the representation of other species in textbooks

The construction of the knowledge object ‘animal’ or the “kommunikative Aneignung” (communicative appropriation) (Steen, 2019: 257–275) of animals by the text pro-

ducers is realised in the textbook via strategies of linguistic and visual conceptualisation, resulting in certain readings or patterns of assessment of animals. Conceptualisation can be characterised as strategic because textbook representations of animals are about influencing the content of discourse formations (cf. Nonhoff, 2014: 387) as well as creating certain effects and legitimising given structures. In this sense, strategic means purposeful, partially automated, but not necessarily planned and/or consciously executed. The modes of representation were scanned at the text level using linguistic units such as word - phrase - sentence - text/discourse (cf. Bendel Larcher, 2012: 56) for recurrence and patterns. Based on the linguistic means used, such as modal verbs, determinative or qualifying attributes, metaphors, but also argumentations, narratives, proverbs or intertextual references, what was said was interpretatively reconstructed and then divided into inductively formed descriptive categories.<sup>6</sup> Also of interest was which thematic aspects are most frequently explained in conjunction with the respective animal species in a salient and cross-textbook manner. In addition to the use of language, the content conveyed was also analysed for its factual content and the respective contexts were recorded.

Basically, in the co- and contextual (i.e., the text surrounding the written text as well as the images provided) synopsis, a consistently speciesist/anthropocentric assessment of the animal species in the textbook was found. Without exception, all animal species examined in the analysis are classified with utilitarian colouring into socio-cultural categories, which - in variously graded tones - metaphorically characterise them in terms of area or function, for example as pets or (endangered, extinct or invasive) wild animals, as health policemen or mousers, as milk factories or cultural 'Kulturfolger' (synanthropic species) (stereo-)typified. Animals in textbooks are positioned on a scale of usefulness to humans, or in the terminology of Arluke et al. on a "sociozoological scale" (2015: 84), which in fact corresponds to a conception that is objectifying or distancing in principle.<sup>7</sup>

Three main directions were recognised in the various presentations, which were divided into three superordinate major groups: Into **affirmative**, **ambiguous** and **distancing** conceptualisation strategies. In the case of affirmative conceptualisation strategies, the information presented tends to be framed in a positive, valorising way, which is usually because the respective species is of great benefit to humans. Conversely, distancing strategies emphasise those aspects that promote a less valuable perception of an animal species and sometimes even figurate this species as 'harmful'. Ambiguous strategies are those that allow readings in both directions, i.e., that can create both affirmative and distancing interpretative frameworks, i.e., that are ambiguous.

Within each of the three main groups mentioned, another four subgroups were created, which reveal further nuances in the conceptualisations and differentiate the type of conception of the respective animals. To emphasise the action character of the respective mode of representation, the substantive verb was therefore used to designate the category (e.g., *subjectifying*, *objectifying*, etc.). In addition, the text contains further, but open-ended

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The category of intertextuality referred to here essentially means that written texts refer to what has already been said or written. Current textbook texts are intertextually linked with previous textbooks and with existing or generated texts in biology/zoology as a reference science and source of knowledge. In view of the scope, however, a detailed discussion must be omitted here (see Schmid, 2024 for details).

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Birgit Mütterich (2015: 71) refers to this as a "tiefenkulturelle Matrix" (deep cultural matrix) and Georg Toepper uses the term "kulturelle Matrix" (cultural matrix) (Toepper 2016: 149).

strategies of representation (e.g., *emotionalising*, *functionalising*, etc.), which each take on reinforcing and/or supporting functions of conceptualisation. In the animal representations conveyed in textbooks, however, only one conceptualisation strategy is rarely found – depending on the scope of the representation. In most cases, several conceptualisation strategies appear side by side for each reference animal species, overlapping and mixing or merging smoothly into one another or in an interdependent relationship. It is therefore possible for several conceptualisation strategies to come together, which in total do not allow a clear, selective classification, but usually do reveal weightings in the concept. When viewed as a whole, this differentiation makes it possible to visualise anthropocentric and speciesist assessments by the text producers and their placement on a scale ranging from worthy of protection to dispensable (cf. Horn/Roscher, 2019: 8).

The conceptualisation strategies identified are briefly explained below. For reasons of space, however, only one example of each descriptive category is analysed. However, it should become clear how the way animals are depicted in textbooks can or should lead recipients to view or judge these animals in a very specific way.

## **Affirmative conceptualisation strategies**

(*subjectification*, *superiorisation*, *aestheticisation*, *ecologisation*)

### **Subjectify**

The conceptualisation strategy of *subjectification* means that animals are figured as parts of the human civilisation space and communicatively placed within the human sphere. These animal species (in the present analysis it was the dog and cat) are often given named identities, professions or even biographies that describe an animal individual and thus allow individuality to be recognised.

### **Superiorise**

*Superiorising* means emphasising animals or characteristics or features of these animal species in a way that—in contrast to an inferior presentation—particularly distinguishes the respective species from the perspective of the text producers and thus also sets it apart from other species in a special way (distinction). The descriptions in the textbooks concentrate on individual animal species-specific abilities that are constructed as extraordinary/impressive in explicit and implicit comparison with other species and therefore valorise the respective animal species, as this usually results in a correspondingly honoured additional benefit for humans (e.g. the dog's ability to detect scents).

## Aestheticise

Animals that are portrayed in textbook texts as particularly attractive, beautiful, well-formed or handsome due to certain characteristics and/or abilities are given a form of *aestheticisation* through this form of representation, which contributes to the perception of this species as positive and/or likeable. In most cases, characteristics are described or emphasised that relate to the external appearance such as stature and constitution of an animal species and can be localised in the fields of body and movement. The following case study illustrates this conceptualisation strategy using the squirrel as the unit of investigation.

### Analysis example: The squirrel – nimble and cute

In the comments on the squirrel, it is explained that the animal species is characterised by a “schlank[en] und leicht[en]” Körper (slender and light body) (3) and that it is above all its movement that “fasziniert” (fascinates) (1). The linguistic expression ‘fascination’ indicates that the sight of the “wendigen, sicheren Klettertiers” (agile, safe climbing animal) (3) captivates the viewer and gives them pleasure in watching it. Affectively, this touches on the sense of joy (*emotionalisation*). The descriptions of the body and the movements with positively connoted adjective attributes such as *light, slim, good, fast, nimble, agile, excellent, lightning fast* or *skilful*, as well as the naming of the movement patterns, which are once also stylised appreciatively as “Kletterkünste” (climbing skills) (Hännl/Kopeszki, 2015: 53), explicitly demonstrate an attitude towards the species.

- (1) Wer hat nicht schon Eichhörnchen fasziniert beobachtet, wie sie flink auf den Baumstämmen laufen und über die Äste klettern. (Who hasn't been fascinated by squirrels as they run nimbly on tree trunks and climb over branches?) (Gereben-Krenn et al., 2016: 61)
- (2) Gewandt und flink klettern sie einen Stamm empor, huschen von Ast zu Ast oder springen von einem Baum zum anderen. (Nimble and agile, they climb up a trunk, dart from branch to branch or jump from one tree to another.) (Schullerer/Burgstaller, 2016: 61)
- (3) Ein wendiges, sicheres Klettertier. Eichhörnchen können gewandt und flink einen Stamm hinaufklettern, von Ast zu Ast hüpfen und auf kopfüber den Baumstamm hinunterlaufen. Der Körper ist schlank und leicht. (An agile, safe climbing animal. Squirrels can climb up a tree trunk deftly and nimbly, hop from branch to branch and run down the tree trunk upside down. The body is slender and light.) (Glöning/Hofer, 2012: 58)

The textbooks explain the squirrel's manoeuvrable climbing ability by the "rauen Haftballen an den Klettersohlen" (rough adhesive pads on the climbing soles) (Gloning/Hofer, 2012: 58). At one point, these are also metaphorically characterised as "ABS Socken" (ABS socks) (Biegl, 2017: 71). This refers to a type of sock that has rubber studs on the sole of the foot to prevent slipping on the floor, which is indicated by the abbreviation ABS (Anti-Blocking System). This anthropomorphising reference to a human concept or to something that is presumably familiar to children of this age group enables the text producers to establish contact with the readers and conceptualise the squirrel as a likeable identification figure (cf. Wanning/Kramer, 2018).

There are also word pairs that outline the squirrel as a "putzige[n] Nussfresser" (cute nut-eater) (Rogl/Bergmann, 2018: 11) or "beliebte[n] Kulturfolger" (favourite synanthropic species) (Schullerer/Burgstaller, 2016: 61), which has "viele städtische Parkanlagen erobert" (conquered many urban parks) (Rogl/Bergmann, 2018: 46) and can even become "handzahn" (hand-tame) (Schullerer/Burgstaller, 2016: 61). The use of the war metaphor 'conquer' here signals a power of action (*agency*) granted to the squirrel to make a habitat usable (even against the will of others) or to use the cultural space (parks) claimed by humans for itself. The tameness of the squirrel is also documented pictorially in another textbook. There, a photo shows a squirrel sitting on a human hand. The accompanying caption comments that this is a "Eichhörnchen beim Nagen" (squirrel gnawing) (Drexler et al., 2018: 77). It is recognisable in the picture in the textbook that the squirrel is holding a nut between its fingers, which was presumably previously on the human hand or offered there as food. This staging is repeated in a similar way in around two thirds of the textbooks, which always collocate the squirrel with one or more nuts in the visual representations. This may (even unspoken) refer to the zoological conception of the squirrel as a rodent but can also contribute to the animal species being trivialised as a 'cute nut eater'.

## Ecologising

Some animal species are framed positively in the textbook because they are ascribed a specific benefit for the plant and/or animal world. The respective behaviours are species-specific and have various effects on the natural world that have previously been defined by humans as beneficial, good or desirable for ecological contexts (e.g., the dispersal of plant seeds or typical forms of nutrition). *Ecologisation* means that these animal species are assigned a purpose or a specific ecological task/role in the natural world (e.g., as a 'Gesundheitspolizist' (a kind of forestry policeman). In the present analysis, these are, without exception, species that are categorised as 'wild animals', such as squirrels, hedgehogs, moles, bats or foxes.



## **Ambiguous conceptualisation strategies**

*(classifying, particularising, euphemising, racialising)*

### **Classify**

Classifications are firmly anchored categorisations that are used relatively automatically in a language community and are part of the unquestioned body of knowledge of societies. Berger and Luckmann assume that categorised elements of knowledge make the world appear factual and real and provide the basis for action. In this way, a stable perception of the world develops during socialisation and is difficult to change (cf. Berger/Luckmann, 2012 [1969]: 63). In this context, animal species are assigned to social areas or their own spaces and charged with certain typifying and essentialising attributes. For example, the assignment of a living being to the 'animal kingdom' and its categorisation into phylum, class, order, family, genus and species by biology as a science. In biology/zoology, these categories serve as an organisational model for animal species and are to be understood as instituted classification systems that are intended to help maintain an overview and are (usually) no longer questioned in an everyday context (cf. Bendel Larcher, 2013: 68). Assignment to certain categories usually has negative consequences for the respective animal species. This form of categorisation basically serves to exert control over other animals and to assign them a specific role in human life (cf. DeMello, 2012: 55).

### **Particularise**

*Particularisation* refers to the focus on certain biological specifics such as behaviour, characteristics, body features and/or functions. Many of the characteristics mentioned in the textbook are processes or elements that can be assigned to a specialised biological discourse and are considered by the text producers to be representative of a particular species. At the same time, however, this form of conceptualisation is suitable for creating a reduced image of animal species or for defining an animal species in a specific way of being (*essentialisation*). By omitting and/or concealing other characteristic types of being, a significantly reduced image of an animal species is created, which allows for ambiguous interpretations in the overall view. The following example is intended to illustrate this using the species cattle.

#### **Example analysis: Cattle and their digestion**

The knowledge elements conveyed in the textbooks on the animal concept of 'domestic cattle' primarily include digestion (*particularisation*) as well as the production of milk and meat (*objectification*). Food intake and the associated processes of metabolism

are among others the elementary biological characteristics of all living creatures. In the textbook presentation, the aspect of digestion (and in some cases also excretion) is one of those that saliently occur in connection with the animal species cattle (or domestic cattle) and are only discussed in striking detail only there.

The image of cattle that is created through the description of tooth shapes, the nature of the digestive organs, the process of food intake, the type of food and the activity of chewing as well as the process of metabolisation bundles a few biological aspects that focus centrally on digestion, while many other factors are not mentioned at all. Although there are occasional vague allusions to (functional) cognitive abilities (e.g., sensory abilities) of cattle, these are also conceptually linked to food intake and digestion. In this form of particular attribution as a 'digestive animal', the animal species bovine is linked to specific topics that coincide with what Jobst Paul calls the "Fäkal-Motiv" (faecal motif) (Paul, 2019: 49). It is conceivable that the visualisation of the huge quantities of food (from a human perspective), the hours of chewing and the long intestines suggests or facilitates (mental) associations with pejoratively connoted swearwords.

In addition to the linguistic representation, the digestive organs of cattle are also visualised in the textbook. The diagrams focus on the stomach and intestines, their relative size and their position inside the bovine body. It becomes clear that the position of other vital organs such as the heart, lungs, liver or even the brain are not shown at all in some cases, but the focus is purely on the stomach and intestines. The distancing object character of the cow as an abstract visual object, in which only digestion seems to be of interest, is also visually reinforced in this way.

## **Euphemise**

When used as a linguistic stylistic device, euphemism means presenting phenomena or facts, objects and people in a glossed-over manner and/or with the intention of obscuring them. *Euphemising* in the sense of linguistic action means communicatively obscuring, trivialising and/or blurring the clarity of a statement or its meaning, as well as not contextualising or obscuring phenomena in a correspondingly precise manner. In the context of the depiction of animals in textbooks, examples are often found that obscure humans as the actual cause of various phenomena (e.g., the use of toxic substances that are lethal to animals, the anonymisation of entire groups of animals or the extinction of entire species).

## **Racialisation**

*Racialisation* refers to the sociocultural, symbolic and material production of races through animal breeding. In the textbook texts, this is expressed by means of both positive and ambivalent to negative human attributions and projections onto certain animals bred

by humans (e.g., the idea of purebredness). In the conceptualisation conveyed in textbooks, learners are introduced to this by highlighting - mostly morphological - appearance characteristics. The representations also imply *exoticising* aspects in which human projections are transferred into animals, i.e., “verkörperlicht” (embodied) (Roscher, 2016: 33), and animal bodies are thus turned into objects that can be produced and selected in accordance with human preferences (e.g., in the form of a German shepherd dog, Dachshund, etc.). This is also associated with claims of disposal and ownership of the “menschlich-technische[n] Artefakte” (human-technical artefacts) (Nieradzki, 2016: 123), which identifies animal breeding as “eine[.] spezifische[.] Form der Biopolitik und der Verwaltung von Leben” (a specific form of biopolitics and the management of life) (Nieradzki, 2016: 123). Conversely, however, there are also retransfers, such as the postulate of a supposedly natural dominance hierarchy (hierarchy or right of the strongest) to humans (cf. Roscher, 2016: 32–33), which is often mentioned in connection with the domestication of wolves and dogs.

## **Distancing conceptualisation strategies**

*(objectifying, inferiorising, demonising, economising)*

### **Objectify**

*Objectification* refers to an essentialising form of representation in which animal species are reduced to a specific use for humans in a distancing and/or subtly devaluing manner and in some cases radically reified. The respective animal as a living being is no longer at the centre of the depiction, but rather its conception as a food or product resource. The use, killing and consumption of animals is no longer scrutinised, but established as a cultural habitus or norm.

### **Inferiorise**

The terms ‘inferior’ and ‘inferiority’ denote the inferiority and/or inferiority of a fact, object or phenomenon. Supposed animal inferiority is often intended to be made clear to observers in comparison to another fact, object or phenomenon, which is accordingly considered superior and equates to an (imagined) ideal type. As part of the conceptualisation strategy of *inferiorisation*, animals and individual animal activities, characteristics and/or physical features are portrayed as inferior, subaltern, deficient and/or inferior (e.g., supposedly missing, stunted or less efficient body parts). Animal behaviours and actions are (deliberately) alienated in the communicative presentation, even where they correspond in form and function to the evolutionary and developmental biological forms of existence (this applies, for example, to the mole, which is said to have eyes that are too small, or the pathologisation of the mouth-nose area of the rabbit).

## Demonise

*Demonisation* refers to conceptualisations that show animals in a negative, dismissive and/or derogatory (perhorrescent) way and argue that these animal species represent a potential danger or threat. The animals are portrayed as supposedly or posing a threat that is directed against health and safety, the internal space claimed by humans and/or related objects (resources) and, above all, against humans themselves as a self-proclaimed civilised-cultural and/or vulnerable entity. Against this background, it seems legitimate for the text producers to characterise these animal species as ‘harmful’ and which may, or even must, therefore, be killed by humans. It is striking that these animal species are very often those that are categorised as ‘Kulturfolger’ in the textbook (e.g., mice and deer). The textbook descriptions imply mechanisms of essentialisation and distancing and thus create a distorted image of the animal species presented, which has little to do with the biology of this species.

## Economise

In the *economising* conceptualisation strategy, animal species are linked to economic costs and/or damage in the textbook presentation. Animals are conceptualised as cost-causing factors that (should) make it appear legitimate for certain actions (such as persecution and/or killing) to be carried out on them. Economisation can be found in a neutral form in information on time and monetary expenditure, such as that incurred by living with a dog (e.g., through walks and expenditure on food). However, while it cannot be said that these results (or is intended to result) in a more distanced and/or negative perception of the animal species, readers are presented with a different picture of the species roe deer and red deer, as shown in the following example.

### **Analysing example: Too much roe/red deer (‘game’) harms the forest**

In a good two-thirds of the textbooks, the animal species roe deer and red deer are repeatedly mentioned as potentially causing major damage to the forest through “Schäl- und Verbisschäden” (peeling and browsing damage) (Hännl/Kopeszki, 2015: 51) as well as damage caused by “Fegen des Bastes” (sweeping the velvet) (Schermaier/Weisl, 2015: 50). The textbooks argue that this forest damage could be minimised by feeding the animals in winter. At the same time, however, this would require the regulation of surplus animals through hunting. However, there is no genuine biological information on the species, for example on the seasonal whereabouts and/or migratory behaviour of red deer. On the other hand, the feeding behaviour of roe deer is described as “wählerisch” (picky)

(Rogl/Bergmann, 2018: 46), which says little and can also have pejorative connotations. Children hardly learn anything about the nutritional requirements of this food-chewing species (in contrast to cattle). Only one textbook mentions the physiological peculiarities of metabolism during the seasons. However, it is precisely this special feature that characterises both species and enables them to survive during the winter with a minimum of food intake. Pupils are deprived of the opportunity to conclude for themselves that neither species actually needs to be fed by humans. Nor do the textbooks offer any ethical consideration as to why only these two species are fed and no other wild animal species as well. It is, therefore, questionable to what extent the independent establishment of connections is significantly encouraged or made more difficult. It should also be criticised that the socio-cultural elements of knowledge largely overlap the zoological ones and that particular interests become apparent in the discourse positions presented, which in this context are given interpretative power or assert this power in and through textbooks.

## Conclusion

The exemplary nature of the texts, or the story that structures the discourse conveyed by the textbooks, essentially tells of animals that are categorised in accordance with aspects of (direct or indirect) usefulness and usability for humans. This sometimes radical (and violent) act of appropriation already takes place in language, by means of which other animal species are classified (zoologically/scientifically) and categorised (socioculturally). In the linguistic and pictorial representation in the textbook, animals are contextualised with human practices and their purpose for humans is established in this way. The *story-we-live-by* (cf. Stibbe, 2015: 2021) documented in the textbook texts can be formulated in words as follows:

*Animals are resources for humans and humans are authorised to negotiate animal life and non-life or death.*

The way in which animal life is conceptualised in the biology textbook trains the perception that it is legitimate for humans to define (and regulate) the number, the (biogeographical) occurrence and the handling of animals. The possibility of thinking animal subjectivity is not conveyed in this world view. On the contrary, the conceptualisations conveyed in the textbook tempt us to experience other animals purely as objects that can be disposed of.

With its scientific background, the biology textbook can be categorised as a non-fiction text, which, as a popular science textbook, has the function of introducing learners to the subject and providing them with factual information. The analysis revealed that some of the knowledge extracts in the textbook can be traced back a long way historically (detailed in Schmid, 2024). It also became clear that the communicated educational content

of the textbooks, which define the framework of meaningful knowledge about an animal species, does not have an exclusively zoological background, but is permeated by cultural values and benefits and in some cases does not meet the requirement of correctness. Socioculturally characterised knowledge is conveyed in and through the animal concepts, from which subject-related knowledge or essential elements thereof are withheld. It is still an open question as to which standards are used to approve the transported knowledge content about animals and which subject is the right place for divergent information. In addition, it must also be clarified to what extent, in the context of placing social norms and political decisions in dealing with animals, it must also be a matter of including animal ethical perspectives and positions as integral components in biology textbooks in order to enable young generations to develop judgements about the world (of and with other animals) that are based on a balanced spectrum of information.

In the context of the illustrated information, discourse positions can be identified that conflict with the vital interests and existential livelihoods of non-human and especially wild animal species. Those non-human entities that have been categorised as 'Kulturfolger' (e.g., mouse, deer, wild boar) tend to be conceived in an ambiguous or distancing manner. Such classifications/categorisations represent structure-forming elements of the interpretation of reality and the world. It is striking that humans (in the real world) are granted the right to control these animal species spatially (geographically) and bio-politically. In this context, the textbooks state the thesis that animal species in the 'Kulturfolger' category (except for the bat) occur in sufficient numbers, which suggests that these numbers can be reduced. This also applies to the supposedly abundant deer, which 'harm' the forest that humans have previously defined as their own resource. However, one of the reasons why forests are (or should be) protected in the first place is due to human actions such as environmental protection or forest laws, which, of course, were not negotiated with animals living in the forest, but arose because of severe human interference (e.g., deforestation, soil sealing). As a result, humans have provided the forest with various functions that are primarily designed for the benefit of humans and the interpretation of the desired state of the world favoured by humans, but which significantly exclude many other animals from this concept.

In contrast, those animal species that are (in the real world) on the verge of extinction or of which there are only a small number left are conceptualised as worthy of protection in the context of nature and species conservation (the wolf species tends to be excluded from this). The fact that there must once have been more of all these animal species remains implicit and is presupposed. The various species are valorised and devalued by means of the classifications made in the textbook and are simultaneously coded for the animality assigned to them by humans. Adolescents learn to categorise animals into useful and non-useful bodies, but not that human and non-human animal species are vulnerable living beings and that they may all have the same inherent value.

The study made it clear that the knowledge presented in the textbooks is neither state of the art knowledge nor purely scientific, but is permeated with sociocultural, interest-led judgements. One urgent recommendation of the study is therefore to reflect on the concept of life taught in biology textbooks in terms of animal ethics and to integrate it in terms of content and didactics. This is because where the life of animals is (or should be) taught, their life or non-life tends to be determined in a clearly anthropocentric manner. In its programmatic function as a teaching/learning medium, the textbook would generally not only have significant opportunities to facilitate comprehensive and reflective opinion-forming but would actually also have the social and legal mandate to do so.

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## **Veverica, ris in miška. Prispevek avstrijskih šolskih učbenikov k speciesističnemu dojoemanju živali**

Avtorica preučuje, kako avstrijski šolski učbeniki za Biologie und Umweltkunde (biologija in okoljske študije) prispevajo k speciesističnemu dojoemanju živali. Trdi, da učbeniki krepijo antropocentrizem z uokvirjanjem živali na podlagi njihove uporabnosti za ljudi. S kritično analizo diskurza avstrijskih bioloških učbenikov za otroke v starosti od deset do enajst let raziskuje, kako jezikovne in vizualne reprezentacije različnih vrst sesalcev konstruirajo živali znotraj utilitarističnega, antropocentričnega okvira. Učbeniki kot vplivno didaktično orodje odražajo in oblikujejo družbene norme, vrednote in znanje. V Avstriji so široko razdeljeni prek nacionalnega programa, kar zagotavlja njihov vpliv na učenčevo razumevanje sveta. Ta študija poudarja osrednjo vlogo, ki jo imajo učbeniki pri prenašanju hegemonističnih norm na prihodnje generacije, vključno z odnosom do živali. Raziskava temelji na živalskih študijah ter kritični analizi diskurza, pri čemer je uporabljena metodologija Sylvie Bendel Larcher in Arrana Stibbeja. Analiza je bila osredotočena na 19 učbenikov, odobrenih za uporabo do šolskega leta 2017/2018, ki zajemajo dvajset vrst sesalcev. Identificira ponavljajoče se načine reprezentacije, ki bodisi afirmirano, odtujeno ali dvoumno prikazujejo živali. Afirmativne strategije vključujejo subjektifikacijo, superiorizacijo in estetizacijo, ki živali prikazujejo kot dragocene ali privlačne na podlagi njihove koristi za ljudi. Strategije odtujevanja, kot so objektivizacija, demonizacija in ekonomizacija, reducirajo živali na vire ali grožnje, kar še dodatno krepí človeško prevlado. Ena od ključnih ugotovitev je, da so živali kategorizirane glede na njihovo uporabnost za ljudi, bodisi kot viri (npr. govedo) bodisi kot škodljivci (npr. jeleni). Tudi vrste, ki so uokvirjene pozitivno, kot so veverice, so pogosto estetizirane ali subjektivizirane na načine, ki trivializirajo njihovo naravno vedenje. V nasprotju s tem so vrste, ki veljajo za grožnjo človeškim interesom, na primer jeleni, ki povzročajo škodo v gozdu, demonizirane in označene kot tiste, ki si zaslužijo nadzor ali izločitev. Učbeniki tako postavljajo živali na lestvico uporabnosti, pri čemer je njihova vrednost določena z njihovim zaznamim vplivom na interese ljudi. Raziskava tudi poudarja, da znanje, predstavljeno v učbenikih, ni zgolj znanstveno, temveč prepleteno s kulturnimi vrednotami. Na primer, opisi živali pogosto poudarjajo njihovo ekonomsko vlogo, kot je proizvodnja mleka pri kravah, zaničujejo ali ignorirajo pa druge vidike njihove biologije ali vedenja. Ta selektivna predstavitev znanja prispeva k redukcionističnemu pogledu na živali in omejuje učenčevo razumevanje njihove intrinzične vrednosti kot živih bitij. Na koncu avtorica poziva k bolj uravnoteženemu in etično informiranemu pristopu k poučevanju živali v šolah. Predlaga, da bi morali učbeniki za biologijo vključevati vidike etike živali, da bi spodbudili globlje razumevanje vloge živali v naravnem svetu, poleg njihove uporabnosti za ljudi. Ta premik bi lahko mladim generacijam pomagal razviti bolj sočuten in informiran pogled na odnose med človekom in živaljo. Trenutni pristop pa v veliki meri ohranja speciesistični pogled na svet, ki marginalizira živalsko subjektivnost in krepí človeško prevlado.





# Home Pig Slaughter; or, the Redefinition of Tradition and the Industrial Holocaust

*Ljudje vas bojo  
vlekli za noge  
(žival na križu).*

*Satana zaznamo v bližini; lep je trg mesa!*

(Detela, 2018: 367)

*People will be  
pulling you by your feet  
(the animal on the cross).*

*You can feel when Satan is close;  
the beauty of the meat market!*

(Detela, 2018: 1048)

## Introduction

This chapter is about the still existing and persistent “cultural” practice of killing an animal species. This practice is called home pig slaughtering (sl. *koline*) (in which a pig/sow is killed as a “farmed” animal). The article examines the subject through the prism of history, folklore, literature and customs. This practice is paralleled with the reality of today, exposing agroindustrial practices and emotional encounters with pigs/sows.

Present-day home pig slaughtering will be examined from the point of view of the animal and their intrinsic value, redefining tradition. We will examine the well-known ethnological views that uncritically classify the practice of home pig slaughtering as

a so-called cultural heritage, and our concept will be examined from a different perspective – we will call this tradition a negative tradition that continues as a legacy of killing despite modern knowledge about the pig/sow as sentient beings. At the same time, we will raise the issue of home pig slaughtering practices in folklore and selected works of Slovenian literature, with an emphasis on contemporary fiction, in which we see how these practices are being transformed, showing a complete reversal in the perception of the pig/sow as a subject and their protection in shelters.

We will also reflect on the real life conditions of pigs and sows within the context of industrial production, which represents the complete de-subjectification and negation of individualisation of the pig/swine as a sentient being. This is, of course, far worse, and performed on a more massive scale, than the home pig slaughtering practices in rural settings – in these settings there are masses of pigs considered only as tagged animals in death camps, unable to live even to their last act as creatures, but rather as commodities. The only common ground that unites the two animals of the porcine species, the farmed pig and the industrial pig, is death. It is inevitable, unless the individual resists by escaping, both from being butchered in farmyards and from slaughter in industrial slaughterhouses. We will propose some options for replacing the practice of home pig slaughtering with positive practices, while also raising the possibility of considering the complete abolition of this practice and the legal issue of animal rights.

## **Pig/Swine Symbolism**

The deep-rooted symbolism of the pig/swine is extremely powerful. It is in the *Bible* where we can read: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Germ, 2006 – Standard Version of *the Bible* quoted in 1984: 40). The very association of the dog and the pig in a distinctly negative manner shows where the notions of sows and pigs, which people associate with filthiness, laziness, and greed, come from. The following quotation from *the Bible* also shows the association between the pig/sow and the dog in a negative sense: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire” (*the New Testament*, 1984: 685). Germ quotes Aristotle, who opined that the pig or sow was a symbol of impurity (Aristotle, *The History of Animals*) and that the desire to “mate” is stronger only in the dog and man. Sows also have in common with humans and dogs that they are tempted by the opposite sex even when pregnant, which is rare in the animal world (Germ, 2006: 186). Let us examine the current situation with swine, which cannot even turn around in their metal boxes, let alone do anything else. Plutarch was also under the misconception that pigs like to wallow in mire, an erroneous belief which has been disproved by naturalists and ethologists today. In the



Christian Middle Ages, the sow was spoken of only in negative terms, and prejudices about the uncleanliness of the animal are still present in the Jewish faith, so much so that the unfortunate pig became synonymous with various vices: depravity, filthiness of soul and body (anthropomorphised human characteristics). This is tantamount to a connection to the devil, as it was believed that witches often rode swine and were thus tied to the devil. The parable of the demons that Jesus drove out of the two demon-possessed men by sending them into a herd of swine, which then drowned in the lake, points to this very connection with the devil (Matt 8:28–34) (Germ, 2006: 189). Pliny the Elder thought that swine were brutish, but today’s research shows that they are extremely clever.

Keber extensively discusses references to sow and pig as found in phrases, adverbs, e.g. *fat as a pig*, *lazy swine*, *lazy sow* (1996: 330–341), and says that the terms we use for pigs and swine “tell us only that we know how to name them and that we are aware of the basic purpose of their breeding” (Keber, 1996: 330). Filthiness is another attribute, which Schrader explains by saying that the sow wants to cool off and so looks for water, but cannot find it in the yards, and so looks for a bath, which it finds. This is usually slurry or other dirty liquid (Schrader, 1886: 196). Therefore, man immediately associated this practice with filth, and its transmission to the human world was natural. And all filth becomes “pig-gish”. Gluttony is another alleged trait which has undergone a zoomorphic transfer to man – *to gorge like a pig*. Although the phrase *to buy a pig in a poke* is better known in English than *to buy a cat in a sack*, the fact that animals were carried to markets in sacks in the past is also reflected in the song (Š 7449: 317):

Kaj pa bodeš žakelj nucou?  
Prase kupu, v žakelj smuknu.

What will you use that sack for?  
To buy a pig, stuff it in the sack.  
(Š 7449)<sup>1</sup>

The symbolism of the pig is mostly negative, and fails to heed the new scientific knowledge and understanding about the intelligence of pigs, about their emotions, and about the fact that they do not choose dirt because they are filthy, but because it is a way to protect their skin. And when we see a pig lying contentedly on straw in an animal sanctuary, it is clear that all the negative attributes and anthropomorphisms (gluttony, sloth, filthiness and lust) are actually a reflection of the human traits that man has applied to pig/sow, thus justifying, since antiquity and through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the butchering of pigs in the countryside as well as in industrial plants. On the other hand, we like to gift figurines of piglets as a symbol of happiness and prosperity and abundance (Chevalier-Gheebrant, 1995: 593).

This symbolism has a strong impact on the perception of the pig in Western society and is an excuse to marginalise the pig, which is considered only good for human consumption. We butcher them and “celebrate” their deaths – home pig slaughtering. That

**1**  
The letter Š denotes a collection of *Slovenian folksongs* edited by Karel Štrekelj. The number references the number of the song in the book.

The story of Abel and Cain is classified as a tradition, a legend, even a myth. According to Sethers, it is a myth because it originates in pre-historic times (1992: 146). *Prologue to history: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*, <http://www.averagematt.com/prologue-to-history-the-yahwist-as-historian-in-genesis.pdf>.

they are also sentient beings with their own interests is not socially accepted by the majority; the autonomy of the subject is reserved for human beings alone. What is needed is a complete transformation of this symbolism and the disassociation of animal appellatives from human negative traits. Perhaps this could lead to a different attitude towards swine, or at least necessitate a focus on the positive.

## Innocent Blood

Thus, something first needs to be said about the bloodshed pervading these practices. The first innocent ritualised blood was shed when Abel and Cain offered up their sacrifice to God – Cain offered a plant sacrifice, Abel an animal sacrifice, and God accepted only the animal sacrifice and not the plant sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> This may have been a sign that the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” applies only to man, and thus the shedding of animal blood is a more powerful sacrifice than the offering of crops. The ritual sacrifice has caused a dissociation between the “autobiographical animal” and other sentient beings, which means that therein lies the origin of the shedding of innocent blood. According to Gould and Kolb, sacrifice [...] is “the ritual offering of a human or animal (or crops and other votive objects), or symbolic representations of them, to be used by a supernatural being. [...] Sacrifice is therefore a special type of ritual offering, which must be distinguished from that of presenting gifts to secular authorities” (Gould and Kolb, 1964: 613). According to Mary Douglas, “[t]he ritualist becomes one who performs a particular act that demonstrates commitment to certain values” (Douglas, 1994: 22). Ritual is a concept that refers to rituals in connection with the sacred, and ritual is any culturally prescribed formal behaviour grounded in tradition (Gould and Kolb, 1964: 607). In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim introduces the concept of ritual as the means by which collective beliefs and ideals are simultaneously generated, experienced and affirmed as real by the community (Durkheim, 2008, cited in Bell, 2009: 20; cf. also Fikfak, 2008; Geertz, 1973; cf. Golež Kaučič, 2017). Is home pig slaughtering a ritual and a tradition? Innocent blood is shed in this practice.

## Heritage and Tradition, or the Context of Slaughter

In the ethnological literature, the Slovenian authors of the past and present discussing home pig slaughter do not problematise killing, but wrap their views in rituals, customs and traditions. This is the case with Niko Kuret, Robert Minnich, and Janez Bogataj, the last of which simply swears by the convention and the economy of violence for gourmet pleasure, regardless of the suffering the animals experience.

We therefore reject such a negative tradition and its incorporation into tangible and intangible heritage. Justifying the institution on the simple grounds that it has always existed is unwise. In this manner, we could demand the preservation of slavery or the right to the first night in countries where these customs have been kept “relentlessly” for centuries, as the “heritage of home pig slaughter” and the “heritage of bullfighting” have been defined in Spain and Portugal (Rodrigues and Achino, 2017: 315–327), using critical discursive analysis to show the reasons why some supporters of bullfighting still consider it an ethical activity and tradition, as many do regarding the “heritage of fox hunting” in England.<sup>3</sup>

The conventions and superstitions concerning human violence must be totally rejected, as it involves the suffering of animals for human consumption, which is totally unnecessary today. In the work *Praznično leto Slovencev* (Kuret, 1989, vol. 2), there is a section dedicated to the feast of home pig slaughter, which is represented as “the home pig slaughter festival”, as the “fattening of animals” was the task with the resulting consequences. This is the butchering that took place in the first week of Advent, when the time of anticipation of the new birth, the birth of man and not an animal, commenced. Slaughter was therefore a death ritual that provided food for the festivities and was consequently connected with the notion “that the time to be merry is coming”. Kuret believes that, at this time, the spirits of ancestors visited the homes where the animals were slaughtered and demanded their share. In short, beliefs in mythical creatures allowed the slaughter ritual to take on a “spiritual dimension” (Kuret, 1989: 263). The people who fed the pig demand a “pound of flesh”. The hierarchy of the world at that time is characterised by the animal as the creature of the lowest tier, serving the master (who is also the butcher) and the housewife, who fed the animal, along with the speciesist designation given to feeding the animal: “foddering”. Kuret also demonstrates the whole slaughtering process, including special equipment, ranging from knives and kneaders, to the racks where the carcass is placed. Kuret notes that the first days of winter heralded, among other things, the imminent festival of home pig slaughter. Home pig slaughter was also called *furež* in the Drava River Plain. The pig is placed in a kneader or a wooden trough. The slaughter commences by invoking God. In some places in Slovenia, the housewife also pokes the “fed sow” in the eyes with a birch broom to bewitch it and take away its sight<sup>4</sup> (Kuret, 1989: 264). This indicates that certain “traditions” had to be followed, and this made it impossible for the living creature to see its own death. She was supposed to present a threat “because it sensed that death was imminent” (Kuret, 1989: 265). Therefore, they acknowledged its feelings, such as fear. All rituals are actually a mixture of paganism and Christianity, which ousted the pagan superstitions. In the aforementioned book, Kuret describes the conventions and superstitions of human violence without any reflection on the suffering of animals for human consumption. We think that this is actually a description of the deconstruction of compassion, the male act of violence clashing with female sentiment, since compassion is a sentiment that only a woman can feel, and compassion will not

3

Cf. Eliason, 2004, who is in favour of the conservation of fox hunting, and the thoughts of Jessica Sarah Gröling, who uses a discursive analytical approach to discuss the issue of fox hunting and urban foxes <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/26315/GrolingJ.pdf?sequence=1>.

4

In 2003, a female respondent said that “when the pigs refused to eat, they took a birch broom and hit them under the paunch. They said that it was a spell. This is what they used to do” (Vrhpolje pri Kamniku, 9 October 2003, Upper Carniola, GNI Archive, Tzap 276).

## 5

*Poginiti* is a verb with negative connotation used to describe the death of animal and not human, and is a distinct speciesist expression of a deep binary division between the animal and the human. Even after death.

## 6

The female respondents (Cintare group, field work 2 February 2023, Ljubljana), aged between 70–80, discussed the home pig slaughtering and one of them summarised her opinion:

D: If you buy a sausage in a shop, you don't think this used to be an animal. And that's what's basically wrong. If we looked at all these products that you get in the shop differently, we would probably slowly see a change of attitude towards these animals that we eat, and then maybe we wouldn't buy them so often. Until a change occurs in our minds, we will keep this impersonal, you take it off the shelf, put it in the basket and go. I think there won't be any change until this happens (underlined by the author).

make the flesh good – it is therefore a degradation of both the animal and the feminine.

Kuret points out that “It is a widespread belief, not only in this country, that an animal does not *die (pogine)*<sup>5</sup> if someone who has pity for the animal is present at the slaughter” (Kuret, 1989: 266). In some places, it was believed that a butcher who strikes weakly becomes sick. Even the “evil eye” keeps death at bay. In Sweden, there is a belief that foreigners, women experiencing menstruation, and pregnant women should not be present at the slaughter. If somebody shows pity to the sow, she will let little blood, its flesh will be harmful, and the person themselves will die a troubling death (Kuret, 1989: 575). Kuret emphasises the skill of the butcher by the fact that the death cries and wheezing cease quickly (Kuret, 1989: 266). The idea that the pig suffers did not occur to the ethnologists, which shows marked anthropocentricity and the objectification of the animal, which serves human interests by dying, while its own interests are by no means at the forefront.<sup>6</sup>

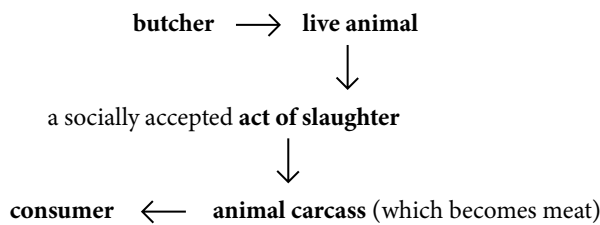
Home pig slaughtering was the so-called ritual festival of bringing food to the table that today no longer fulfils its original function. Ethnologists have not problematised this act of killing; on the contrary, it can still be found in two books by Janez Bogataj, *Koline* (2017a) and *Ni ga tiča do prašiča* (Bogataj 2017b). The first one has a red cover, representational of the bloody act of murdering a pig and, inside, red spots are all over the pages like drops of blood – violence, particularly by men, is even comprehended as a death ritual. It is an involuntary death because the pig resists and is forcibly dragged to its death – torture, suffering, without any empathy for the animal. Bogataj is incapable of it, incapable of reflection, because he propagates the commercialisation of food with a heritage note (cf. also Godina Golija, 2014; Muršič, 1991), which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has apparently not yet reached the level of ethnologists questioning a bloody, unnecessary, inadmissible ritual that perceives the animal person as a mere means of satisfying one's own “gourmet” greed. Also, in the second book, *Ni ga tiča do prašiča* (Bogataj, 2017b), home pig slaughtering is portrayed as a festival, mainly a festival of killing for food. One chapter is even titled Meat on Four Legs through Time (Bogataj, 2017b: 29). In it, we can also find that slaughter should be included in the educational process, as even schoolchildren in Kamnik are invited to the butchering. Bogataj even goes on to write: “With its immediacy and the possibility of a direct human presence, this pig's death essentially awakens elemental feelings that have already become far removed from us” (Bogataj, 2017b: 305). In his book *Koline*, he also mentions negative opinions about home pig slaughtering, but does not comment on them (2017a: 122, 124). The findings of the Norwegian researcher, Robert R. Minnich are extensive and innovative, based on field material collected in 1974 and 1975 in the Western Haloze Hills, where he studied the *furež* or home pig slaughter. Minnich summarises Kuret as saying that “in the Alpine region of Slovenia, for example, events associated with the seasonal herding of livestock (the practice of transhumance) seem to have a stronger influence on the local festive calendar than the event of the butchering of swine” (Kuret in Minnich,

1993: 57–58). But Minnich also thinks it was a cannibalistic act, as the pig was part of the family in some places. He says:

It is customary in the region for households to engage a local skilled expert to carry out the slaughter for a fee. Of course, the practice of home pig slaughtering remains an important aspect of the diet of Alpine peasant households and an important medium for expressing hospitality relationships. However, it is evident that it does not play as vital a role in the integration of local society and culture as other survival activities that mobilise local cooperation between households more effectively. (Minnich, 1993: 58 and 1988)<sup>7</sup>

If in the past it was a survival activity, today it is based on the eradication of killing from people's consciousness and the insertion of the mere normality of feeding on carcasses as a gourmet pleasure without reflecting on the killing of a living being.

A graphic representation of home pig slaughtering:



## The True Narrative of Butchering Today

From the partial subjectification of the pig in the family communities of the village, there has been a complete objectification of the pig. Moreover, it is no longer a creature, but has been turned into a suffering body mass. Blood flows not only in the countryside, but also in slaughterhouses, which have been relocated from the “open view” to the margins of society (Elias, 1978; Vialles, 1994). Approximately 300,000 innocent pigs/sows are slaughtered annually. Animals are completely passive objects to be consumed. Animals live in impossible conditions, their lives are mechanised, standardised and commodified (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011: 76). If they do not die on the way to the slaughterhouse, they experience a horrible death at the hands of workers who are underpaid, poorly educated and do a horrendous job without emotion (Stibbe, 2001; Wilkie, 2010). And even those animals that are bred on farms, relatively traditionally, are mostly abused, neglected, always exploited and usually killed quite quickly (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011: 76).

**7** Other authors also mention home pig slaughter mainly in connection with the eastern part of Slovenia, i.e. Styria and the Prekmurje Region. The detailed course of the home pig slaughtering practices and the people's habits have also been described by Jelka Koselj in her book *Koline in jedi iz domače svinjine* (1999) and by Vesna Grilanc Guštin in her book *Je več dnevou ku klobas* (1997). The first one describes home pig slaughtering in Upper Carniola, the second one in the Primorska Region.



*Figure 1: Home pig slaughtering (Prašiča koljejo), Škocjan/610, SEM F0000021/577, photo by Boris Kuhar.*

For Carol J. Adams, eating meat and hunting are normalised violence, “after all they are only animals” (2014: 21). If you want to kill a human being, you have to define it as something inhuman, e.g., Jews in Germany were likened to rats, animals in laboratories are specimens, cows and pigs are meat or food. In short, it is about denying that they are individuals and sentient beings. In this case, they can be killed, butchered, tortured, kept in isolation, etc. And this is done on a grand scale, in the manner of massification, or the immeasurable multiplication of porcine subjects who have lost their bodies. “Animals become a metaphor for the Other” and lose their uniqueness (Adams, 2014: 19–21). Linguistic domination and linguistic alienation at the same time led to this unequal discourse resulting in the reproduction and negotiation of superiority over animals (cf. Fitzgerald and N. Taylor, 2014). We bury our dead. And here lies the essential difference. “Meat eaters bury animals in their own bodies!” (Adams, 2014: 21). You could also call it “*flesh eating hegemony*” (Morgan and Cole, 2011: 120), which is further emphasised by various commercials that deconstruct animals and make the production and feeding of animals normalised in a carnistic (Joy, 2009), anthroparchial (Cudworth, 2014: 169) culture. In an interview, Adams says:

When nonhuman living beings are converted conceptually into false mass terms to enable their conversion into products, we come to believe that their deaths do not matter to themselves. Animals are killed because they are false mass terms, but they die as individuals. They die as a cow, not beef, as a pig, not pork. Each suffers his or her own death, and this death matters a great deal to the one who is dying. (Johnson and Thomas, 2013: 24<sup>8</sup>; see also Adams, 2014: 18–28)

It is therefore a “symbolic distance” (Hamilton and Taylor, 2013). John Berger reflected that our current relationship to animals is actually that humans are “spatially separated”, and that we represent animals in a romantic manner, not in their suffering (1980). We must be aware that a humanist discourse of the species will always successfully demonstrate the tolerance of violence against the social other of any species, on the basis of gender, race, class, etc. (cf. also Wolfe, 2003b: 8).

Noske believes that animals confined in metal crates are “reduced to appendages of computers and machines” (Noske, 1989: 20). Twine, however, defines the industrial complex as “a partly opaque and multiple set of networks and relationships between the corporate (agricultural) sector, governments, and public and private science. With economic, cultural, social and affective dimensions it encompasses an extensive range of practices, technologies, images, identities and markets” (Twine, 2012: 23).

If we look at the real narrative of the pig’s life and death today, we can see that in factory farming it is now completely transformed into a creature that is barely alive but not yet quite dead. It is also completely subjected to the so-called meat product form, in which is no longer a pig, but still suffers terribly to generate profit and enable the insatiable

9

Swine in metal crates. Smithfield Foods gestation crates, Smithfield Foods/Murphy Brown pig breeding facility, Waverly, Virginia, United States. 2010. Author: Humane Society of the United States. Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gestation\\_crates\\_5.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gestation_crates_5.jpg). We have such cages on some fully industrialised Slovenian farms. See AETP.si organisation campaign.



*Figure 2: Pigs or sows in metal complexes of industrial breeding today! The death camp example. The sow cannot turn around, she is confined in “gestation/metal crates”<sup>9</sup>*



consumption of its body parts, which are almost laboratory modified (cf. Nibert, 2002). Medoro writes “that an animal caged for life is not alive; rather, she is simply not dead. The vast warehouses within which sows are confined function to suspend the animal in a realm of not-dying.” (Medoro, 2014: 209). Will Boisseau thinks that “Animals caught in the animal-industrial complex do not simply have limited life chances but are bred into existence in ways which best serve the industries that exploit them. Their very existence is based on their use as a resource, they are not simply made to seem relatively insignificant but tortured, turned into living commodities, and killed for consumption” (Boisseau, 2022: 33). It is the technology of death. Dutkiewicz talks about how, in industrial society, the pig becomes the object of “biopolitical animal production – it is a marketable commodity”, with pig bodies being subordinated only to profit (2013: 302–303), while Esposito argues:

It is not that livestock are deemed unworthy of life in an absolute sense. It is, rather, that they are structurally and biologically not allowed to live outside the productive process. Their death is written into futures contracts, company ledgers, and into their very bodies. Productive death is literally instilled into animal bodies before their birth. (Esposito, 2008: 133)

The pig is no longer a creature, it is a capitalist product. Animal welfare is subordinated to production profitability, and these living beings are, in fact, just meat. All of this stems from the original sin of domestication. Sorenson therefore shows the intersection between animal and human enslavement, precisely on the basis of domestication:

Domestication of animals served as a model for the enslavement of humans. Breeding animals helped to develop concepts of race and pure blood, and classification of animals helped with the stratification of humans by “race” and by form of society. Racist discourse is replete with animal imagery, and colonial history mirrors the hierarchy of humans over animals. (Sorenson, 2014: XV)

And what are animals but slaves to human domination?<sup>10</sup> It is a system that allows physical and psychological dominance over animals. Winter notes that “Such systems ignore the fact that animals are sentient beings capable of developing profound social relationships and possess emotional lives, preferences, desires, and innate tendencies that they would express in natural conditions (Winter, 2022: 106; cf. also Davis, 2010; Corman, Vandrovcová, 2014; Cudworth, 2015; Medoro, 2014; Nibert, 2013; Rossi and Garner, 2014; Weis, 2013).

A demonstration of empathetic and emotional resistance to the narrative of modern factory pig farming can be seen in ‘The Case of the Toronto Pigs.’<sup>11</sup> This is a true story of human emotional engagement with modern industrial practices, with an example from

**10**  
Twine, *Revealing the animal industrial complex*, <http://www.critical-animalstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/>.

**11**  
*The Case of the Toronto pigs*, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqhtslrh51j20GJWzelaPpQ>.

**12**

The emotional aspect is important, and Matsouka and Sorenson believe that this aspect came to critical animalist studies from ecofeminism. “Emotion is not merely a matter of individual experiences, but it is the experience of social relationships and is constituted within political and social contexts. Although the consideration of emotion has been overshadowed by a focus on reason, emotion, and entangled empathy have been discussed, especially from the perspective of a feminist ethics of care.” (Matsouka and Sorenson, 2018: 4; cf. also Aaltola, 2015; Donovan, 2007; Gillespie, 2016; Gruen, 2013; Sorenson, 2003).

**13**

Some of the respondents, who did not want to hear the “stories” about home pig slaughtering, left the room. See transcription of field recording of Cintare group, Ljubljana, 2 February 2023.

**14**

See confession of a slaughterhouse worker, in Grušovnik, 2016: 146–148.

**15**

Tolstoy defines *bearing witness* as: “When the suffering of another being causes you pain, do not give in to the initial desire to run away from the sufferer, but on the contrary, get as close to him (or her) as possible” (Tolstoy, 1997: 214).

Canada called ‘The Toronto Pig Save’ (TPS). The practice of perception of animal suffering<sup>12</sup> was used, specifically through empathy and non-violent assistance to animals, although this does not prevent their death in slaughterhouses. In this real narrative, an episode of social dimensions is thematised through the testimony of activists who witnessed the suffering of the animals. This process of showing empathy, compassion, and deep emotion towards animals, and not looking away from their suffering has been called *bearing witness* (Purdy and Krajnc, 2018). Their actions are in contrast to the deflection practised by the majority. This systematic looking away, averting our gaze, pushing away and repressing the feelings we have for animals is linked to the fact that we are all aware that animals are suffering, but we would rather look away, we are “wilfully ignorant” (Grušovnik, 2020).<sup>13</sup> According to Grušovnik, the exploitation of animals involves ignorance, denial, cognitive dissonance, euphemisation and reinterpretation (e.g. the renaming of animal parts as beef, see Grušovnik, 2016: 219 and 144, n. 69; cf. also Joy 2019).<sup>14</sup>

Ian Purdy and Anita Krajnc use testimony (*bearing witness*) as a central strategy to expose the issue of animals being sent off to unimaginably brutal slaughter. Witnesses<sup>15</sup> as a group “that puts transport trucks on the way to slaughterhouses in a political context, draws attention to the suffering of animals, and helps put glass walls on slaughterhouses” (Purdy and Krajnc, 2014: 45). This way is non-violent and underpinned by emotion and empathy. Joanne O’Keefe, TPS activist, wrote: “look into their eyes together with us and strengthen your dedication to fighting for them with all your heart. Look into their eyes and know you’re doing the right thing by exposing the truth to others.” (Purdy and Krajnc, 2018: 48). In an attempt to partially alleviate this hell on earth for animals that are in fact neither alive nor dead, the TPS activists gave water to the pigs on the trucks before they were transported to the slaughterhouse. That triggered reactions that may well have been guilt-based violence, as the truck driver assaulted an activist, calling her names, saying that these were not people, and accusing her of committing a crime against property (cf. Schaefer, 2017: 29; cf. also *Pig trial verdict*). Schaefer writes: “He is angry. Why is he not indifferent? [...] Precisely because he feels the pressure of the violent ideology that sustains our world beginning to collapse, he refuses to allow the activists to give the animals even a sliver of comfort and relief before their deaths.” (Schaefer, 2017: 29). Schaefer applies the theory of affection reversal to this very case:

The pigs are thirsty. But in being cut out of their emotional ecosystems, in being severed from their lifeworlds, what else have the pigs lost? What other pains do they feel for losing their children, their mothers, their friends, air, light, grass, the sky, their freedom to move around, their worlds? What invisible tortures are produced by the stripping away of all their hopes, all of the light in their worlds, leaving them with nothing? (Schaefer, 2017: 29)

He continues: “My argument would be that by locating the animals in their world-a

world that is subject to deprivation and pain, a world that is bound to their bodies—the activist is showing that animals are not the feelingless creatures that we pretend they are. She is casting light on their invisible worlds, their invisible pain” (2017: 29). This pain of bodies has to be identified by using the phrase *mapping the pain of bodies* (Schaefer, 2017: 18), or empathising with the pain, even though it is actually very difficult to feel the pain of another. Lori Gruen calls this feeling of another’s pain “engaged empathy”, not just as a process of empathising, but as critical attention to wider conditions that undermine the welfare, well-being or flourishing of the person for whom empathy is intended (Gruen, 2009: 30; 2018: 141–153). According to Schaefer: “Pain is not just an effect of a physical assault. It is also created by violently severing an animal from the world where they make their lives, their emotional ecosystems.” (Schaefer, 2017: 18., underlined by the author). Or, as Corman puts it: “Their families and their social and cultural ties are broken: the abuse they suffer is also psychological and emotional” (Corman and Vandrovcová, 2014: 139).

Achor also writes about what everyday industrial reality shows us:

Farm animals have come to live their entire lives inside small cages or pens that they never leave. Sometimes, they exist in nearly constant darkness. The only time the animals go outside or feel sunshine is when workers load them into trucks headed for the auction block or the slaughterhouse. [...] No thought is given to an animal’s needs, instincts, or comfort. The animals are just so much meat. (Achor, 1996: 78; cf. also Nibert, 2014: 9)

Cudworth discusses how the meat industry in the West is patriarchally constituted and that the so-called farm animals are mostly female and handled mostly by male farmers. By manipulating their reproduction, they increase profits, while at the same time, for example, swine are subjected to the worst violence. Slaughter in particular can be said to be a culture of machismo (Cudworth, 2014: 31). Mason and Fenelli describe the horrors of life for swine in agroindustrial practices as follows:

The factory sow’s misery deepens in the gestation crate, a stall so narrow that she cannot turn around or groom herself. It is the most common type of housing for female pigs used for breeding. She remains in it for her entire four-month gestation period. Her normal urges to forage, socialize, and build a nest are completely frustrated. As with cows, and birds used to breed fast-growing offspring, to prevent the sow from gaining weight and becoming unable to reproduce, her feed will be severely restricted, resulting in extreme hunger and distress. She may be fed only once every two days or so. About a week before her piglets are due, she is moved to a narrow “farrowing crate”. This device permits her to lie and stand, but she cannot walk or turn around;

its purpose is to keep her in position only to eat, drink, and keep her teats exposed to the baby pigs. Soon after birth, the piglets' teeth are clipped; their tails are cut off, their ears are notched for identification, and males are castrated – all without any anaesthetic. In a few weeks, the sow goes back to the breeding area, and the piglets are moved to pens in the “finishing” buildings, where they spend about sixteen weeks until they reach a slaughter weight of about 250 pounds«. (Mason and Finelli, 2007: 161)

That is, total control and an industrial system, as if pigs and sows were just objects of mass production. And that is what they are. These are factories of dismembered animal carcasses, with no trace that this piece of packaged “chop” was once a living, sentient, intelligent being. Capitalism and production for increasing profit have turned farmyards and the so-called pig/sow pens (one or two) into prisons (courts) where pigs are tried and killed just for being pigs/sows. Eisnitz says: “Females are bred, imprisoned, raped, killed and dismembered in huge industrial facilities” (Eisnitz, 1997: 85). Is this a war against animals, because we treat them as prisoners, or against prisoners of war, who are locked up in camps? Wadiwel believes: “The genealogy of the war on animals ranges from the constant adaptation and reshaping of systems of dominance to most effectively capture the animal’s agency or action, flight, and vitality while maximising utility value for humans” (Wadiwel, 2015: 169). He also writes that: “the ‘gulag archipelago’ might be conceptualised as comprising an interconnected set of containers of violence, with stratified modes of delegated sovereignty regulating micro spheres that stretch across almost all modes of human existence, encompassing heterogeneous scenes of domination, from animals in the dock in a slaughterhouse, rats in cages in experimental labs, to dogs at the ends of leashes in suburban backyards” (Wadiwel, 2015: 24). These testimonies and reflections confirm that there is both personal and systematic violence in society – the former visible and the latter concealed. Wadiwel speaks of the so-called ‘visibility/invisibility’ policy, as these camps are hidden from view (Wadiwel, 2015:31–32). Galtung, on the other hand, discusses “personal and structured violence” (1969: 173). According to Wadiwel, we can speak of “intersubjective, institutional and epistemic violence” (Wadiwel, 2015: 33). Medoro writes about the life of pigs in industrial plants, where they are just living objects for human consumption. Together with the workers in these factories, they form an animal-human slave force. Eisnitz reflects on the horrific treatment that the animals and workers in these plants undergo, how the animals know when they are going to die. They even resist, as shown when a worker was attacked by a pig that refused violence and death (cf. Eisnitz, 1997: 68, 69, 98). Nibert cites the testimony of Fred Myers, director of the National Humane Society, about horrific slaughterhouse practices (Nibert, 2002: 161).

But at least humans can live, they can move around, they can have children, they can feed themselves, they are at least relatively physically free, whereas swine either lie si-

lent in their pens or scream (move their heads, bite). And do so at the top of their voices, so that workers must wear mufflers on their ears (see Hahn Niman, 2009: 115; Medoro, 2014:209–210). In some places, workers abuse animals, kick them<sup>16</sup> etc. We can see the psychopathology of violence in this, as workers inflict pain on animals through sadistic abuse when they are already suffering unbearably. In Canada, Mercy for Animals has brought criminal charges against eight employees, who were identified in a secretly leaked video, for intentionally causing pain, suffering and injury to animals. As a result, the legal order has labelled the kicking, punching and hitting of cows on the face and body, and the use of chains and tractors to lift sick or injured animals by the neck, as deliberate violence and suffering (cf. Winter, 2022: 107). Ellyse Winter adds:

While I do not disagree that these particular acts of violence did cause “wilful” or “unnecessary” suffering, I would suggest that the systemic acts of violence including intensive confinement, the physiological and anatomical manipulation of farmed animal’s bodies, of transportation of slaughter, continuous artificial ejaculation and insemination, premature separation of newborn animals from their mothers, and the denial of species-life behaviors also cause “wilful” and “unnecessary” suffering, given that alternative foods and agricultural practices are possible. (Winter, 2022: 112)

Bisgould and other authors have mentioned the fact, admittedly pertaining to Canada, but which can be applied to all industrial complexes around the world (and also applies to home pig slaughtering), that:

Many, if not all of the practices by which animals are turned into food could be considered to be violations of [the Criminal Code] in that they cause pain, suffering or injury to animals for an ultimate purpose which is not ‘necessary’ in any true sense of the word. Relying on animals for food may be done for reasons of custom, habit, or preference, but it cannot be considered ‘necessary’ in most parts of Canada. (Bisgould et al., 2001: 12, underlined by the author)

This is certainly true in Slovenia, but unfortunately, we have no legal leverage to identify this violence. No one in Slovenia has ever been convicted of “unnecessary” violence against animals, but violence is in fact embedded in animal husbandry practices, not only in industrial complexes and farm stables. The cries of cows having their calves taken away from them, spearing animals, short chains in stables<sup>17</sup> and the inability to move in stable complexes, living only indoors and, last but not least, the slaughter or murder of living beings, is a practice that we all know about. But it continues, unhindered and unabated. We are waging a war on animals that sustains human power and domination.

#### 16

This is not unique to Canada; in 2022, we witnessed the unprecedented cruelty of the Rače slaughterhouse, where sadistic males were torturing the animals and it appeared as if they were enjoying their screams and cries. These animals died at the butcher’s hand, and even their last moments were not made any easier; no, the workers took out their frustration on a helpless victim, as if we were witnessing a holocaust of immeasurable proportions. This has also happened in the past, at the Košaki slaughterhouse, in Ljutomer, etc. Fernández mentions a report by PETA (a global animal protection organisation) which documented the operation of a pig farm and found abuses in which workers beat pigs with sticks and hammers, killed piglets with blows and allowed pigs to starve (cf. Scudder, Mills and Fernández, 2009: 163; Fernández, 2020: 66).

#### 17

In the catastrophic floods in Slovenia in 2023, many of the cows or bulls that died (drowned, or buried under landslides) were those that were tethered and not untethered by their owners in time. The same happened with tethered dogs.

18

Charles Patterson interviewed by Richard Schwartz, <https://www.jewishveg.org/schwartz/interview.htm>

19

Nuñez Gough, Sharon. How connection inspired change and growth, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=13xsC\\_rD-20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=13xsC_rD-20), 6 September 2023. In Slovenia, we also have the *Koki Sanctuary for Nature and Animal Protection* (which adopts farmed pigs before slaughter so that they can live their perfect individual lives as pigs until their natural death), <https://sl-si.facebook.com/zavodkoki/>. There are other similar shelters in Slovenia, such as *Nika's Friendly Village*, <https://www.facebook.com/nikinaprijaznavas/>, *In a Fairy Tale*, <https://pravljici.si/> and *Sanctuary for Horses*, <https://dzk.si/>. But these are not state-funded shelters, they only operate through donations and training. *Nastja's Arch* is a very special sanctuary, <https://www.facebook.com/p/Nastjina-Barka-100068227622157/>, a family sanctuary that is different from others because it also takes in wild animals that need a temporary home while they recover or reach maturity, who are then returned to their natural environment.

20

There is also the story of the rescued piglet, Lizka, who still lives today with her three children (one of them is Tito, see photo) in the sanctuary V Pravljici (In a Fairytale), thanks to Teya Brooks Pribac, who lay beside her all night, as she hovered on the verge of death, and brought her back to life with her own body. It is available in the book by Teya Brooks Pribac. *Enter the Animal. Cross-species Perspectives on Grief and Spirituality*, 2021: 132–134.

All of these mass breeding facilities where animal exploitation takes place are rooted in the logic of domination and the dichotomous relationship between animals and humans (Best, 2007, Nocella et al., 2014). Winter considers:

Similar to the prison-industrial complex and the military-industrial complex, the animal-industrial complex highlights the largely opaque and intersecting interests of the government, agribusiness corporations and the economy that together result in the commodification and objectification of animals. Further, conceptualizing this model as the animal-industrial complex elucidates how animal agriculture is deeply entrenched in a capitalist logic that depends on a large-scale, highly technological and depersonalised system of production for mass consumption and which values profit over all else. (Winter, 2022: 100; cf. also Fitzgerald and Pellow, 2014; Noske, 1997; Twine, 2012)

Or even more illustratively: Charles Patterson in his book *The Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* discusses the deep and disturbing links between animal slavery and human slavery. The links between domesticated animal breeding and compulsory sterilisation, euthanasia and genocide and between the assembly line methods of slaughter and mass killing of animals in slaughterhouses and the mass killing techniques used in Nazi concentration camps (2002). Patterson said in an interview with Richard Schwartz: “A better understanding of these conditions must help to make our planet a more humane and suitable place for all of us – humans and animals alike, a new awareness is essential for the survival of our endangered planet.”<sup>18</sup> The construction of industrial warehouses, the complete objectification of other species and the mass mechanised killing of animals should be a warning to humanity that such a process could one day be applied to humans, as it was in Nazi Germany. Thus, a shocking quote cited by Best, attributed to Theodor Adorno, is to the effect that “Auschwitz begins wherever one looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: these are just animals” (Best, 2007: 19). Winter argues that the mass breeding system ignores the fact that: “animals are sentient beings capable of developing profound social relationships and possessing emotional lives, preferences, desires, and innate tendencies that they would express in natural conditions” (Winter, 2020: 106). Mass production and the insatiable desire to make money and profit have completely alienated them from natural life and, what’s more, they are being fattened up with antibiotics, modified by breeding, etc. Therefore, such animals are in fact a living organism, but no longer a natural being. It is, rather, a product to be consumed; a fact that is horrifying.

But how the human-pig relationship can be different is shown by the example of Sharon Nuñez Gough.<sup>19</sup> This is an animal activist who rescued<sup>20</sup> and adopted piglets from factory farms and then testified, telling her life story about their emotions and personali-

ties. The three piglets grew into big sows and were given names. Through observation and the autoethnographic method (Chang, 2008), she found that they have very different personalities.<sup>21</sup> She had a very strong dialogical relationship with them. Many of her friends stopped eating meat and started taking animal rights activism more seriously when they encountered these sows (Nuñez, 2009).<sup>22</sup>

And yet, there is no disguising the strong emotions involved in the close, almost physical contact between man and pig/sow and the look in the eyes as the pig suffers from thirst and is about to go to the slaughterhouse. In its revelation of the suffering pig/sow bodies and souls, their affective and emotional reactions, the Canadian narrative unfolds very vividly. The story of the rescued pigs/sows, which reveals three very different personalities of the pigs/sows, shows that trans-species justice is necessary, that it is necessary to accept that animals are individuals and not just members of a species, and that animal liberation is a necessary process.

Perhaps it is precisely these multiple narratives that allow us to experience reality on an emotional level. Their deaths, their bodies and the violence that was inflicted on them must not become a mere spectacle in which there is no longer any emotion. Perhaps we can propose some schemes that can be used to bring about a systemic, socio-legal and not just symbolic change in the situation of pigs or sows and other animals:

**Transforming the Death and Life of Pigs/Sows and Enabling Them to End the Practice**

home pig slaughtering	industrial slaughtering and slaughterhouses	livestock sanctuary
killing a pig for food	killing a pig for food and profit	allowing the pig to live until its natural death
negative tradition	capitalist exploitation of animals and people	the realisation of abolitionism
<b>rejection of tradition</b>	<b>changes of political system</b>	<b>the new normal</b>

**Thematisation of Home Pig Slaughtering in Folklore and Literature**

The folk song, which thematises the attitude towards an individual pig, approaching the end of its life, but which has spent it in conditions fundamentally different from the real narrative of the capitalist world, clashes with the reality of today’s world. The emotions

**21** Cf. Kiewert, *Bank/2016, The Pigs are Alright*, with images of farm animals that have escaped or been rescued from the “human architecture of exploitation”. The animals depicted are what they are, the subjects of their own lives and in relation to people. Bank, showing farm animals that have colonised the urban space. The author considers it a reinterpretation of Delacroix’s painting *La Liberte guidant le peuple*, where the children are with the pig/sow, and they do not know what they are going to do with it – will it be violence, or have they freed it from the death camp? The images *Pigs Are Fine and Woman with Pig or Sow* (2015), according to the author, “subvert the human capacity to block out knowledge about animal suffering” (Kiewert, 2016: 33–34).

**22** Ethological research confirms the following: Pigs absorb iron and other nutrients by rooting in the soil, learn their name at two to three weeks of age; they are among the top ten most intelligent species on the planet; enjoy listening to music; communicate using more than 20 unique vocalisations. Donald Griffin further observed “that animals are aware of themselves and the world around them” (Griffin, 2001: 274; cf. also Bekoff, 2007 and Waal, 1989 and online).

## 23

The barbarism is unprecedented in today's industrial capitalist "production" of animal carcasses, which of course shows in numbers the horrific cruelty that tortures and kills billions of living beings, causing suffering and death every second (see Grušovnik, 2016, Klampfer, 2010, Kocijančič, 2016, 64–67). In China, they are building a 26-storey skyscraper for pigs, in short, a slaughter camp in storeys, and expect to kill 1.2 million pigs a year. The Ford car plant in America uses live pigs in so-called crash tests (PETA, online). The barbarism of killing

that are held back, the empathy that the folk artist undoubtedly shows for the pig, are in the industrial world disguised in all sorts of ways to allow us to pretend that we do not know.

Adams writes: "Humans do not regard meat eating as contact with another animal because it has been renamed as contact with food. Who is suffering? No one" (Adams, 2014: 19).

The very fact that animals die for food is thematised in folklore as something reminiscent of ancient sacrifice, but here God has been replaced by man with his view of the pig as a source of food for survival, but later also for the desire for daily abundance. In the sense of "ritual", people do not ask themselves, they do not think about the suffering of animals, they do not think about the prohibition against killing that is supposed to apply to all living beings. All they think about is the food and the fun that goes with it. Home pig slaughtering as a festival is thus a rejoicing over the death of the one who will then be chewed in the mouth, but it involved a single animal being, not millions, as is the case today<sup>23</sup> (see Golež Kaučič, 2017).

Carol Adams believes:

Through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent *as animals* for meat to exist. Animals' lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive, they cannot be meat. Thus, a dead body replaces the live animal. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food (Adams, 2015: 20–21).

Adams presents three ways in which animals become absent referents: literally, as they are absent because they are dead; another way is linguistic, because we are not talking about animals, but about veal or lamb. And the third is metaphorical, because they become metaphors to describe human experience. And the absent referent comes from an application or reference to something else (Adams, 2015: 21). Metaphor and symbolism mark animals as truly non-existent.

The construction of animals as non-existent in the act of dying and the transformation from corpse to flesh has lasted for millennia and is accepted as a normal state of affairs in society; moreover, it is also thematised in social practices, art, literature and religion (Diamond 1991: 351). Within the context of home pig slaughtering, as the process of the last consequence of the pig's life, there is violence against the animal individual, who until then still had some kind of life, whereas in industrial pig farming, the violence, the process of death or war against the animal is perpetuated (cf. Safran Foer, 2009: 33; Derrida, 2008: 101; Noske, 1997: 18). In industrial pig farming, the violence, the process of death, or the war against the animal is at the centre of the process.

Ortiz-Robles, analysing Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, also reflects on the need to consider the fate of pigs in industrial farms, in addition to examining the allegorical nature of the text. He points out that these industrial farms also operate on the basis of a narra-



tive structure that relies on the figurative representation of animals. He cites Noelle Vialles (1994), who describes the ways in which we reflect on the killing, skinning, and butchering of animals in slaughterhouses as complex rhetorical operations involving litotes, euphemisms, and metaphors. Vialles calls skinning “the metamorphosis of the patient” and points to the fact that allegorical practice contains the greatest burden of our relationship to animals (see Ortiz-Robles, 2016: 176).

From the point of view of zoofolkloristics, ecocriticism and critical animal studies, the thematisation of animals in folklore and literature might be more successful than theoretical discourses or even the assertion of some partial laws (cf. Fisher Fishkin, 2010: 30). Stories can be more powerful than philosophical arguments (cf. Golež Kaučič, 2023). Taking a page from fiction, we can effectively convey human messages to individuals, who are then equipped to translate these messages into changes in attitudes and behaviour.

Folk poetic depictions of the home pig slaughtering and the pig as the central creature of human violence are common, but empathetic ones are rare. Folklore texts reflect the reality of being a folk singer. It was, of course, very much adapted to the daily and festive life of the community. The community has also determined its attitudes towards animals, and, of course, on the basis of religion, beliefs and existing long-standing traditions. The first days of winter heralded, among other things, the imminent festival of the home pig slaughter. As a “home festival”, home pig slaughtering was held in high esteem. The folk singer Jurij Vodovnik from Pohorje has composed a song in which this is not the time of killing a living creature, but the joy of the food that will be on the table when that creature is killed, the time when a pig, aware of death and wanting to escape, is being captured or lured out of its home, with the only resistance that the animal is able to make being to run away:

Veseli čas prihaja,  
da mati zgodaj vstaja,  
ma dost skrbi, velik trpi,  
da v peč potico vsaja.

The joyful time is a-coming,  
the mother gets up early,  
she’s got enough on her plate, she suffers a lot  
to put the nut roll in the oven.

Prešiča so zredili,  
jih bodo skor lovili,  
pa tud klobas za pustni čas  
tri sorte naredili.

They have fattened the pig,  
they will be chasing them shortly,  
and they will make three varieties  
of sausages for the carnival time.

Prešiči so debeli,  
mo skor za njim leteli  
okol oglov, okol plotov,  
dokler jih bomo vjeli ...

The pigs are fat,  
we will soon chase them  
round the corners, round the fences,  
till we catch them (GNI O 11.776, excerpt)<sup>24</sup>...

## 24

GNI O and the number stands for a song from the manuscript collection of the Committee for the Collection of Folk Songs (1903–1914), held by the Archives of the ZRC SAZU, Institute of Ethnomusicology in Ljubljana. Cf. (Field recordings, Cintare group, Ljubljana, 2 February 2023, excerpt) B: Even as a child, when I was little. They slaughtered a pig at a neighbour’s house in Ljubljana near Stožice. I didn’t even see it, but I heard it. I heard it squealing, and I think that is one of the few incidents that has remained in my memory from those years when I was little. I can’t say that I find it all that disturbing, but I know what it looks like, you know. [...] And I remember something else from the same place. A vet came. He came to castrate a pig. And they tied that pig to one of the telegraph poles, which was [...].

The song is only concerned with the food that the pig embodied, a nameless animal

that was only associated with the products made from its carcass. However, it is also thematised that the pig did not want to give up its body for human food, therefore it had to be caught, and its flight from humans is clear; the singer refers to it as flight and the chase, to the inevitability of death. Songs sung about the home pig slaughter mostly explain the process of slaughtering, the distribution of the meat and all the activities related to this practice (e.g. Furež/Slaughtering, GNI O 3195; Bodem zredu (I will breed), GNI O 4324; Veseli čas prihaja (A happy time is coming), GNI O 2270; Kolinili smo (We were slaughtering), GNI O 6390).

In the manuscript record of the song “Pesem od prašičkovega lovljenja/ Song of a Pig Chase” (written down by Franc Karbaš, Sv. Miklavž pri Ormožu, between 1903 and 1912, Archive No. GNI O 9484, 1–2), the singer illustrates the violence towards the pig, the fear of the animal that runs away because it is aware that it is going to be killed, and this shows that in the past they were also aware of the animal’s feelings, but ignored them, precisely because of the pig, which was, from their perspective, only food. That the animal also rebelled and the only way was to escape is thematised in this and the previous song, as the animal’s rebelliousness is a kind of rebellion against human domination (Hribal, 2010; Kowalczyk, 2014: 192–193). Sarat Colling argues that, even in animals, “resistance [is] an act that involves a desire to free oneself from captivity, violence and suffering (Colling, 2018: 21–45).

Ingold found that animal sentience, together with resistance, demonstrates a form of agency (2006: 73: cf. also Wadiwel, 2015:10–11). The pig had to be perceived only as food, not as a living being, not as a carcass, only as meat, not as one that lives for itself, only as a human food product using the whole pig’s body. That is why resistance is unwelcome and immediately suppressed.<sup>25</sup> The home pig slaughter is microproduction of killing of a single body, and mass industrial farming is macroproduction of trillions of bodies, which means that the sentient being, which may still have been recognised in village communities, has become something that does not exist as a being at all, only as a piece of meat, through the domination of violence for profit. If the pig in the song rebels and even with the strength of its own body pushes the man into the mud, and this is of course the farmhand – on the scale just a little above the pig, then this is its last active act, because his rebellion is crushed immediately and the suffering can begin. In industrial complexes, as we have shown, resistance can only be resisted by bodily movements, by sounds, or by apathy, and resistance is immediately suppressed in a sterile technological way, but also with the violence perpetrated by the workers in the complexes, who turn their own frustration into violence against the pig or the sow, and with the particular cruelty we have already discussed.

Prašič skoči zdaj preik plota,  
hlapca dobro v blati skota.  
(ga prekrije z blatom).

The pig now jumps over the fence,  
the servant is soiled in mud.

Both songs are meant to be humorous, but seem to be about mock discomfort at the

9484  
9277

Franc Karbaš, učitelj  
Sv. Miklavž pri Ormožu

*P*  
Pesem od prašičkovega lovljenja.

*Lento - allegro*



1. Do ber ve - šer draži gajda  
Hitro bom po dvoji bescda  
na - ši krali po dvoji - ši  
Telka le ka - rusa i - ši.

2. Koz, konic moči kodi  
Pražimo njemi po sledi  
Čujmo se ga v šumi ovli  
Pražimo, kaj mo ga stavili

3. Ton je vse naš lovec krivi  
Kaj do zdaj prašiček živi  
Ti či bi visi lovija  
Lakre pa si telku pija.

4. Prašič skoči zdaj prek plotca  
Skapca dobro v blati skota  
Oh prašička nem te jau  
Dokle prašič ne de kija.

Odbor za nabiranje  
slovenskih narodnih pesmi.

Figure 3: Manuscript record of the Song of a Pig Chase.

Written down by Franc Karbaš, Sv. Miklavž pri Ormožu, between 1903 and 1912.

Archive No. GNI O 9484, 1

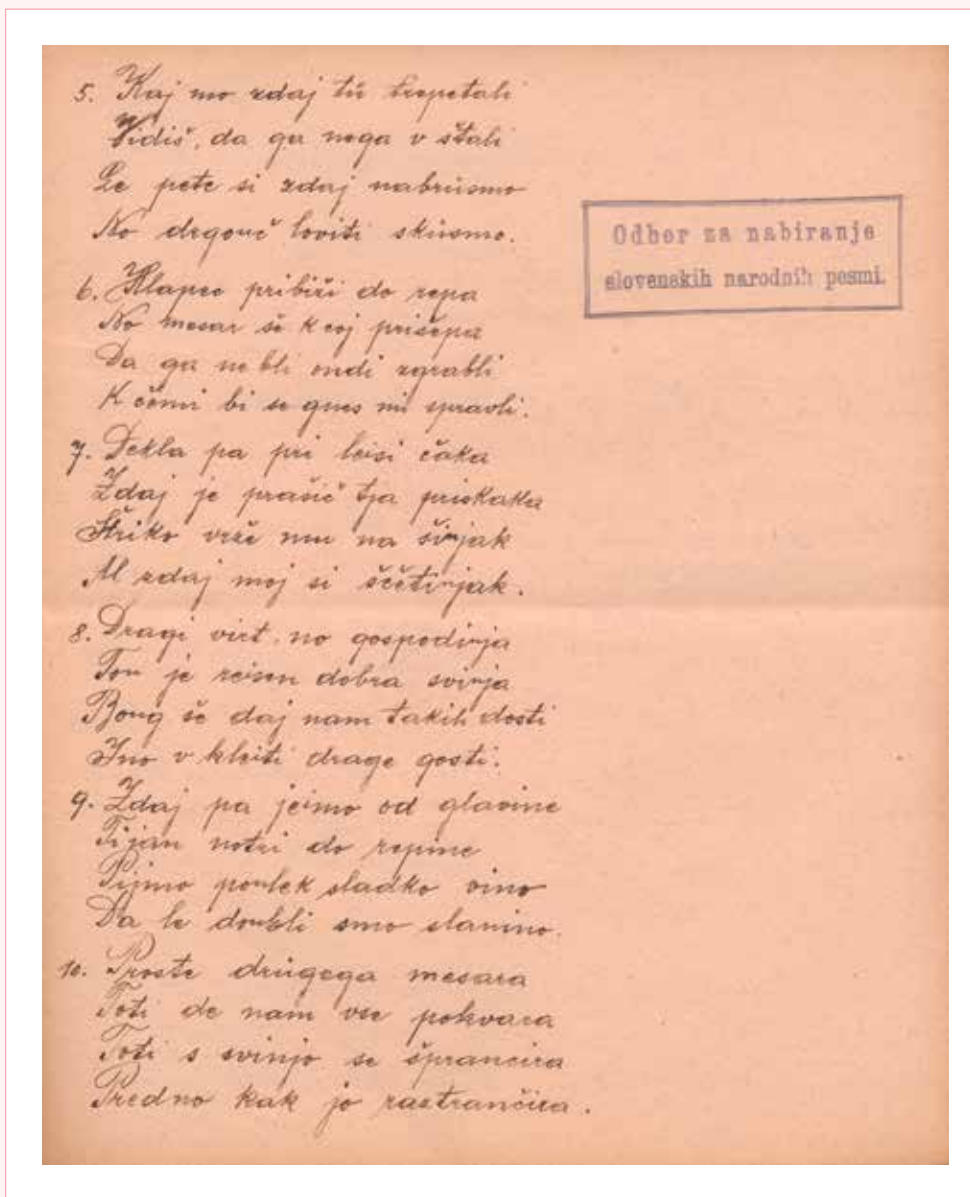


Figure 3: Manuscript record of the *Song of a Pig Chase*.

Written down by Franc Karbaš, Sv. Miklavž pri Ormožu, between 1903 and 1912.

Archive No. GNI O 9484, 2

murder of animals. The mockery is also directed at the man – the butcher – who is supposed to be walking with the pig. It seems that it was not so easy to cause the death of an animal. And that is precisely because of the closeness.

In the song “Veseli čas prihaja/The Joyful Time Is a-Coming”<sup>26</sup>, despite the joy of the promise of food that comes after the murder of the pig, the singer points out the fear of the animal, knowing that it will be slaughtered:

Prašiček široko zija	The little piglet is squealing
z debelim repom vija,	its thick tail twisting,
ker boji on se zadnih dni	for he is afraid of its last days,
Matija ga lovi.	and Matthias is chasing him. (GNI O 5386)

In Slovenia, the butcher’s axe is sharpened for animals slaughtered for the consumption of their body parts and blood at the “peasant festival” (cf. Minnich, 1979 and 1987), which, according to Minnich (who believes that in the past this event mitigated the separation of man from animals, but which has completely disappeared in the modern industrialised world) is called home pig slaughter (sl. *koline*) and is still practised today. Home pig slaughter is not a ritual, because there is nothing sacred about the act. If ritual is a symbolic action (Cazeneuve, 1986: 37), here the symbolism has fallen away, since the blood of the animal passes from suffering and death into crime. If we start from the animal’s point of view, we are looking from its perspective. Home pig slaughtering as a festival is an absurd event linked to the suffering of intelligent beings of another species, which is linked to speciesism as discrimination against the Other on the basis of species. Richard Ryder, the author of the term speciesism, argued that being a member of a species has no moral value in itself (Ryder, 1971: 81). Ryder writes in the *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Welfare*: “If it is accepted that it is morally wrong to intentionally cause pain to innocent members of the human species, then it stands to reason that it is equally wrong to cause suffering to innocent members of other species ... So it is time to act on this logic” (Ryder, 2009/1998: 320.)

The following examples show how home pig slaughtering is thematised and discussed in Slovenian literature.

## 26

While singing one of the versions of this song, the singers of the Jerbas group expressed different opinions about this song and the issue of home pig slaughtering. One felt that there used to be more compassion towards animals, stating, “Yes, for example, my grandmother used to have bunnies, but my father used to go away when they were being slaughtered, and he is a man. He couldn’t deal with it”. Somebody else continues, “None of us would work in a slaughterhouse.” And the content of the song, like she said before, we think about it in all the songs, because then it’s easier to remember, if nothing else, I think” (Field work Križe, 8 June 2022, sung by Jerbas).

## Srečko Kosovel

### Naš prašiček

Včeraj smo prašiča prali:  
eden vlival z zalivačo,  
drugi pral ga je s krtačo.  
Nekaj časa je poslušno  
in potrpežljivo krulil,  
a potem nam je utekel  
in se na dvorišče vrgel –  
bolj umazan kakor prej.

### Our piglet

Yesterday we washed the pig:  
one washed it with a watering can,  
the other rubbed it with a brush.  
It grunted obediently  
and patiently for a while,  
but then it ran away  
and hurled itself in the yard –  
dirtier than before.<sup>27</sup>

Kosovel offers us only the image of a piglet that is to be “washed” as “laundry”, just as man wants, and the pig’s escape from this domination. Kosovel, himself sensitive to the life and being of animals, does not thematise killing, but here it is a kind of portrait of a pig that man considers a filthy animal. But is this image not also something that could be described as an individualisation of the pig, of its needs, that here too it is a violent act of man that is not in harmony with the pig’s interests. For we see below that the pig’s interest in protecting its skin from parasites is an interest in its well-being, and therefore it cannot in any way be assimilated to the human world. But here the pig is still somewhat free, because it then decides that it will no longer tolerate human intervention and runs away. This means that it expresses its individual activity.

The situation is different in contemporary Slovenian literature, as we can illustrate with the examples below.

In his latest collection of poems, *Namreč* (2022), Milan Jesih thematises the violent discourse of killing a pig and the religious “ablution” of bad conscience in the church.

Kaj na balkonu kruli še žival?	Is the animal still grunting on the balcony?
Pa se zanesi na šnopčkove strice!	And now rely on your schnapps cronies!
A ga ni zjutraj Ljuboslav zaklal in zmlel in stlačil v pečence?	Didn't Ljuboslav slaughter him in the morning and ground it up and pressed it into sausages?
A nismo šli precej po tistem v cerkev?	Didn't we go to church not long after that?
Nismo žebrali latinskih litanij za mir ocvirkov zgor v prvem verzcu omenjene živali?	Didn't we count the rosary of the Latin litanies for the peace of the cracklings of the above-mentioned animal from the first verse? (Jesih, 2022: 228)



*Figure 4: Koline. SEM F\_1963\_5\_3\_014\_RGB,  
photo by Peter Naglič.*

In the following verses, he refers to the pig as an individual with a name, presenting its resistance and suffering and representing swine as equal to man:

Zjutraj smo klali Zorana, prašiča: upiral se je, brcal, tulil, kričal, svetnike za usmiljenje zaklinjal, kot češ, pomota, jaz kot vi sem svinja.	In the morning we butchered Zoran, the pig: it resisted, kicked, howled, cried, begged the saints for mercy, as if, you blundering fool, I, like you, am a swine. (Jesih, 2022: 229)
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The double discourse of emotional attachment to animals, which, despite being a long-standing animal-human bond, results in murder, which revolts the poet and makes him want to take the victimhood upon himself. Marc Bekoff has researched animal sentience, has shown that they suffer, and believes that our behaviour needs to change and, once we know this, we must choose ethics (Bekoff, 2007: 135).

Dojili smo jih majhne in pestovali, po imenih smo jim dober tek želeli, da tolsti bi porasli in debeli, češ, z nami ste družina, ne živali. Podle zahrbtnosti sem sit, vidim: nedolžnega nič ne prepriča, da z jutrom ga prihajamo ubit. Ljudje, pojejmo mene, ne prašiča!	We nursed and nurtured them when they were little, we called them by their names and wished them bon appétit, so that they would grow fat and pudgy, as if to say you are part of our family, not mere animals. I am fed up with vile insidiousness, I see: nothing convinces the innocent that we are coming to kill it in the morning. People, let's feast on me, not the pig. (Jesih, 2022: 248)
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In the verses below, Jesih thematises human insatiability:

Jutri bi klali, zdaj pa ta zadrega: pujs se nam mrda, nič mu ni do tega, pravi, da druge, boljše ima načrte, ne pa turizem tjakaj čez v zasmrtje, Da ne razume, kdo tako je lačen, kam se mudi, »saj nuje ni nobene, špajza, kot vem, prepolna je jedače,« je rekel, »to opravite brez mene.«	Tomorrow we would be butchering, but now this vexing affair: the pig is making grimaces, it does not feel like it, it says he has other, better plans in store, not a tourist tour over to the other side, It said that it did not understand who was so famished, where was the hurry, "as there seems no need, the larder, as I know, is packed full of food," it said, "you can do without me." (Jesih, 2022: 232)
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We know that pigs are suffering because we see it, we hear it, we are aware of it. We know that they feel, that they are in discomfort, in pain, that they are aware of the ultimate consequence of life, but does this make us stop the slaughter, refrain from eating





Figure 5: Koline. SEM I\_1771,  
photo by Marija Makarovič

meat, cheese, eggs? No, because we cannot give up the taste, the pleasure of feeding on corpses. And then our attitude towards animals is presented in the attitude that it is not our problem, because we do not see it, we do not hear it, and even if we did, we would quickly forget it. Our relationship to animals is, according to Bekoff, “complicated, frustrating, ambiguous and full of paradoxes” (2009: xxix). Francione defines it as “moral schizophrenia”, it can be “cognitive dissonance” (Francione, 2000; Arluke, 1988; Birke, 2003). All of this is linked to the socially structured conceptions of animals that we have internalised (see also Gröling, 2014: 92–93).

Jure Jakob’s poem, *Koline* is just a picture of the slaughter of a pig and a slaughter of a cow, without reflection. It is as if we were reading a description of this bloody ritual, which is still going on today – the perpetuation of the slaughter continues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perhaps some discomfort can be seen in the verses:

Ne požiraj sline.	Do not swallow the saliva.
Ne misli na noge, če misliš na noge, se ti to pozna na srcu.	Do not think about your feet, if you think about your feet, you’ll feel it in your heart.

And the fact that alcohol is a necessity for this act.

## Koline

Potrebujem nož, dobro nabrušen, in cigarete.  
Potem bomo šli zelo zgodaj, še v temi,  
v zamrznjen december, do soseda, ti boš vzela štrik,  
ti pa kanglo za kri.  
Najboljši so stari vojaški čevlji  
in prazen želodec, da se slivovka lepo razlije.  
Potem potrebujem nekaj minut trde mirne roke  
in močan pulz, da me svinja ne razpara,  
ko zatuli.  
Iz kotla se kadi para,  
po zraku pleza vonj po smoli.  
Potem pazi, da boš točno v glavno žilo.  
Pazi, da bo šla vsa kri ven.  
Ne požiraj sline.  
Ne misli na noge, če misliš na noge,  
se ti to pozna na srcu.  
Ko bo ležala v banji, na hrbtu, poparjena,  
s stegnjenimi parklji, se bo zdanilo.  
potem pridejo sorodniki,  
v opranih, svetlih predpasnikih,  
in pridno delajo  
čez cel dan.  
Mi se vrnemo zvečer, ko se spet stemni.

I need a knife, well sharpened, and cigarettes.  
Then off we go very early, when it's still dark,  
in the frozen December, to the neighbour's, you take the rope,  
and you take the blood bucket.  
The old army boots are the best  
and an empty stomach, so that the plum brandy spills out nicely.  
Then a steady hand just for a few minutes  
and a strong pulse so that the sow does not tear me apart  
when it growls.  
Steam is rising from the cauldron,  
the smell of resin is wafting through the air.  
Then be careful to hit the main vein precisely.  
Make sure all the blood seeps out.  
Do not swallow the saliva.  
Do not think about your feet, if you think about your feet,  
you'll feel it in your heart.  
When she is lying in the tub, on her back, scalded,  
with her trotters stretched out, daylight will crack.  
then the relatives enter,  
wearing washed, bright aprons,  
and work diligently  
all day.  
We come back in the evening, when it is dark again.  
(Jakob, 2003: 67)

Aljaž Krivec recalls his encounter with the home pig slaughter (excerpt):

Moj prvi spomin na potek dneva na domačiji je, kako je skupina moških iz hleva začela vleči nekega prašiča. Babica je stala nekaj metrov proč. Nadzorovala je proces, ter ga usmerjala z napotki. Dedka, sicer lovca, se ne spomnim. Ko so prašiča le pripeljali do kadi (mislim, da je bil med vlačilci tudi moj oče), so nadzor prepustili stricu, mesarju. Buljil sem v dogajanje, nakar me je mama zgrabila, mi pokrila oči in me obrnila v stran ter malodane zabičala: »Tega ne boš gledal!« Aljaž Krivec, *Iz hleva na cesto*.

My first memory of the day on the farm is of a group of men starting to drag a pig out of the pig sty. My grandmother was standing a few metres away.

She was supervising the process and giving directions. I do not remember my grandfather, otherwise a hunter. Once the pig was brought to the tub (I think my father was among the procession of tuggers), they left my uncle, the butcher, in charge. I stared at what was going on, when my mother grabbed me, covered my eyes and turned me away, almost instructing sharply, “You are not going to watch that!”<sup>28</sup>

The author did not know anything particular about home pig slaughtering, he thought it was just a visit to grandma and grandpa. The author presents his experience of the home pig slaughtering in a completely disinterested way, just as he remembers experiencing the animal world as a child. However, this description does have some parts where we can see that the mother wanted to conceal the violent act from the child and that the child has not yet understood that the death of a living being has taken place, which points to the last paragraph, where the child imagines the pig’s tail from fictitious children’s stories and pictures, and all that matters to the grandmother is to warn the child that this part of the pig’s body is not meant for food. Perhaps what makes this unvarnished description even more shocking is that it is so real.

Suzana Tratnik also thematises the home pig slaughtering in at least three short stories, in which ethnological findings can be linked to fiction, which is very telling:

Po kosilu je sorodstvo spokojno razrezalo dopoldne zaklanega prašiča, ne da bi se komurkoli zdele neumestne pripombe vaških žensk, češ kako lepi so sveži kosi mesa, v katerem še trepetajo živci. Smela sem biti zraven, ko je stara mama cedila prašičjo kri v velikanske železne pladnje in jih potem previdno, kot kakšne dragocenosti, porivala v pečico razbeljenega štedilnika na drva. ...« (Tratnik, 1997: 12)

After lunch, the relatives calmly butchered the pig they had slaughtered that morning, without anyone thinking that the village women’s remarks about how beautiful the fresh pieces of meat were, with the nerves still quivering in them, were uncalled for. I was allowed to be there when my grandmother poured pig’s blood into giant iron trays and then carefully pushed them into the oven of the white-hot wood-burning stove, like valuables. [...] (Tratnik, 1997: 12)

Tratnik experienced this slaughter as a perfectly normal activity, and we see speciesism in the use of the terms, because a pig is butchered, not killed, and this also creates alienation from the animal. How strong human superstition was in the countryside is shown by the record about not mixing the blood of different kinds of animals, because animals are just animals, there is nothing sacred about them:

stara mama je v sodu, v katerem sva se umivali z Greto, pomivala krvave pladnje. Zelo veliko krvi je bilo letos, si je govorila. Dobri prašiči so bili. Dobri, ja. Stara mati pa je menila, da se živali ne ubija, le kolje. In da se ne sme mešati piščančje in prašičje krvi »Kokoš in prasca v krvi ženiti, to je prekletstvo. Prekletstvo nesvetih.« (Tratnik, 1997: 21)

My grandmother used to wash the bloody trays in the barrel where Greta and I washed. There was a lot of blood this year, she told herself. They were good pigs. Good, yes.

But the grandmother believed that animals were not killed, only butchered. And that chicken and pig blood should not be mixed "It is a curse to wed a chicken and a pig in blood. The curse of the unholy." (Tratnik, 1997: 21)

In the passage below, the author mentions the Cartesian split of the mind, the split between subject and object, body and soul.

Vdor diskontinuitete v otroški svet gotovosti. Človeška smrt/pasja smrt. Zato nas bo odslej obsedla zahteva po harmonizaciji razlomljenega ega. In še česa. (Tratnik 2003: 159)

The intrusion of discontinuity into the child's world of certainty. Human death vs. the death of a dog. Henceforth, we will be obsessed with the demand for harmonisation of the broken ego. And more. (Tratnik, 2003: 159)

The author thematises the pig's activity, which is manifested when the pig wants to escape from death but fails to do so:

V pomivalnem koritu sem sedela tudi takrat, ko smo na dvorišču klali prašiča. – Zgodaj spomladi se je zgodila nesreča. Prašič je pobegnil iz hleva. Menda je z rilcem preprosto dvignil loputo in se skobacal na prosto. Slutila sem, da se bo to zgodilo, vendar tega nikoli nisem upala omeniti. Le kdo bi verjel, da se tako debel prašič lahko izmuzne? »Tako, prašič je odšel, sem previdno oznanila v kuhinji.« Nikamor ni šel, kakšne neumnosti pa trosiš, je rekla stara mama, ki se nekoč fotografirala z našim najdebelejšim prašičem. Pa je. Pobegnil je. Videla sem ga. Tam na vrtu. Prašiča so kmalu ujeli. Skoz reže na roletih kuhinjskega okna sem kmalu videla ogromno hrastovo mizo in ob njej velikega mesarja z zavihanimi rokavi. (Tratnik, 2005: 159)

I also sat in the sink when we were slaughtering a pig in the backyard. – An accident happened in early spring. The pig escaped from the pig sty. Apparently, he simply lifted the hatch with its snout and jumped out into the open. I had a hunch that this would happen, but I never dared to mention it. Who would have believed that such a fat pig could slip away? “So, the pig is gone,” I announced carefully in the kitchen. He hasn’t gone anywhere, what nonsense you are spouting, said my grandmother, who once had her picture taken with our fattest pig. It is. He escaped. I saw it. There in the garden. The pig was soon caught. Through the slit in the blind of the kitchen window I soon saw a huge oak table with a big butcher with rolled-up sleeves at its side. (Tratnik, 2005: 159)

Suzana Tratnik thematises the childhood experience of slaughtering a pig as something normal. The three short fiction collections contain a number of descriptions of the slaughtering of pigs. The author spent her childhood with her grandmother in Vučja vas near Ptuj, where her grandmother treated home pig slaughtering as a part of everyday life and introduced it to her granddaughter. No sentiment, no empathy, just a few ingrained superstitions and beliefs intertwined with religion to make killing a pig appear normal. But the compassion of man for the pig does suddenly come out at one point. “When the kitchen smelled acridly of roasted rusty-red blood, I saw my grandmother crying.” (Tratnik, 2005: 116)

### **A Different Kind of Thematisation – Detela**

Detela reveals the human domination, which is thematised in his poem “*A Horrid Fairy Tale*”, when the murder of a pig is an economic act carried out by butchers on a living creature, which is merely an object of torture and killing, in order to make its body a better and more expensive meat. A child who hears squealing does not realise it is murder, but is told the next day: “Years passed / and the world was taking shape / into a painful message of murder for the child” (Detela, 2018: 1092–1093). It is a poem that thematises the slaughter of a pig in a world of industrial farming, a world where it is all about the death economy, not in a world of small farms and people, and not as a folk song, where the slaughter is a personal act and the pig can be looked at in its trusting eyes, accustomed to being given food, but in the end also death, by a human hand.

That is why Detela’s poem is a cry for blood, which would overwhelm the vision of the murder and death of animals and people, in order to stifle the bloody images. Detela’s poetry is rebellion and protest, but at the same time an awareness that his language is somewhere outside the text and can only be perceived on the levels of the metatext.

## **Strašna pravljica**

Da bi svinjina imela višjo ceno,  
so zvezali prašiče za nogé,  
zarezali so v žile in zabili  
so ostre elektrode skozi kožo  
med testisi in bedri. Potlej so  
postopoma zviševali napetost  
električnega toka, da je kri  
v ogromnih količinah že iztekla,  
še preden so prašiči umrli. Zrezki  
iz te svinjine so bili sijoče  
beli kot skuta. Cviljenje prašičev  
se je glasilo daleč čez vrtove.  
Otrok se je začuden spraševal,  
odkod ta glas. A ni ga prepoznal.  
Drugi dan je to zvedel od nekoga,  
ki je dobil meso od klavcev. Kmalu  
zatem je videl embrio kokoši  
na rumenjaku izpraznjenega jajca,  
bleščéče redeč. Minevala so leta  
in svet se je otroku oblikoval  
v boleče sporočilo o umorih.  
Ko je otrok dorasel, se mu je  
razkrila skrita želja: naj ves svet  
postane enobarven, živordeč,  
naj vse zasije kot razlita kri,  
da ne bo človeka, ki bi mogel  
videti kri ubitih embriov  
iz rumenjakov jajc in kri zarodkov,  
ki jih zdravniki vakuumsko izsesajo  
iz maternic nosečih žensk in deklíc.  
Takrat so se pojavili prividi  
krvavih madežev povsod po mizah,  
posodju, zelenjavi, sadežih,  
pa tudi po rokáh in po telesih,  
kakor da bi k vsemu prirasla kri  
ki je iztekla iz ubitih žrtev.

## **A Horrid Fairytale**

To bump up the price of pork,  
pigs were tied by their legs,  
veins were cut and sharp electrodes  
were stuck through the skin  
between the testicles and the loins. They then  
gradually increased the voltage  
so that the blood  
had already flowed out in huge quantities  
before the pigs died. The steaks  
made from this pork were shiny  
white like cottage cheese. The squealing of the pigs  
could be heard far across the gardens.  
The child wondered in amazement  
where the voice came from. But he did not recognise it.  
The next day he heard it from someone  
who had gotten meat from the butchers. Soon  
afterwards he saw the embryo of a hen  
in the yolk of a broken egg,  
brilliant red. Years passed  
and the world took shape of  
a painful message to the child about the murders.  
As the child grew up, a hidden wish  
was revealed to him: that the whole world  
should become monochrome, vivid red,  
that everything should shine like spilled blood,  
that no human being would be able to  
see the blood of the embryos killed  
from the yolks of eggs and the blood of the embryos  
vacuum sucked out of the wombs  
of pregnant women and girls by doctors.  
Then came the visions  
of bloodstains everywhere on tables,  
dishes, vegetables, fruits,  
as well as on hands and bodies,  
as if the blood that oozed out of the murdered victims  
had stuck to everything. (Detela, 2018: 1092–1093)

Detela fully supports non-violence.

Let us also mention the youngest representative of ecofeminist and non-anthropocentric poetry, who encountered pig creatures and their body parts, which are distanced from her by a visible yet invisible wall of species distinction. This is Tanja Badalič Volk. Despite seeing a relation between two beings, Ohrem discusses an ontology of bodies, in which the ontology of the real is always (also) a bodily ontology, and the ontology of the body is always (also) a relational ontology (Ohrem, 2018). Kelly Oliver argues that “All creatures on earth are blessed and cursed with the ability to respond” (Oliver, 2010: 270). And the pigs speak with their bodies, pleading to be rescued with their bodily responses, but unfortunately the human response is only to get off the “train of other bodies’ suffering”.

### **Kapus**

Brassica Oleracea  
Nahajam se onkraj  
umazanega zidu svobode.  
Gledam bitja,  
ki životarijo  
dan in noč v temini  
meje,  
ki loči dojemanje  
drugega.  
Nekdo se zvedavo obrne  
k vratom.  
Rilec zatakne med  
rešetke. Jih grize.  
roka se ne premakne.  
opazujem drugega,  
ki nepremično sedi na kolku  
in škili skozi praznino bivanja.  
Tretji drži razdaljo.  
ki ne bo nikoli dovolj  
d a l e č,  
ko bo prišel čas.  
Šepečem besede,  
ki me režejo v oči.  
prvi še vedno vtika rilec  
med rešetke.  
obrnem se in izstopim.

### **Cabbage**

Brassica Oleracea  
I am beyond  
the dirty wall of freedom.  
I am looking at beings  
who linger  
day and night in the darkness  
of the border  
that separates the perception  
of the Other.  
Someone turns curiously  
to the door.  
Pushes a snout  
between the bars. Gnaws on them.  
the hand does not move.  
I watch the Other,  
sitting motionless on its hip,  
peering through the void of being.  
The third one keeps its distance.  
which will never be sufficiently  
f a r a w a y  
when the time comes.  
I whisper the words  
that cut my eyes.  
the first one is still sticking its snout  
between the bars.  
I turn and exit. (Badalič Volk, 2022: 55)

**29**

The poetess explained how the poem came about when she saw this reality but was able to step out of it as a free human being.

**30**

See also the depictions of possible coexistences between humans and animals in paintings. (Kiewert, 2016: 33–35; cf. also Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2015: 57–74).

**31**

Oral testimony during a visit to the sanctuary, 19 April 2022.

Badalič Volk does not thematise industrial reality, but farm reality, her own experience of pigs in a pig sty, which she witnessed herself.<sup>29</sup> The poetess is on the human side, where man is free to choose how he will live. Or as Noske puts it, “The natural ability of animals to move, play, self-clean, social interaction and contact with the natural environment seems almost subversive” (Noske, 1997: 15). In the poem, the pig is in a dark space in which it can barely move and yet it tries to break through these openings. It wants to show in every way that it is a living being that wants to live, that it has an interest in living on its own terms and not on those imposed on it by man. In the poem, the poetess thematises her own helplessness. She can only observe, she can only bear witness, like the Canadian activists, but all three individual pigs are not spared the ultimate consequence of death, in this case the home pig slaughtering.

Kathryn Gillespie believes that there is an undeniable connection between humans and animals, which is realised through bearing witness, instinctive empathy (which is mutual), engaged observation, and empathising with the subject (Gillespie, 2016). And this representation in the poem confirms this empathy. In the end, the poetess is only able to get out of it, but she does witness and thematise carnivore violence through her poem.

### **Possibilities of Positive Tradition<sup>30</sup>**

Cronin and Kramer write: “Photographs of non-human animals living in animal shelters allow us to imagine how we would feel without fear and suffering” (2018: 90). The head of the shelter, Ksenija Vesenjāk Kutlačić, told us the story of this little sow, which we briefly summarise:

The pig jumped out of the trailer the farmer was driving to the slaughterhouse. She was badly injured. And yet she wanted to keep running. Ksenija Vesenjāk Kutlačić was driving by at the time and thought, well, why should I be the one rescuing animals again, let someone else do it, but she changed her mind and went there anyway. When she told the farmer she would take her to a sanctuary he was reluctant at first, but then he saw how injured she was and, rather than incur the expense, he agreed not to take her to the slaughterhouse.<sup>31</sup>

That’s how Stela ended up in a sanctuary. In addition to Stela, there are several other animals in this shelter who are socialising with each other, such as a ram and a pig, free and unafraid. (Figure 4 and Figure 5)





*Figure 6: Stela: a rescued pig living her own life in the Koki Sanctuary.  
Photo by Marjetka Golež Kaučič.*



*Figure 7: A pig in the company of a ram.  
Interspecies connection. Koki Sanctuary.  
Photo by Marjetka Golež Kaučič.*

Colling writes about animals that have escaped death and ended up in shelters. Visitors to shelters then see these escaped animals living a relatively free life, grazing in meadows or socialising with friends, and are deeply touched by their fate, even becoming vegan (Colling 2018: 37–38). He also reflects on how only a small proportion of animals escape death and what barriers they have to overcome, because we have put up fences, locked doors, put them in trailers, that is to say, humans have put countless boundaries between them and us, and that the animals cross “conceptual boundaries between domestic/free-living” (Colling, 2018: 38; cf. also Cresswell, 1996: 22).

Animal rebellion therefore brings to light an awareness of hegemony and control over the spaces, environments and boundaries from which animals cross or escape. It is a kind of prison system. For example, if a bull escapes from a slaughterhouse, the animal prisoner has to return there, because it is potentially dangerous and its life is just food.<sup>32</sup>

E. Winter offers three active ways to make these horrific practices visible and central to social reality:

1. Destabilizing the idea that the lives of animals on industrial farms are natural.
2. Learning about animal behavior or spending time at farm sanctuaries and witnessing animals in their natural state to recognise animals as sentient beings who possess innate tendencies and preferences they would display in natural conditions.
3. Contrasting the lives they would live under natural conditions with the violent reality of the animal-industrial complex. (Winter, 2022: 121)

It is also possible to show the lives of pigs/sows through a cinematic lens, showing the lives of pigs/swine through different discursive lenses, thereby creating awareness of the real life and death of pigs. Neda Radulović writes about this in her article “Sow as the main hero/heroine of discursive erasures of authentic lives in film representations” (*Svinja kao glavni junak/inja diskurzivnih brisanja autentičkih životinja u filmskih reprezentacijama*). Radulović analyses two films, *Svijet koji nestaje* (1987) and *Prenarazila se zimina* (2010). In the first, the main character is Gile, the thirteenth pig, who is thrown away by the mother sow, but then struggles to survive. The latter tackles the problem of EU laws that do not allow slaughter with a knife but with a gun, but both films are in the function of constructing ideological narratives (carnism, anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, etc.) and in a way devalue the death of animals (Radulović, 2022: 823–838; cf. also Pots, 2017: 10). Nevertheless, by looking at these representations, we allow the viewer to deconstruct what is presented and reject existing discourses.

Watching the 2020 documentary film *Gunda* by director, co-writer and co-composer Viktor Kossakovsky, the viewer might start to think about rejecting socially constructed discourses of the life of animal subjectivities, which we associate primarily with food. The film follows the everyday “free” life of a sow with ten piglets, two cows and a one-legged



*Figure 8: Tito, the rescued pig. V Pravljici/In a Fairytale Sanctuary.  
Photo by Marjetka Golež Kaučič.*



Figure 9: “Dragi Božiček, želim si živeti/Dear Santa, I want to live!”  
Poster. [www.challenge.si](http://www.challenge.si), Daša Keber.

hen, and non-fictionally allows us to imagine the reality of life in a pig family. It therefore allows us to compare the industrial discourse of the swine camps and their life, with the possibility of a different life of the swine on its own terms.<sup>33</sup>

In this film, however, the “spatial and discursive disconnect” with the sow (Gillespie, 2011) is in a sense removed, as we are brought closer to the pig’s real world, and such a narrative can nonetheless promote an alternative view of swine.

However, the fact that an artistic realisation, which presents the consumption of pigs, which in the Christmas season have a dual role as food and as a symbol of happiness, can also non-metaphorically use the linguistic discourse of the pre-New Year’s time (*the wishes that children write to Santa Claus*) to draw attention to mass deaths at this time, is illustrated by a poster that was pasted on the streets of Ljubljana a few years ago by vegan activists. (Figure 7)

## Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed the animal perspective and tried to present the fact that animal rights are not an impossibility, but a rational, normative and irrefutable fact, going beyond the idea that humans are special beings and firmly rejecting the corporate-funded propaganda that supports and encourages the exploitation of animals. This propaganda can come from the killing industry, but also from traditional practices, which are given particular credibility by well-known ethnologists, based purely on the unacceptability of tradition, where, of course, economic interest is again present. But it all stems from the commodification of all that is animate or inanimate – which is why the ethical and political model of veganism is portrayed as a fashion or a lifestyle for elites. It is essential that we see ourselves as part of nature, not as the master of nature.

An abolitionist approach should be pursued, based on critical animal studies, with the fundamental discourse that the animal is a sentient being and nobody’s property, that it is neither an object, nor a commodity, nor food. Tradition should not be an excuse to exploit and kill animals.<sup>34</sup> Why should an animal have to have some added value to become part of a moral community, because neither does a human being – no one has to fulfil or be something, it is enough to be born human – and that should suffice for animals, too. It is enough to be a sentient being with a moral and legal status in a multi-species community.<sup>35</sup>

As Best (2014) has already said, academic writing about animals and their situation is by no means the solution, because it must be linked to action and not be apolitical. Writing about animals should have consequences, which should be to change something that is making life impossible for animals; to change some harmful practice that is taking their lives or causing them suffering. And that is our intention, with a firm commitment, to try to influence an end to the slaughter of pigs as a negative tradition. With a critically animal-

**33**

*Gunda*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunda\\_\(2020\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunda_(2020_film)). The director stated: “Documentary film is an excellent tool for showing the reality of the world, for showing things that we ourselves do not see, that we do not want to see, or that we have collectively agreed not to see, and thus allow ourselves not to think. Gunda and I want people to see these animals as sentient beings and encourage them to think about the possibility of their consciousness and solitude. That’s why I think Gunda is the most personal and important film I’ve made as a filmmaker and as a person” Cf. *Reason, called Gunda*, <https://greenfilmshooting.net/blog/en/2021/08/14/a-reason-called-gunda>. From the point of view of a non-anthropocentric treatment of pigs living a relatively free life, the film is relatively positive, perhaps as much a reminder as literature of how pigs should live a life on their own terms. But in the end, we see Gunda searching for her offspring who have been taken away from her, and we realise that although the sow lives a free family life for a while, its life and the lives of its offspring are subject to human domination. Why didn’t the director take care of Gunda and its piglets and find them a sanctuary where they could live out their natural lives? So, it seems to be yet another neo-anthropocentric cinematic representation, the use of animals for a cinematic venture.

**34**

We need to replace this practice with new ritual options – instead of feeding on pigs’ bodies, we feed on plant food, we organise socialising with pigs who live their lives without the risk of losing them. If we could begin to see the home pig slaughter as a mere butchery without the context of a ritual feast, if we could begin to see the pig at least in the same status as the urban dog, if we could see the pieces of meat as pieces of a carcass, if we could incorporate ►

into our concept of the world that the pig is part of a moral community of living beings and is not meant for human use or abuse in any way, then we would be able to view all killing as barbaric. This could then be extended to all other animal species, thus ending animal genocide.

### 35

There is also the question of intersectionality or the intersectionality of the slaughter-butcher. Why does anyone insist on butchering a pig – can it really be a credible profession – why not just divert the slaughterer or butcher into another profession, or even create a new profession, the profession of caring for farm animals – in shelters, which would be opened and subsidised, just like sanctuaries for cats and dogs. This would turn violence into non-violence and strengthen compassion.

centric approach to animals, we recognise their categorisation as property and their exploitation for profit, which is a fundamental element of the global economic structure. Veganism must be an expression of an ethical and political commitment to social justice. It must be an ethical model with an active commitment to the rights of all living beings. They are no longer property, but are perceived as persons whose interests must be considered as human and for whom equal rights must be asserted (Bisgould, 2014: 163; cf. also Pavlovič, 2018).

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## Koline ali redefinicija tradicije in industrijski holokavst

Prispevek govori o še vedno obstoječi in trdovratni »kulturni« praksi ubijanja ene živalske vrste. To prakso imenujemo koline (kjer se ubija prašiča/svinjo kot »rejno« žival). Obravnava ga skozi zgodovino, folkloro, literaturo in šege. To prakso vzporeja z resničnostjo današnjega dne ob razkrivanju industrijskih agrokulturnih praks ter ob emotivnih srečanjih s prašiči/svinjami.

Koline danes smo preučili s stališča živali in njihove intrinzične vrednosti, z redefinicijo tradicije. Preučili smo znana etnološka stališča, ki prakso kolin nekritično uvrščajo med t. i. kulturno dediščino, zato bo naš koncept drugačen – to tradicijo bomo imenovali negativna tradicija, ki se kljub sodobnim spoznanjem o prašiču/svinji kot čutečih bitjih nadaljuje kot ubijalska dediščina. Hkrati pa prikazujemo tematizacijo kolin v folklori in izbranih delih slovenske literature, s poudarkom na sodobnem leposlovju, kjer vidimo transformiranje teh praks, ob prikazu popolnega obrata v percepciji prašiča/svinje kot subjekta in njegove zaščite v zavetiščih.

Hkrati predstavljamo tematizacijo kolin v ljudskem izročilu (v pesmih, kot so: Koline, Furež, Veseli čas prihaja) in v izbranih delih slovenske književnosti (Jure Jakob, Koline; Suzana Tratnik, Igre z Greto), s poudarkom na sodobnem leposlovju (Jure Delata, Strašna pravljica). Tu vidimo transformacijo teh praks, ki kaže na popoln preobrat v dojemanju prašiča/svinje kot subjekta in njegove zaščite v zavetiščih. Razpravljamo o resničnem življenju prašičev in svinj znotraj industrijske proizvodnje, ki predstavlja popolno desubjektivizacijo in individualizacijo prašiča/svinje kot čutečega bitja. To je seveda veliko hujše in bolj množično kot zakol v podeželskih okoljih – v tem okolju se zdi, da so množice prašičev kot številke v taboriščih smrti, ki ne morejo živeti niti do svojega zadnjega dejanja kot bitja, temveč kot blago. Edina skupna točka, ki združuje obe vrsti prašičev, farmskega in industrijskega, je smrt. Slednje je neizogibno, razen če se posamezni subjekt upre tako, da pobegne bodisi pred klanjem na kmečkih dvoriščih bodisi pred klanjem v industrijskih klavnicah. Predlagamo, kako zamenjati zakol prašičev doma s pozitivnimi praksami (npr. opazovanje prostega življenja prašičev v zavetiščih), odpiramo možnost razmišljanja o popolni odpravi te prakse in pravno vprašanje pravic živali.





# GMO Apocalypse; or, The So-Called Mysterious Extinction of Bees

*The world we have lost is organic.*

Carolyn Merchant

Claude Lévi-Strauss observed that the separation of humans from their natural environment, to which they both morally and physically belong, forces them to live in an artificial setting imposed by modern urban life, posing a significant threat to the species' mental health. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss critically notes how this distortion of urban civilisation, a byproduct of industrialisation, has manifested ideologically in philosophy and morality. He argues that it has reached a point where, "in the name of humanism, they exalt this separation of man from other forms of life, leaving man with only self-love as the principle of thought and action" (Lévi-Strauss, 1988: 261). Although Claude Lévi-Strauss had already warned anthropologists in his 1962 book *Totemism Today* that animals provide essential conceptual sources for us, emphasising in the concept of explaining totemism how animals are *good* for thinking because they, like the plant world, offer a method of thinking, in 1998 Jhan Hochman, in his book *Green Cultural Studies*, had to reiterate how the humanities were still not *green*, or how, even in the 1990s, the humanities continued to focus (solely) on race, gender, sex, and class, while still neglecting the question of species. Or, as Kari Weil in her book *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012), within the framework of the animal turn, often cites Derrida's statement: "An animal looks at us and we are naked before it (her/him). Thinking, perhaps, begins there" (cf. Weil, 2012: XV).

**1**  
The text opens with a *possible* meeting (in one of the possible worlds) that could provide quality solutions to the bee disappearance problem.

**2**  
Artyom Lukin is Deputy Director for Research at the School of Regional and International Studies, Far Eastern Federal University (Vladivostok, Russia). He is also Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations.

**3**  
The publication *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* was published in 2006 by The Livestock, Environment and Development (LEED) Initiative that is supported by the World Bank, the European Union, etc. The web-page of the publication states: "A high impact publication from 2006, *Livestock's Long Shadow* used the most recent and complete data available to demonstrate the 'environmental issues and options' relating to livestock." Cf. <https://livestockdata.org/publications/livestocks-long-shadow>

Perhaps the best way to begin the narrative of the mysterious disappearance of bees is by imagining a hypothetical meeting between Artyom Lukin, Árpád Pusztai, and William Engdahl—an encounter that, regrettably, has yet to occur, an encounter that unfortunately has not yet happened.<sup>1</sup> Artyom Lukin, a Russian academic and expert in international relations, with a focus on East Asia and Russia's foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region,<sup>2</sup> suggests that we entered a cataclysmic and fateful period in human history in 2020. According to his assessments, it all began with the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 and in 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic devastated the global economy and exacerbated existing tensions between the ruling hegemon (the United States) and the new superpower (China). In summary, his estimation in 2020 was that war between America and China is not only possible, but inevitable (Index, 2020). This global end, at least the end of natural food as it had been until just a hundred years ago, thus, the end of organic food, is also evident in the global "liberal" interest in GMO food and monoculture farming systems that do not support biodiversity-based ecosystems. Monocultures, mainly grown for export in the Third World, are more susceptible to pests than mixed crops grown on small farms. Monoculture farming also erodes the soil as it constantly requires increased doses of pesticides, as was the case with cotton growers in Central America. Over time, the cotton boll weevil (*Anthonomus grandis*) became resistant to chemicals.

While at the beginning, growers sprayed cotton only a few times a season, by the mid-sixties they were spraying it ten times, and by the end of that decade, twice as often. (Lappé, Collins, Rosset, Esparza, 2005: 124)

## A critique of GMO and/or conspiracy theory

Árpád Pusztai, known as the prophet of the GMO apocalypse, emphasises how Americans think less about the quality of food "because they are forced not to ask" and predicts that the world as we know it will disappear by 2050 – "It will not be destroyed by terrorists but by scientists" (Pusztai, 2008: 119). In addition to the danger of the GMO apocalypse, there is, of course, the real danger of the impact of the meat and dairy industry on global warming (Marjanić, 2008; 2019). The FAO report *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* (2006), a 400-page report, highlights that animal husbandry, or the meat and dairy industry, contributes to global warming by 18 %, far more than the entire world transportation sector (Steinfeld, 2006: XXI–XXII, 272).<sup>3</sup> Animal husbandry accounts for 9 % of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, mainly due to deforestation for pasture and arable land. These scientific predictions can be documented by data from the documentary *Devour the Earth* (UK, 1995), as well as data presented by F. William Engdahl, an American-German writer and geopolitical analyst known

for his writings on economic and political issues, who points out that whoever controls the world's seed supply, controls the world (Engdahl, 2005).<sup>4</sup> Investigative journalist Krešimir Mišak summarised the work of William Engdahl by stating that through his three books, he analysed three levers of power for the global elite – oil, GMOs, and money. These books are *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order* (1992), which delves into the history of oil and its influence on geopolitics, *Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation* (2007), in which he explores the implications of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture, and *Gods of Money: Wall Street and the Death of the American Century* (2010). Mišak also highlights that Jeffrey Smith wrote an indispensable book on uncovering industrial and governmental lies about the safety of GMO food, titled *Seeds of Deception*, as well as the book by Dr. Marijan Jošt<sup>5</sup> and Thomas S. Cox, *Intellectual Challenge of Self-Destructive Technology* (cf. Mišak, 2010: 379).<sup>6</sup>

Árpád Pusztai noted that animals that ate GMO tomatoes did not grow in accordance with desired parameters but showed signs of retardation; their internal organs were not well developed, and some the brains of some animals also showed signs of malformation – they had a slower immune system. After making statements in the media about the dangers of GMO food, Pusztai became a national hero, but attacks on his scientific integrity soon began; efforts were made to silence him, and he was threatened with a lawsuit.<sup>7</sup>

Due to financial reasons, he could not afford legal defence, so fellow scientists came to his aid, and since 1999, he has regained his freedom of speech. Among other things, he warned that bovine growth hormone is only allowed in the United States. This hormone increases milk production in cows but shortens their lives; the amount of milk a cow could produce over ten years, they produce in three to four years. Moreover, this milk harms human health, causing prostate cancer as well as breast cancer. Herbicides came into use around 1955, but superweeds that are increasingly resistant have started to develop. While there were only a few of them in the seventies, by the late nineties, some 250 such weed species had been identified by scientists. The problem is that herbicide residues remain in the grain, green mass, i.e., in what is used for animal and human consumption. Moreover, there is the issue that the testing of GMO crops is conducted by the multinational corporations that created them; the tests are not public and do not cover a period of time that is long enough to show their effects.

Árpád Pusztai is a Hungarian-born biochemist and nutritionist who gained prominence in the late 1990s due to his controversial research on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and their potential effects on health. Pusztai worked at the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, Scotland, where he conducted experiments to determine the effects of genetically modified potatoes on rats.

In 1998, Pusztai's research findings were brought to public attention when he claimed that feeding genetically modified potatoes to rats led to stunted growth, impaired

**4** William Engdahl's sees the spread of GMO seeds, crops, and food as one aspect of a plan to reduce the world population (non-euphemistically: genocide), i.e., a plan for the systematic destruction of entire population groups as a deliberate political goal (cf. Engdahl, 2005; Mišak, 2010). Because of these radical interpretations, Engdahl's perspectives sometimes fall into the realm of conspiracy theories, especially regarding geopolitical events and economic policies. While his views have gained attention from certain circles, they are also often criticised for being overly speculative or lacking empirical evidence.

**5** Regarding the local situation (Croatia), I would like to provide a reminder of the actions of the Animal Friends Croatia organisation, which use their campaigns to advocate for a vegan diet, as well as some of our performance artists (e.g., Robert Franciszty – the performance *Four Seasons in the Slaughterhouse*, FEMFEST, Zagreb, 2017; an outstanding project by Tajči Čekada *EcoEco Human Milk – The Only Suitable Milk for Humans*, presented at the Almissa Open Art contemporary art festival, Omiš, 2017) who raise awareness about the dangers of GMOs, meat, and dairy industries with their performances.

**6** Cf. <https://2012-transformacijasvijesti.com/category/kresimir-misak-2>

**7** His research methods were heavily criticised by the scientific community and the scientific consensus at the time did not support his claims about the dangers of GMOs. The Rowett Research Institute subsequently suspended Pusztai, and his research was subjected to thorough scrutiny.

Carolyn Merchant, much as Horkheimer and Adorno did in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), identifies and reveals that the Enlightenment period was the beginning of an era in which science began to atomise, objectify, and dissect Nature, advocating the concept of Nature as an inert, non-intelligent force to be subdued and subjugated to human (male) needs.

immune function, and damage to internal organs. He suggested that the genetic modifications in the potatoes, specifically the introduction of lectins from the snowdrop plant, were responsible for these adverse effects. Pusztai's statements sparked a major public debate about the safety of GMOs and led to widespread concern among consumers.

Despite the controversy surrounding his work, Árpád Pusztai remains a figure of interest in discussions about GMOs and food safety. His case serves as a cautionary tale about the importance of rigorous scientific methodology and peer review in evaluating claims about the health effects of new technologies. In short, his case proves that any criticism of GMO foods leads to being accused of a conspiracy theory.

### **Biopiracy and the hybrid long shelf-life tomato**

Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva has been fighting for years, decades even, for a ban on GMOs and sterile seeds. In her book on biopiracy from 1997, she emphasises that the greatest threat to biodiversity is the uncontrolled spread of monocultures advocated by multinational companies, which is also tied to the production of pesticides and herbicides from the sales of which these companies profit. Similarly, the author shows that non-GMO species can have catastrophic consequences on biodiversity when they are released without control into non-native habitats or when they are released into their native habitats in such numbers that they disrupt the balance of ecosystems. Vandana Shiva notes that by 1997, more than a hundred and ninety animals had been genetically engineered (Shiva, 2006: 32). Nature has been turned into a commodity, and in this context, the author quotes ecofeminist theorist Carolyn Merchant, who in her book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution* (1980) emphasises that the rise of reductionist science has allowed nature to be declared dead, inert, and worthless. Or, as Slavoj Žižek ironically summarises the critique of capitalism – “If there is one good thing about capitalism it is that under it, Mother Earth no longer exists” (Žižek, 2015). This particularly relates to the rise of the reductionist paradigm of biology, which assigns value only to one species – humans – and proclaims instrumental value to all other species through speciesist discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Merchant highlights that, in both Western and non-Western cultures, nature is traditionally feminine (1980: XXIII).

Bioethicist Hrvoje Jurić emphasises that the promotion of GMOs serves goals that are no longer hidden. These are very clear objectives of concentrated capital and certain countries, primarily the United States. Within this context, Hrvoje Jurić reminds us that the development of bioethics in Croatia is closely linked to debates on the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), succinctly summarised in the title of Valerije Vrček's book – *GMO: Between Coercion and Resistance*. Numerous scientists, environmental activists, journalists, and even some politicians have been involved in resisting



the imposition of GMOs since the mid-1990s. In return, their warnings were dismissed as pseudoscientific exaggeration and unfounded panic-mongering. This happened, for example, to Marijan Jošt, and these accusations were an integral part of a conspiracy, the standard strategy of which is to discredit its opponents as mere “conspiracy theorists.” However, documents made publicly available thanks to Wikileaks,<sup>9</sup> Hrvoje Jurić further points out, have confirmed these so-called “conspiratorial” theses, hypotheses, and syntheses (Jurić, 2013).

In addition to GMO food, there is also a problem with hybrid species. According to data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 75 % of the world’s cultivated varieties have disappeared in the past hundred years. Furthermore, there are hybrid species of fruits and vegetables, with their engineered beauty and longevity – such as the long shelf-life tomato created by Israeli scientist Haim D. Rabinowitch, which can last up to three weeks, unlike natural varieties – which are no longer prevalent in the market because they are not profitable, considering that their natural, normal lifespan is only three to four days. In the 1970s and 1980s, scientists Haim D. Rabinowitch and Nachum Kedar sparked a global revolution with tomatoes endowed with an extended shelf life. However, these tomatoes lack flavour and do not contain as many minerals and vitamins as “homegrown,” natural tomatoes. In the documentary film *Seeds of Profit* (2019, directed by Linda Bendali), Haim D. Rabinowitch emphasises that the market does not demand tomato quality in terms of mineral and vitamin content but only their long-shelf-life.

Through multiple hybridisations, scientists continuously breed tomatoes that are redder, smoother, and firmer. However, in doing so, tomatoes have lost a quarter of their calcium and more than half of their vitamins. The problem of hybrid species is presented in the documentary *Seeds of Profit* (2019, directed by Linda Bendali), which highlights that two-thirds of seeds belong to the following multinational corporations: Bayer – Monsanto (now owned by Bayer),<sup>10</sup> DowDuPont, Syngenta (based in Basel, Switzerland, and quite active in the Croatian market), and Limagrain. The Vilmorina corporation, based in Israel, also uses artificial bees for plant pollination; these are electric brushes known as robotic *bee-drones*, pollination drones (Ponti, 2017).<sup>11</sup> Each of these corporate giants has its market, and they produce seeds in underdeveloped countries, such as India, with underpaid labour, primarily based on women and child labour. Workers receive a handful of rupees as wages, while companies generate turnover exceeding 2 billion euros.

This could frame a rather alarming political narrative, as the European Parliament in February 2024 narrowly supported the use of new genomic techniques in agriculture, with lawmakers claiming that this would accelerate the green transition by creating more resilient plants. In short, rules for GMOs in the European Union are being relaxed. “German federal agency warns there is no scientific basis, and EU countries have yet to agree a position amid a row over whether the new class of GMOs should be patentable” (Hodgson, 2024).

**9**

Cf. an article by Marijan Jošt titled “Wikileaks: US Pressuring EU Over Refusal of GM Crops. Confidential Cable from the US Embassy in Paris Recommends Retaliatory Measures Against EU Countries Opposing GMOs” from 2011. The article, among other things, highlights that 2011 began with an inconvenient piece of news published on January 4 in *The Guardian* magazine, which reported that the US ambassador to Paris, Craig Stapleton, a friend and business partner of George Bush, after the French moratorium on Monsanto’s GMO maize MON-810, wants to punish France and advises the government in Washington to “start a military-style trade war against any European Union country which opposed genetically modified (GM) crops” (Jošt, 2016: 210).

**10**

German multinational Bayer’s takeover of Monsanto in 2016 (Widger, 2021: 1).

**11**

With the decline in natural pollinators like bees, researchers and engineers have been exploring the concept of *robotic drones* that can pollinate plants. These drones are often equipped with brushes or other mechanisms to collect and distribute pollen, mimicking the behavior of bees.

12

Cf. “Hrana koja će nestati ako nestane pčela” [Food Will Vanish if Bees Die Out], <https://alternativa-za-vas.com/index.php/clanak/article/izumiran-je-pcela>

13

Cf. “Zašto nam izumiru pčele” [Why Are Bees Dying], <https://argos.hr/ekologija/zasto-nam-izumiru-pcele/> The U.S. Government claims that glyphosate is safe, and even approved an increase in glyphosate levels in Monsanto’s products in 2013. Glyphosate is primarily used on crops such as corn or soybeans that are genetically modified to withstand its use (Marušić, 2016, http).

14

However, unlike non-native honey bees, native bees are even more endangered. “This distinction is important because European honey bees have a whole industry working to sustain them – to treat sick colonies – whereas wild bees don’t” (Jones, 2023).

15

Their webpage contains no mention of negative effects, cf. <https://www.enlist.com/en/herbicides.html>

## The extinction of bees – Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD)

Geneticist and plant breeder Marijan Jošt, regarding the extinction of bees, refers to Einstein’s saying that when bees die out, humans will also die out, and warns that every third bite we eat comes from crops pollinated by bees. In an article published in 2014, he notes that for about a decade, there have been discussions about the dying-off and extinction of bees, initially blaming mobile phones and radiation, and then chemicals used in food production. “The US National Agricultural Statistics Service reports a halving of the number of bees” (cf. Jošt, 2016: 247). Science terms this tragic phenomenon as “Colony Collapse Disorder” (CCD), and studies show that it is caused by glyphosate, the active substance found in the Roundup herbicide, which is massively used in the production of GMO crops today. CCD is characterised by the sudden disappearance of worker bees from a beehive, leaving behind the queen and a few immature bees. This phenomenon has been observed since at least the mid-2000s and has been attributed to a combination of factors, including pesticide exposure, habitat loss, pathogens, parasites, and stressors related to commercial beekeeping practices.<sup>12</sup> Beekeepers have been recording instances of colony collapse disorder since 2006, noting the presence of empty hives. Sick bees leave the hive to die outside in order to prevent the spread of infection within the colony. The bees in question are European honey bees (*Apis mellifera*), the only domesticated or semi-domesticated species.<sup>13</sup> As Sergej Forenbacher states regarding the Hymenoptera from the bee family (*Apidae*), subfamily honey bees (*Apinae*): “It is the most widely known and developed member of the flower-bee group (*Apoidea*), which visits the flowers of plants to collect not only pollen but also nectar” (Forenbacher, 2002: II, 80).<sup>14</sup>

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), despite warnings, approved a combination product of Monsanto’s Roundup and an even more toxic herbicide from Dow Chemical, 2,4-D, an herbicide that was a component of the infamous forest defoliant “Agent Orange” during the Vietnam War (Jošt, 2016: 247). Marijan Jošt, with frightening predictions, enumerates a possible apocalypse: the approved combination is called “Enlist Duo” – “May God help us since mankind has lost its mind” (Jošt, 2016: 248).<sup>15</sup>

It has been determined that glyphosate can affect the learning and adopted behaviour of bees and, over time, influence the characteristics of the colony in the hive. The concentrations of Roundup herbicide used in practice can alter (reduce) the short-term memory of bees. Since bees do not die immediately but return to the hive, they bring the herbicide into contact with the larvae. This means that young bees will have a smaller flight radius from the hive, ultimately leading to the disappearance of the colony over time. (Jošt, 2016: 247)

Recent developments have seen increased resistance to the second most effective weed killer, 2,4-D, which is combined with glyphosate resistance. Although the Environmental Protection Agency approved the combined product, called Enlist Duo, in 2014, 2,4-D is associated with an increase in cases of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and numerous neurological disorders, as reported by researchers in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (Ražem, 2018: 335). Jeffrey M. Smith, in his book *Seeds of Deception*, emphasises that genetic engineering could be a wake-up call because it raises the question of how democracy can be upheld based on the hegemony of just one company, considering that Monsanto (at the time of writing the book) controls 85 % of genetically modified germplasm and has the power to fill the stock of commercial seed supplies with genetically modified variants.

I will mention just two examples of the “mysterious” death of bees: a case from 2019 when a large poisoning of bees occurred in Kikinda, resulting in the deaths of 1,668 bee colonies. It was noted that such poisoning had not been recorded before “because the bee mortality was practically total, and the bees that initially survived the poisoning because they were in a sealed brood died within the next few days immediately after hatching, which best illustrates the strength of the pesticide used” (“Nastavlja se ...”, 2019).

In Međimurje, in an area that spans a few kilometres between the settlements Gardinovec, Domašinec, Sivica, Podturen, Ferketinec, and Dekanovec, a massive die-off of around 57 million bees was recorded in 2020 (totaling 1,150 beehives, with approximately 50,000 bees in each hive). Željko Trupković, president of the Agacija association,<sup>16</sup> stated that they are awaiting the results of expert examinations, “after which beekeepers will know if they will even have to burn all the beehives in which the bees died” (“Pomor 57 milijuna pčela...”, 2020).<sup>17</sup> Marin Kovačić stated that there are very few bees in their natural habitat, and they struggle to survive, which is why they are considered an endangered species (“Pomor 57 milijuna pčela ...”, 2020; cf. “Sjećate li se”, 2020).

It is worth noting that, until September 2020, mainstream media did not mention the possible impact of glyphosate on the mass deaths of bees.<sup>18</sup> Beekeeper Antun Tot notes that the bees are completely disoriented and just fall down – “One would think they’ve gone mad, but the cause is an insecticide sprayed on some fields” (Rukavina, 2020).

The so-called mysterious extinction of bees is the focus, for example, of the documentary *Silence of the Bees* (Nature Documentary, screenplay: Dough Shultz) from 2011.<sup>19</sup> In winter 2006, beekeepers noticed an unusual phenomenon with massive bee deaths. To increase awareness of the importance of bees for maintaining balance in nature and the survival of humanity as a whole (it is estimated that one-third of the world's food supply directly depends on bee pollination), the United Nations declared May 20 as World Bee Day in 2017, after an initiative led by the Republic of Slovenia.

Around two billion tons of pesticides are used worldwide, and nearly one billion tons of pesticides are applied in the United States alone, which amounts to three and a

**16**

Agacija – Association of Beekeepers of Međimurje County, <http://www.agacija.hr/>

**17**

Both media used speciesist Croatian verbs for the death of bees – *uginule*, *ugibale*.

**18**

For the negative effects of glyphosate, which is one of the most commonly used herbicides globally; it's used in agriculture, forestry, urban and industrial areas, and for aquatic weed control, on people, cf. Pusztai, Bardocz, 2011: Glyphosate residues can sometimes be found in food products, water sources, and soil due to its widespread use. Regulatory agencies set limits on acceptable glyphosate residues in food and water to protect public health.

**19**

Cf. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/silence-of-the-bees-introduction/38/>

20

E-mail conversation from February 2024.

21

Johann Schreiner notes, as recorded in *Leksikon socijalne ekologije* (Lexicon of Social Ecology, ed. Ivan Cifrić), the concept of *nature* encompasses all living or non-living phenomena that have not been created by humans, and it is broader than the concept of human natural environment, which represents only a fraction of nature.

half kilograms per capita, and this quantity is further increasing (Lappé, Collins, Rosset, Esparza, 2005: 114). In much of the Third World, the majority of pesticides are not used to ensure basic food crops, but for industrial crops (Ibid.: 122).

Bože Kokan, senior curator and entomologist at the Natural History Museum in Split, states the following in relation to the anthropocentric treatment of insects as natural enemies:

Due to damages to crops and the transmission of infectious diseases, humans have started an actual war with insects, and the consequences are immeasurable and unpredictable. We use weapons of mass destruction against insects: chemical warfare (initially DDT ...), radiological warfare (sterilisation with radioactive isotopes), and biological warfare (bacteria, fungi ..., insects as natural enemies). Radar is also used to track the movement of insects. There is also debate about whether electromagnetic radiation, which supports the operation of mobile phones, affects the lives of insects. Because of insects, we have also begun genetic modification of organisms (GMOs), and then we started thinking about modifying humans. Similarly, insects inspire drone builders. Imagine a swarm of cheap small flying drones that are difficult to defend against, can enter small spaces, and cause damage to the most expensive facilities. After all, the word *drone* also means a male bee. I know that European countries are trying to develop plant protection products that do not contain substances toxic to insects. The question is how successful they are in doing so.<sup>20</sup>

### **Towards the end and/or apocalypse or “There is no life, nothing, only the smell of death”**

The book *Ova jedina Zemlja* (*This Only Earth*) by Rudi Supek, published in 1972, warned about many of the issues currently affecting Croatia on a regional scale of the SFRJ. It was written at the time of the first United Nations conference on environmental issues, held in Stockholm in 1972, and was based on an appeal warning about the serious consequences of demographic expansion, the imbalance between humans and the biosphere, and environmental pollution (Supek, 1989: 19).<sup>21</sup> In 2018, Jason Lederman, in the context of global warming, warned that an increase of just two degrees could result in the disappearance of entire nations and peoples, all Earthlings.

Although the majority of the population in Croatia believes that Monsanto has not yet entered the domestic market, the company has been present since as far back as 2001, when they first established a branch in Croatia. They registered the company's headquar-

ters in Zagreb, at Vrlička 30, only to later change the company's headquarters and move it to a new address – Ozaljska 136, where they still operate (Marušić, 2016, http). The largest client of Monsanto in Croatia, connected to the planting of hybrid Dekalb corn, is Agrokor,<sup>22</sup> owned by the wealthiest Croatian, Ivica Todorić, a tycoon on a global scale (Marušić, 2016). Investigative journalist Maro Marušić, according to data from Monsanto, writes that Monsanto's corn is planted:

In western and eastern Croatia. As for Dalmatia and Herzegovina (...), hybrid corn is not planted there, but glyphosate is sold in viticulture and fruit growing. The same glyphosate preparation, sold by Monsanto in Dalmatia, is highly controversial worldwide. It is an active ingredient in the Roundup herbicide, a Monsanto product, for which the World Health Organization (WHO) stated a year ago that it 'probably causes cancer' (Marušić, 2016, http).<sup>23</sup>

An article published by Erick V. S. Motta, Kasie Raymann, and Nancy A. Moran in 2018 warned that glyphosate, "the primary herbicide used globally for weed control, targets the 5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase (EPSPS) enzyme in the shikimate pathway found in plants and some microorganisms."

Thus, glyphosate may affect bacterial symbionts of animals living near agricultural sites, including pollinators such as bees. The honey bee gut microbiota is dominated by eight bacterial species that promote weight gain and reduce pathogen susceptibility." (Motta, Raymann, Moran, 2018: 10305).

Simultaneously, ecologists warn that various non-human animals carry microplastic particles in and on them. Research conducted in Copenhagen and in semi-urban and rural areas near Copenhagen showed that thirteen different synthetic polymers can be found on the bodies of bees. "The most common is polyester, followed by polyethylene and polyvinyl chloride," as stated by Andrija Filipović (2024: 532–552).

In this context, Alf Hornborg (2017, 2020) raises the question of the relationship between anthropology and the Anthropocene/Capitalocene,<sup>24</sup> noting that most anthropologists are still preoccupied with understanding local experiences rather than global processes like climate change as it also calls for more responsible efforts to build an interdisciplinary theory of the Anthropocene:

Rather than analytical clarity, the aim of much of this writing seems to be to fashion prose as imaginatively as possible, replete with evocative allusions, poetic metaphors, and unbridled associations.<sup>25</sup> (...) I am agitated not only because we are destroying the planet, but because legions of critical

**22**  
Cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrokor>

**23**  
Some studies have suggested links between glyphosate exposure and health issues such as cancer, although regulatory agencies like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) have deemed it safe when used in accordance with instructions. Cf. EPA and EFSA web-pages. However, in 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a branch of the World Health Organization (WHO), classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans." Cf. IARC web-page.

**24**  
The term *Capitalocene*, coined by sociologist Jason W. Moore, critiques the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene, which suggests that human activity as a whole is responsible for environmental degradation. Jason W. Moore highlights that the Capitalocene does not stand for capitalism as an economic and social system. "It is not a radical inflection of Green Arithmetic. Rather, the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature – as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology" (Moore, 2016: 6).

**25**  
It is about Hornborg's criticism of the writing style of the Haraway-Tsing-Moore triad (among other authors) about the Anthropocene. "We might ask ourselves why anthropological deliberations on the Anthropocene increasingly sound like dinner conversations after some glasses of wine. I am not happy about the signals we are sending to our students, who discover that academic success (such as being published by a major university press) may be inversely proportional to clarity" (Hornborg, 2017: 62).

As Adam Koons and Jennifer Trivedi stated, “Disaster Anthropology uses theoretical and methodological tools from across anthropological subfields to understand the effects of disasters” (Koons, Trivedi, 2021).

academics are devoting their intellectual energies to everything but contributing to an analytically rigorous grasp of our dilemma. Such a synthesis must necessarily be interdisciplinary (Hornborg, 2017: 5).

Frances D’Souza, the founder and director (1977–1983) of the International Disaster Institute, raised a similar question in 1985: “How far have anthropologists directed their attention towards the alleviation of suffering caused by disasters and how far have they been able to persuade aid agencies of the value of such an informed approach?” (Souza, 1985: 18).<sup>26</sup>

The August 2021 issue of *Anthropology Today* magazine warned that worldwide citizen movements against glyphosate, the world’s most widely used herbicide, have prompted safety assessments. In Europe, it is expected that a long-term process will conclude that glyphosate is harmful to health and that it should be banned in all 28 Member States, which would represent a significant blow to the agrochemical industry. From Vietnam and Thailand to Colombia and Mexico, the US government has threatened trade problems if a ban is implemented. The message is clear: Chemical regulation is an international, not a domestic matter, as the authors of the mentioned issue of the magazine *Anthropology Today* (the August 2021 issue) point out.

On the other hand, glyphosate has become the standard for the new populism. In Great Britain, Brexiteers argued that an independent Great Britain would have the freedom to stop glyphosate; however, it was just another promise that was quickly forgotten. Since 2010, glyphosate has helped foster new coalitions between environmentalists and national groups calling for sovereignty from agrochemical regulations. Glyphosate has played a role in shaping developments in post-war Sri Lanka and the European Union before and after Brexit, as summarised by Tom Widger in his article “Glyphosate regulation and sovereignty politics around the world” (2021) in the mentioned issue of *Anthropology Today*:

Unsurprisingly, glyphosate played a role in the ongoing saga of the UK’s departure from the European Union. In 2016, ‘Vote Leave’ campaigners promised farmers that an independent UK would not implement a European ban on glyphosate. At the same time, they pointed to Europe’s complex regulatory structures as evidence that Europe could or would not protect its citizens from harmful chemicals. Following the Conservative 2017 general election victory, the environment minister and lead Brexiteer Michael Gove boasted that the UK government now enjoyed the power to ban a raft of agrochemicals the EU still allowed. Yet after the transition period ended in January 2021, the government reapproved EU-banned neonicotinoid pesticides linked with bee colony collapse disorder and lifted EU limits on glyphosate use. (Widger, 2021: 2)

Glyphosate brings about what was described by Alojzije Friščić from Nedelišće in Međimurje, where 59 beehives were affected. Among them, 39 had between 50,000 to 60,000 bees, while the others, in newly formed colonies, had nearly 20,000 bees – “The smell of death surrounds the apiary, there is no life, nothing” (Šoštarić, 2020).

This was artistically foreshadowed in Maja Lunde’s triadic dystopian novel *The History of Bees* (2015) when, in the segment dealing with China at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, she describes a time when bees have already become extinct. She finishes with the fate of the fruit pollinator family, the Tao family in District 242 – Shirong, Sichuan 2098. China, in these dystopian worlds, had lost a hundred billion bees by 2029.

In conclusion, I emphasise that the mythology and symbolism of bees, in their absolute symbolism of life (cf. Alaupović-Gjeldum 2004, Andrejić 2020, Volarević 2015, Zaradija Kiš 2023), lead to the precise quote attributed to Einstein: “If the bee disappeared off the face of the Earth, man would only have four years left to live.” This quote was often repeated in regional contexts by multimedia artist Ivan Ladislav Galeta (1947–2014) as a serious warning – “The moment bees disappear, civilization disappears, and the moment man disappears, paradise would arise on Earth.” In the folklore representations of animals in the South Slavic area, only bees were said to have died, unlike other animals, which illustrates speciesism towards other animal species. However, this speciesism in this case documents that today we are seriously and apocalyptically crossing the boundary of life (cf. Golež Kaučič, 2011: 123). Similarly, Natko Nodilo highlights how *our people* used to say (with an *animalistic ethos*), that bees died by using the Croatian word for people dying, pass away, instead of the Croatian word for animals – *ugibati* (cf. Nodilo, 1981: 661).<sup>27</sup>

#### *Post Scriptum for The Lives of Bees:*

EU elections are in June 2024, and some lawmakers are promising landmark legislation to limit these food-endangering chemicals. Ekō team

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#### **27**

The Croatian translation of Catherine Herbert Howell’s book (2005: 44) used the word *ugibati*, reserved for animals. Bože Kokan, cultural entomologist, similarly recalls from his childhood in the Dalmatian hinterland that it was said that bees *died like humans, not animals*. Claire Preston points out that in the 1830s, a bee-rights movement emerged in the US, characterised by the motto: “Never kill a bee.” James Boswell observed that a Corsican convent of Franciscan monks utilised juniper wood, “(from) the smoke of which the bees retire ... They never kill a bee” (Preston, 2015: 84).

28

Photo taken from: Vojislav Mazzocco: "U Međimurju otrovani deseci milijuna pčela, pčelari nam otkrili na što sumnjaju" (Tens of millions of bees poisoned in Međimurje, beekeepers reveal their suspicions). <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/sto-stoji-iza-nezapamcenog-trovanja-pcela-u-medjimurju-pcelari-imaju-teoriju/2190521.aspx>

29

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Figure 1: Burial of poisoned bees in Međimurje, 2020.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 2: "Some beekeepers have up to 20,000 euros in damages: Bees die in agony for seven days".<sup>29</sup> Photo: Dejan Turk. "Rapeseed oil was sprayed near the apiary, resulting in the poisoning of bee colonies. All 66 communities have been affected, poisoned, and I fear that most of them won't survive. Today marks the seventh day, and they are still dying in agony," said Međimurje beekeeper Dejan Turk.



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## GSO apokalipsa ali skrivnostno izumrtje čebel

Prispevek predstavlja dva nedavna primera tako imenovanega »skrivnostnega« izumrtja čebel v regionalnem kontekstu (Srbija, Hrvaška) kot primera nevarnosti GSO hrane, o katerih v svetovnem merilu sistematično poročata Árpád Pusztai in Marijan Jošt v lokalnem, hrvaškem kontekstu. Prvi primer je iz leta 2019, ko je v obsežni zastrupitvi v Kikindi umrlo 1668 čebeljih družin, drugi primer pa se je zgodil v Medžimurju, ko je leta 2020 umrlo približno 57 milijonov čebel (skupaj 1150 panjev, v vsakem panju pa okoli 50.000 čebel). Omeniti velja, da nobeden od osrednjih medijev ni opozoril na možnost, da je na množično smrt čebel vplival glifosat. Raziskovalci ta pojav imenujejo *Colony Collapse Disorder*, študije pa kažejo, da je krivec glifosat, aktivna snov herbicida Roundup, ki se danes pogosto uporablja pri pridelavi GSO pridelkov (Jošt, 2016: 247).

V reviji *Anthropology Today* (avgust 2021) so bila objavljena opozorila, da so svetovna gibanja državljanov proti glifosatu, najbolj razširjenemu herbicidu na svetu, spodbudila njegove ocene varnosti. V Evropi pričakujejo, da bodo v dolgotrajnem procesu ugotovili, da je glifosat zdravju škodljiv in da bi ga morali prepovedati v vseh osemindvajsetih državah članicah, kar bi pomenilo velik udarec za agrokemično industrijo. Monsanto (Bayerjeva) prisotnost in izdelki, zlasti herbicid Roundup na osnovi glifosata, so se soočili z močnim nasprotovanjem in regulativnim nadzorom po vsej Evropi, vključno s Hrvaško in Slovenijo. Glifosat, aktivna sestavina zdravila Roundup, je bil predmet skrbi za zdravje in okolje. V letu 2016 je bila Slovenija med številnimi državami, ki so uvedle omejitve oziroma prepovedi uporabe glifosata. Te omejitve so bile v veliki meri posledica skrbi glede možnih zdravstvenih tveganj, kot je rak, ki so jih izpostavile organizacije, npr. Mednarodna agencija za raziskave raka (IARC). Trenutno glifosat na Hrvaškem ni popolnoma prepovedan, vendar je njegova uporaba strogo regulirana v skladu s širšimi politikami Evropske unije. EU je pred kratkim obnovila dovoljenje za uporabo glifosata do konca leta 2023 in Hrvaška tako kot druge države EU sledi tem predpisom. Vendar veljajo nekatere omejitve, zlasti glede uporabe glifosata na javnih površinah in v bližini vodnih virov, zaradi skrbi za zdravje in okolje.

Prispevek pregledno dokumentira opozorila znanstvenikov, da glifosat vznemirja črevesno mikrobioto medonosnih čebel. Tako imenovano skrivnostno izumrtje čebel je na primer v središču dokumentarca *Silence of the Bees* (Nature Documentary, scenarij: Dough Shultz) iz leta 2011. Pozimi 2006 so čebelarji opazili nenavaden pojav množične smrti čebel. Da bi povečali zavedanje o pomenu čebel za ohranjanje ravnovesja v naravi in preživetje človeštva kot celote (ocenjujejo, da je ena tretjina svetovne oskrbe s hrano neposredno odvisna od čebeljega oprasevanja), so Združeni narodi leta 2017 na pobudo Slovenije 20. maj razglasili za svetovni Dan čebel.







# Ways of Seeing Bears in Slovenia

## Introduction

The relationship between man and bear is complex and determined by various historical, cultural, geographical and social situations. Bears can be understood as spiritual entities (see Nagy, 2024; Knight, 2008), ritual animals (Black, 1998), mediators between the worlds of the living and the dead (D'Anglure, 2006), national symbols (Platoff, 2012), or as threats to people and their property. The bear's role in a community is often even ambivalent – on the one hand positive, and negative on the other, as will be discussed later in this chapter. This is also the case in Slovenia, where in the past the bear was on the brink of survival due to killing, but today the size of the bear population is provoking controversy, and it is also perceived as a symbol of regional or national pride and unspoilt nature.

Attitudes towards different animals are reflected, among other things, in folklore (Golež Kaučič, 2023). In Slovenia, anthropomorphic negative labels such as filthiness or bloodthirstiness are not usually attributed to the bear. The latter appears from time to time in media reports, which are dominated by headlines that mostly include labels such as problematic, aggressive and dangerous. The bear “appears in only 79 paremiological units and three different folk riddles” (Babič, 2024: 8). Metaphors are often associated with its fur, e.g. in the comparative phrase “to be furry like a bear” (Babič, 2024: 8). Unlike the wolf, which is depicted as cruel and bloodthirsty, the bear in folklore is usually presented as a benevolent, strong creature that “that could also be trained for (human) fun or (ab)use” (Babič, 2024: 18).

## 1

The polar bear has even become a symbol or a medium to communicate the threat of global warming. Lizanne Henderson (2024) also shows its portrayal as an evil monster by the film industry.

Despite the fact that it is not labelled as “impure” in folklore (Douglas, 2002 [1966]), the bear is nevertheless perceived as “dangerous”, due to the fact that it is a representative of the wild – of something untamed and unknown. Although it resembles humans in appearance and behaviour (walking upright, taking care of its young for long periods of time, etc.), it differs from them in its ferocity or by being undomesticated. Crossing the boundary between forest and civilisation, it introduces the dichotomy of disorder (wilderness) vs. order (civilisation) into everyday human life. In this respect, the bear represents man’s “Other” (Said, 1978) – something alien, mysterious.

Potential “conflicts” between humans and bears present a challenge within the context of Slovenian politics and public opinion. Despite the public’s sometimes greater and sometimes lesser affection for bears, attitudes towards bears are determined mainly by a sense of fear and threat. On the other hand, bears are recognised as an important part of nature or the ecosystem, where they play an important role in maintaining the natural balance.<sup>1</sup> This discrepancy in the perception of the bear has led to the fact that the bear in Slovenia, as well as elsewhere in Europe, has now become the so-called “endangered pest” (Knight, 2008). It is protected as an endangered species or a victim of man’s destruction of nature, and its protection is seen as necessary, but only as long as it does not cross the boundary between the human and natural worlds, come in the vicinity of dwellings, or even, and this is extremely rare, attack humans.

This chapter aims to shed light on the attitude towards the bear in Slovenia. In the continuation, the authors first present the status of the brown bear population in Slovenia, and then the results of various public opinion surveys, focusing on changes in attitudes towards the bear. We devote a good part of our attention to the cultural ecosystem services research carried out within the Carnivora Dinarica Interreg Slovenia–Croatia project at the Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, in which both authors actively participated, and to the data collected through focus groups, in which visual artists, tourism workers, farmers and hunters engaged in the field of large carnivores presented their views. At the same time, we try to answer the question of whether the perception of the bear shifted from “good-for-nothing” or “pest” to a symbol of unspoilt nature or even to a non-human subjectivity (today). In doing so, we look at the role of the media and social networks as (co)shapers of attitudes towards large carnivores. Finally, based on the analysis of media publications and online networks, we present the case of the Kočevska Region in Southeast Slovenia, where there occurred a positive attitudinal shift in how the bear is considered by the local population.

The chapter is based on an interplay of quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (focus groups, discursive analysis) approaches, which allows for a more comprehensive picture of social reality (see Podjed, 2019: 27), i.e. an insight into the attitudes and views of the local environment regarding the bear, and, to a certain extent, into the mechanisms that determine these attitudes and perspectives. These methods can, as Nicolas Lescureux and John D. C. Linnell note, together

provide a powerful set of complementary tools to both further our understanding of how animals can influence human culture and society and how it could be possible to influence human and animal behaviours in order to ensure the conservation of endangered species with the minimum of conflict in human-dominated landscapes. (Lescureux and Linnell, 2010: 396)

## Population Status

The brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is a species of the bear family (*Ursidae*) and the largest carnivore living in Europe today. It has a large head, small eyes, and a strong and stocky body, often with a prominent shoulder hump. Male individuals are larger and stronger than female individuals. It is a solitary species, with the male and female individuals only remain together during the mating season. It is an opportunistic omnivore – it eats a seasonally varied diet, choosing the foods with the highest energy intake at a particular time of year (Swenson et al., 2000: 16). Due to their large body mass and omnivorous diet, bears are active over large areas. Therefore, in a fragmented, forest and cultural landscape, they almost inevitably overlap with areas used by humans. It is a highly adaptable species, both in terms of diet and use of living area – it can inhabit a wide variety of habitats and is able to adapt to human-dominated environments. (Zarzo-Aria et al., 2018: 6)

In the past, the bear inhabited all of Europe (except large islands such as Ireland, Iceland, Corsica and Sardinia). However, as the human population grew, bear habitats have been lost to deforestation and increased agriculture. Because of its potential threat to domestic animals, the bear (as well as the wolf and lynx) was systematically eradicated, a process for which bounties were paid. The combination of the deliberate eradication of large carnivores and the destruction of their habitat resulted in the disappearance of bears from a significant part of the original area they inhabited in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Zedrosser et al., 2001: 9). Larger populations of bears remained only in parts of southern and eastern Europe (Linnell et al., 2005: 386).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the situation of large carnivores in Europe began to improve. International legal protection mechanisms (Bern Convention 1982, Alpine Convention 1991, Habitats Directive 1992 (for more information see Vidic, 2003)) were established in many countries, in parallel with the establishment of legal protection, following the significant shifts in public opinion on wildlife conservation that occurred in many countries at the time. Interestingly, much of the early restoration in northern and eastern Europe took place within the context of hunting management, often at a time when large carnivores were being hunted (Swenson et al., 1994: 9). This period also saw the recovery of European populations of large herbivores, which shared a similar fate to that of large carnivores in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over the past decades, as people have moved from rural to urban areas and

By comparison, the bear was first protected in Italy in 1939 and in Austrian Carinthia (at state level, not the whole country of Austria) in 1971 (Simonič, 2003: 297).

agriculture was abandoned, forest cover and the habitat of large carnivores have increased and the need for hunting large carnivores by man has decreased. A new conservation paradigm has emerged, based on assumptions of coexistence rather than exclusion (Boitani and Linnell, 2015: 68), with the focus on the conservation of populations, not individual animals. Today, there are between 15,000 and 16,000 bears in Europe (excluding Russia and Belarus) (Linnell and Cretois, 2018: 21). This shows the species' remarkable adaptability and ability to survive in an environment that has been largely modified by humans. However, their long-term conservation cannot be taken for granted. As will be discussed below, the existence of bears depends in particular on society's goodwill.

### **Attitudes regarding the Bear in Slovenia**

Bears in Slovenia are part of the Alpine-Dinaric-Pindos population, whose habitat extends from the eastern Alps in Austria and north-eastern Italy in the north to the Pindos mountain range in Greece in the south, and totals over 3,000 individuals (Kaczensky et al., 2012: 17). In Slovenia, the bear is an indigenous large carnivore, as confirmed by archaeological findings (Toškan, 2007: 223). The size of the bear population has varied considerably. In the Middle Ages, Slovenia was also dominated by an agricultural and livestock production-oriented economy. On the one hand, hunting large carnivores was a favourite pastime of the nobility, but on the other hand, they were seen as pests because of their predation and the damage they caused. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the so-called hunting orders declared bears, as well as wolves and lynxes, to be harmful animals, which in itself encouraged their control (Korenjak and Adamič, 1996: 130). Hunting large carnivores was a free-for-all, or even part of the serf's duties. This led to the lynx being completely wiped out by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with bears and wolves surviving in small numbers.

Bears have persisted mainly due to protective measures in private, large-holding hunting grounds (Simonič, 2003). In 1889, the grand owner, Prince Karl Auersperg, was the first to ban bear culling on his Kočevska estate and to set compensation for bear damage, and his example was followed by some neighbouring landowners. After World War I, attitudes towards large carnivores deteriorated again, and committees were set up again to eradicate them. In the mid-1930s, the Slovenian Hunting Association took up the cause of bear conservation. In 1935, the bear was protected at the local level, with a decree issued by the Drava Banovina that bears could not be shot, hunted or killed, sold or bought in the districts of Kočevje, Črnomelj, Novo mesto, Logatec and Ljubljana throughout the year (Simonič, 2003: 297).<sup>2</sup> Just before World War II, the number of bears was almost a half greater than it was at the beginning of the century – estimated at 55 to 60 animals. At the end of the 1950s, the population in Slovenia was estimated at 150 individuals (Švigelj, 1961). Its numbers have increased gradually since the beginning of the 1970s, and rapidly grew after the

additional protective decree (*Official Journal of the Republic of Slovenia* 57/93) was issued in 1993. In 1991, the Slovenian Hunting Association protected the wolf and the bear on its own initiative, and in 1993, the Decree on the protection of endangered animal species (*Official Journal of the Republic of Slovenia*, 57/93) fully protected all three large carnivores at the national level and designated them as natural assets. The estimate of the maximum annual size of population or size of population after the arrival of new litter in spring for 1970 totals approximately 190 individuals, rising to 300 for 1993, 570 for 2008 (first genetic monitoring), 800 for 2016 (second monitoring) and 990 for 2020 (Jerina et al., 2024: 7).

But politicisation could not be avoided. Until 1997, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food decided on the culling of bears on the basis of expert opinion. However, due to the domination of the livestock lobby within the Ministry (Simonič, 2003: 298), the number of approved culls doubled, which was opposed by the Slovenian Hunting Association that was supported by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning. Since then, the number of bears set for culling has been an integral part of national political controversies. The political squabbles, which are also reported in the media, and which instil fear in the population and, as a result, less tolerance towards bears, are mainly to the detriment of the latter.

## **Public Opinion on Large Carnivores, with a Focus on Bears**

Public support has proved to be a particularly important factor in modern efforts to conserve large carnivores. Understanding people's attitudes towards (the conservation of) large carnivores and the factors that influence these attitudes can help to ensure that conservation measures are successful (Mitchell et al., 2018: 8). Consensus-building is crucial, particularly for the protection of species considered to be conflict species. Negative public attitudes can lead to a lack of support for their conservation, therefore taking into account people's views that determine their behaviour is crucial for successful coexistence with large carnivores. Studying public attitudes towards large carnivores has been the basis of conservation efforts, particularly since 2000, when 70 % of all surveys were conducted (Dressel et al., 2015: 9).

Various studies have found positive attitudes towards brown bears in several parts of Europe (Dressel et al. 2015). People are more bear-friendly in areas where large bear populations have always been present (e.g. Eastern European countries, Scandinavia). Azevedo et al., 2023, mention in their article the positive attitudes of the inhabitants of Romania and North Macedonia, despite the damage caused by bears in those areas (Dorresteijn et al., 2014: 1150; Lescureux and Linnell, 2010: 197). However, in areas where bears have recently returned after several decades or centuries, attitudes are highly dependent on individual stakeholder groups (Azevedo et al., 2023: 2).



*Figure 1: Wolf, photo by Miha Krofel.*

Beliefs about population size are among the most important factors shaping public expectations of population management (Majić Skrbinšek et al., 2019: 22). If there is a perception among the population that there are too few bears, they will oppose any intervention in the population and will in principle be more supportive of large carnivores. If there is a perception that there are too many bears, especially if conflicts arise at the same time, this results in negative attitudes (Kellert et al., 1996: 983). The situation can be paralleled with that of the conservation and protection of natural and cultural heritage, in which the main factor for protecting a habitat or material property is its “endangerment” or potential disappearance. A sense of rarity stimulates a desire to preserve, prompts a different valuation and changes the meaning of the endangered element (DeSilvey and Harrison, 2019: 1–7). It could be said that awareness of rarity prompts awareness of the value of the endangered element.

## Slovenia

The first surveys of the attitudes of individual public groups towards large carnivores were carried out in Slovenia in 1995 and 2000. The majority of respondents attributed the most positive attributes to bears compared to wolves and lynx (Korenjak, 1995: 2000). The first survey in Slovenia to investigate the attitudes of hunters and residents towards bears in Slovenia showed a predominantly positive attitude towards bears, but the majority of participants were already in that time opposed to the expansion of bear populations and the increase in population numbers. A key factor in predicting attitudes towards bears was the perception of their harmfulness (Kaczensky et al., 2004: 671).

A larger public attitude survey was conducted between 2015 and 2019 (Majić Skrbinšek et al., 2019) and involved a large sample of randomly selected adults living in 137 municipalities where bears are present. The results showed that the wildlife acceptance capacity<sup>3</sup> for bears among the population living in the region inhabited by bears in Slovenia was exceeded, particularly in the Dinaric region. In 2019, 41.7 % of the inhabitants of the Dinaric region thought that there were too many bears in Slovenia and 56.3 % of the inhabitants of the Dinaric region would oppose any increase in the number of bears (Majić Skrbinšek et al., 2019: 23). 67.9 % of the inhabitants in the Dinaric region agreed with bear culling as a measure to control population size (Majić Skrbinšek et al., 2019: 33). Respondents identified the signs of bear presence in the settlement, encountering a bear near their home, bears foraging in the garden, orchard or apiary, and attacks on domestic animals as problematic or very problematic situations. Nevertheless, the bear enjoys a high level of public support in Slovenia. In 2019, 84.6 % of the inhabitants of the Dinaric region responded that it is good or very good that we have bears in Slovenia, and 85.5 % strongly agreed or agreed that it is important to preserve bears for future generations

### 3

The concept of wildlife acceptance capacity is used in wildlife management to determine the population density or abundance of a species (bear) in a particular area or by a particular part of society. It is a subjective assessment that is primarily shaped by the perceptions and beliefs of human users of the environment and has proven important in the past for developing strategies to resolve conflicts between humans and wildlife. More on the concept of wildlife acceptance capacity in Zinn, Manfredo in Vaske 2000.



*Figure 2: Lynx, photo by Miha Krofel.*



(Majić Skrbinšek et al., 2019: 25). Between 2016 and 2019, the perception of the value of bears in the Dinaric region of Slovenia also increased in terms of the potential for developing bear-related tourism and the positive impact of bears on the local economy. In general, younger generations and respondents who are more familiar with bear biology are also more supportive of bear conservation (Majić Skrbinšek et al., 2019: 27).

In summary, public attitudes are very favourable to bears, according to the above-mentioned studies, as long as they remain forest dwellers, part of the wilderness and separated from the human habitat. But in regard to bears being in the vicinity of human habitation, or even causing damage, the drive to reduce bear numbers comes to the fore, but not in the sense of complete eradication.

Research related to people's perceptions and attitudes towards conservation issues is usually aimed at large representative samples using standardised questions, allowing statistical analysis and generalisation. Recently, the use of qualitative data (e.g., interviews and focus groups) has become increasingly popular in understanding attitudes and beliefs related to wildlife, as it tends to better represent the diversity of analysed opinions of individuals and groups, and to explore complex concepts in ambiguous and complex contexts (Drury et al., 2011: 18). A more in-depth analysis of the perception of the value of bears, as identified by Majić Skrbinšek (2019) in a public opinion poll, was explored through focus group interviews by Dremel et al. (2020), who focused on listing the benefits of living in an area where large carnivores are present in the light of the so-called cultural ecosystem services. Some of the findings of the research, in which both authors of this chapter also participated, are presented below.

## **Research on the Benefits of the Presence of Large Carnivores in Slovenia**

The research entitled *Identifying the Importance of Large Carnivores for Society in Slovenia Using Focus Groups* (Dremel et al., 2020) was carried out within the *Carnivora Dinarica Interreg Slovenia–Croatia* project. The authors used the cultural ecosystem services framework (CICES, Haines-Young and Potschin 2018) to identify the various benefits as perceived by the stakeholder groups interviewed (hunters, farmers, tourism workers, artists). The differences in the perception of the benefits of large carnivores among different stakeholder groups, their attitudes towards the size of the population of carnivores, encounters with carnivores and conservation of carnivore populations were analysed in more detail.

Ecosystem services refer to the goods and services of the natural environment or ecosystem that benefit people and are essential to their quality of life. Directly or indirectly, they support or enable our survival. There are provisioning services (ecosystem products such as food, fuel, water, etc.), regulation or balancing services (benefits from

#### 4

Focus groups are small structured groups, usually with six to ten participants, who share a common characteristic and a similar attitude towards the topic at hand. They are facilitated by a moderator using a semi-structured interview approach, based on the participants' responses. They are organised to explore a specific topic and an individual's perspective and experience of that topic through group interaction. They are casual, one-off and carefully planned discussions in which participants share opinions, and respond to each other's comments, ideas and views. The debate should be enjoyable. Participants should not feel pressured to speak up or seek consensus, but should be encouraged to express different views. The focus group in the study consisted of participants from the same interest group, because it is not appropriate to mix individuals with very different lifestyles and because it is good for participants to share experiences related to the investigated topic (Litosseliti, 2003).

#### 5

Some artists live in areas where large carnivores are present, and some artists do not encounter large carnivores because they live outside the area.

ecosystem functioning such as regulation of clean air, climate, water, erosion, etc.), supporting services (necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services with indirect or long-term impacts on people, e.g. soil formation, water cycle, etc.), and the cultural ecosystem services (hereafter referred to as CES) that were the subject of the aforementioned research (MA 2005).

Cultural ecosystem services are “physical settings, locations or situations that give rise to changes in the physical or mental states of people, and whose character is fundamentally dependent on living processes” (Haines-Young and Potschin, 2018: 10). The concept of CES is entirely linked to human societies and human “valuation” of biodiversity (Horgan et al., 2021: 186). They often result in intangible benefits that people derive from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation and aesthetic experiences (MA 2005). Through the application of the CES concept, it is possible to explore what people do or feel in relation to an ecosystem or its elements, and how that ecosystem enables, facilitates or supports their activities or feelings (Haines-Young and Potschin, 2018: 18).

Within the context of ecosystem services, large carnivores can be seen as an ecosystem component that provides multiple benefits to people. The presence of bears can thus provide an opportunity to develop different forms of tourism related to bear watching or habitat experiences, different interpretative elements can be developed in the local environment, such as thematic trails or visitor centres, encounters with bears are described by some as inspiring experiences, while for others the presence of large carnivores makes the forest seem more diverse and mysterious.

The concept is clearly not ideal from the point of view of critical animal studies and understanding of interspecies equality (see Golež Kaučič, 2023: 294–312; Haraway, 2016), as it is largely focused on the extrinsic value of large carnivores. However, in the way it was used in the study, it stems from the desire to preserve and promote coexistence between man and large carnivores, that is to say, as a practical tool, starting from the present-day world, which is also less than ideal, and in which, after all, the value of human animals is also measured in terms of their usefulness (especially in terms of their role in the economic system).

The Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services (CICES) was used to investigate the benefits of the presence of large carnivores in Slovenia, which includes 11 different CES classes and thus allows for an efficient structuring of the large amount of qualitative data obtained from the focus groups.<sup>4</sup> Four stakeholder groups were interviewed during the project. The first consisted of seven artists, participants in an art colony on the theme of the lynx,<sup>5</sup> the second consisted of nine tourism workers from the area inhabited by large carnivores. The third focus group included seven farmers (bee-keepers, sheep and goat breeders, horse breeders, etc.) and the fourth included eight hunters from two hunting families in the area inhabited by large carnivores. The participants were se-

lected by using the snowball method – when we contacted the first person, they suggested another, and through acquaintances; we engaged the artists within the framework of an art colony. The focus groups, which usually lasted between 2 and 4 hours, were conducted between October and December 2019.

During the interviews, the moderator used a pre-defined protocol, based on documenting the various benefits of the presence of large carnivores. It was based on the intangible value extraction method described by Gould (2014), which combines different qualitative data collection techniques. The protocol consisted of a set of questions that encouraged participants in all focus groups to express their opinions, feelings and values, covering different CES categories (CICES, version 4.3). The questions addressed a variety of topics related to large carnivores: personal experiences with large carnivores, benefits and drawbacks for people, opportunities for ecotourism, recreation and hunting, spiritual, artistic value, heritage, local and traditional knowledge, educational value and intergenerational value. To encourage the exchange of opinions and feelings, the researchers also showed the participants 14 photographs of large carnivores in different situations (in their natural habitat, causing harm, interacting with people), and the moderator encouraged interaction between participants and the free flow of thoughts during the interviews. The use of the protocol has thus enabled the cataloguing of as many benefits of large carnivores as possible and an overview of their importance for the participants themselves and the society in which they live.

In this chapter, the authors focus mainly on three themes that emerged from the interviews conducted, relating to the perceptions of encounters with bears, perceptions of their abundance and opinions on the conservation of the population. This is because they provide a more in-depth understanding of the data derived from the opinion polls presented above.

## **Encounters with Bears/Awareness of the Presence of Bears**

A group of tourism employees frequently encounter bears. This is partly because of the nature of their work, which is geographically and thematically linked to the area inhabited by bears, and partly because they live in the area themselves. They encounter bears while driving their cars, walking in the forest or around their homes:

Yes, the first time I saw a bear in the wild when I was 8 years old. My father was a district forester and hunter. Now I see it about 10 times a year for sure, it comes near the house, once I spotted one when driving my car, but it is present all the time.

These are usually encounters in which both human and bear avoid each other, thus avoiding potential conflict:

I have seen him many times, there was never any danger, and I have never felt the fear that some people say they have. It already came close to the house, it was afraid of those who were walking on the upper road and the road below, and also of us who were standing on the terrace. Even exiting the Cross Cave, you can spot a mother bear and her cubs. Not one of them wants to encounter me, they hide, it seems to me that they indeed try to disappear. And then we waited for one for a while, but it slightly retreated, and we followed it back and forth a little bit, but it does not really like to have contact. I do not know what it is like to cross its path. But I never felt like this. I might have been alone, but I had a car and it was not a big deal.

Although they did not report any negative encounters with bears, tourist workers talk about being careful when walking in the forest. Although some people also inform guests about bears and show them signs of their presence in the forest during guided tours, they prefer to avoid them in their private lives.

I walk a lot and I have to say that I make a lot of noise, I whistle. I carry small bells and sticks now. I always came across bears in the morning and in the evening, but never during the day. I feel much better when I am accompanied by other people. This year I joke that in Babno polje, because we live in direct surroundings, the bear became the reason for socialising, because those of us who regularly hike do not want to go alone, but together. Three women at 5:30. I know a woman who is so afraid of snakes that she screams even when she sees the shadow of a worm, but when she sees a bear she just lifts her hand and stays quiet, and we turn and walk away. But I saw a bear by the Čabranka River, from my car. When I rolled down the window it roared and I still hear it echo to this day. [...] But we follow it, I like to do it when I have guests, I show them bear faeces and tracks and they and they become quiet and do not make a sound for five minutes. At first, they do not want to believe me that this is bear's excrement.



*Figure 3: Brown bear, photo by Miha Krofel.*

They experience an encounter with a bear when they are alone in the forest differently from an encounter when in a guided group tour or a walk:

A group is still a group. Firstly, you are louder, and secondly, you have a feeling of security because of other people. Nobody even remembers to ask if there is any danger because of the bears.

They use various strategies to avoid direct contact with bears when visiting the forest. Some people draw attention to themselves by talking loudly, ringing bells, banging sticks against tree trunks, making noises, walking in groups or avoiding wandering off deep into the forest when walking and cycling in the forest:

I have never seen wolves nor lynxes, although I would like to. Bears, yes, but from a safe distance, from a car or from a balcony. Probably also because when I go into the forest I do all sorts of things to let them know of my presence and that they should go somewhere else: I cough and I carry a stick to hit tree trunks with. If I get somewhere where there is a lot of fresh excrement, I take a different path. They say you can smell a bear. I never forget this. When I smell what I think is a bear, I quickly walk away. So I don't have any particular fear of bears, and no one ever tried to scare me with them. They try to do it now, but it is in vein.

Tourism workers are becoming more cautious because they feel there is a larger number of bears present than in the past, but this is based on their personal estimates or observations: "I have never seen as many tracks of big bears as I have seen in the Snežnik forests this year. I probably would not have gone on my own." Or: "I came down here twenty years ago. Back then, no one said to me. 'You walk in the forest although there are bears present', but now I often hear the following: 'Are you still hiking around here?'"

As well as past encounters with bears, either by themselves or by people they know:

Our friend was attacked by a mother bear. When you see that practically half his face is missing... it does not leave you cold. [...] Perhaps this is also the reason why we are much more afraid of carnivores than ticks.

The signs, which have the function to warn of the presence of bears and prevent conflicts, arouse negative feelings among visitors to the area, as illustrated by an excerpt from a conversation that developed among tourism employees during the interview:

Person A: There is a big difference now. When I was little, we saw a sign saying “Beware of the bear”. It was an old sign, but no one was afraid. Now you go through the forest towards the Dolenje jezero, the area inhabited by bears, and it would have been better if it had not been there.

Person B: Such an uneasy feeling.

Person C: My wife is picking mushrooms and says she can hear trampling. I go and take a look two hours later and I told her I have found bear tracks. In fact, the bear was right next door, a hundred metres from the houses.

Person D: I have no bad experiences. I saw it twice within a hundred metres, both times it was a mother bear with cubs. But she turned around, I do not even know if she saw me. But it is true that I am not carefree when looking for mushrooms in the woods. Like you said, there is a sign, and it makes you more cautious and less carefree.

In relation to the feeling of safety of tourists visiting the forest, the group of tourism workers stresses that the presence of qualified guides who can ensure the safety of the participants is of utmost importance for bear tourism:

These are guided tours. People feel safe. We also assure them the tour is very safe. They should not be afraid of anything, they should just relax and enjoy nature and watching bears. We prepare them for the encounter to rid them of fear as much as possible, which is why the experiences are so positive, enthusiastic, romantic and a little idealised. It is quite different from going alone. If they go alone and something happens, they react quite differently.

They are aware that the awe people feel towards large carnivores like bears is a key factor that ensures their line of business: “For the kind of tourism I am engaged in, the presence of bears is positive, because I will be guiding a tour on Wednesday, but if there were no bears the hikers would not use a guide.” The bear watching activity is perceived as beneficial for the wider community: “Those who come to see the bears also go to catering establishments, accommodation providers, shops and other tourist attractions.”

Hunters encounter large carnivores the most often of all the focus groups: “I could write a book on my experiences with large carnivores.” Most of the time, it is encounters with bears: “About the bear ... the bear is an indigenous animal here. If you do not see a bear for a couple of days, something is wrong. So that is basically ... nothing special here. It is almost harder to spot a rabbit.”

Most hunters described their encounters with bears as positive, but their feelings about the encounters depend on the situation: “Bears are friendly, I have had wonderful

experiences with them.” For some, they have been “adrenaline-fuelled” experiences, in some cases they have felt threatened by the encounters: “After my encounter with the bear, I realised I was in danger.” Especially encounters with a mother bear with her cubs are received with understanding due to the knowledge of how the species<sup>6</sup> behaves: “I have had many encounters with carnivores, but only one case with a mother bear was critical. I was very scared, but I was not angry with the mother, she was just protecting her cubs.”

Normally, it is no big deal. Then, when she returns, she starts signalling you that you have ventured a little too far, and that is not a nice feeling. But then we had a disagreement. She was signalling me something, I was talking to her, and finally she went silent and I heard that there were cubs behind her and I said: why did not you tell me that beforehand, had I known I would not have ventured there. I walked away and she returned to the cubs and growled softly after me.

The hunters involved even compare bears to humans: “I have been a hunter for many years, but I have never shot a bear. [...] I see it as a strange human.” This symbolism is common, as this is a species that is physically and cognitively very similar to humans: it can stand upright, it takes care for its offspring for years, and eats a variety of foods – much like a human (Lescureux, et al., 2011: 196). Some have expressed their reluctance to shoot a bear because they do not see it as a challenge, it has become a so-called devalued trophy: “Today, the bear is a devalued trophy. I do not want to shoot it either, I would rather see it over running away from me than me hunting it.” This is why they prefer to leave bear hunting to foreign hunters, which also brings some financial resources to the hunting family. Some hunters are protective of mother bears and their cubs: “It’s a disgrace if you shoot a [mother bear and her cubs] in the wild. Hunters would not do that. [...] It is a war crime if someone shoots the mother.”

Hunters are also those who, in the course of their work (some are foresters, tourism workers, etc.), encounter other forest visitors, e.g. mushroom pickers. They have expressed outrage at their strategies to overcome the fear of bears.

[...] when the mushroom pickers come, they roar like they are being slaughtered. The presence of the beast is a decisive factor here. For example, when I was on my lunch break – I am a forester – two persons came with a Mercedes from Ljubljana, and listening to them you would think they were put on the rack. I approached them and said: ‘Dear Sirs, if you do not know how to behave in nature, take your Mercedes and go back to an area where there are no beasts, where there are no bears.’ I asked them why they were so loud. ‘We are afraid of bears.’ ‘Then go somewhere where there are no bears.’

They point out that the increasing presence of humans has made bears more and more accustomed to human presence:



I think that there is already so much disturbance everywhere in nature that the animal does not really care where it roams. Whether it is in the village or deep in the forest. For us humans everything is allowed. We hike ... the more overgrown the terrain is, the more it is inaccessible, the more activities you can find there, everything from hikers to bikers and quad bikers ... There simply is not enough regulation. I just had the opportunity – I went on a hunting trip in the Czech Republic – they have ramps there, and they are lowered, and you have to have a permit if you want to drive through. I think this practice should also be used here. But there is simply no peace in nature here.

Participating farmers reported feeling fear and awe around bears. The presence of bears affects the way they feel about their daily lives, not only because of damage to property and domestic animals, but because of the immediate fear for their own safety or that of their family: “If I see a bear in the morning, I do not send my children to school.” They mention that the presence of large carnivores restricts their movement in nature:

The people who used to go out for a walk alone in the past are no longer doing this because of the fear of the big beasts. Life outside the village has practically come to a standstill. Those of us who have to mow still go out, but otherwise not.

Although brown bear attacks are very rare, the number of attacks increased between 2000 and 2015 (Bombieri et al., 2019: 6), which can be attributed to several factors, such as the increasing number of humans and bears worldwide, which is increasingly overlapping the animal’s habitat with that used by humans (Bombieri et al., 2019: 6). In addition, more and more people are doing recreational activities in areas where bears are present, making bear encounters more likely (Bombieri et al., 2019: 6).

The focus group of artists mostly reported pleasant feelings connected to encounters with large carnivores:

I have met all three of the large carnivores. I felt no fear, but there is always that element of surprise, especially with the wolf and the lynx. It happens when you least expect it. Even though you know they are there, you cannot predict when you will encounter them. And it is always that amazing moment when it is completely unexpected.

Nevertheless, bear encounters in this group are also characterised by a certain degree of wariness: “Walking in the forest where large carnivores are present is much like when you were young and you were walking down a street in Ljubljana at 3 or 4 at night – you

were very alert, very nervous, because you were walking all alone.” This does not necessarily imply a feeling of threat, but a curiosity, a willingness to accept and be aware of the presence of large carnivores in the forest:

In any case, I understand this, because when I was walking in the Styrian forests before, where there were not so many bears. Now, occasionally one or two sneaks in. The feeling is different, and it is not just fear, or not fear at all in my case, but their presence and the knowledge that you can always come across a wolf, a lynx, a bear. It suffuses the area with a different feel, it might instil fear in some, and they are too afraid to venture there. That is probably why some are warning people about a bear in Pokljuka during mushroom picking season. Above all, being careful, being more alert, paying attention to the nature around you, [...] keeping on your toes, keeping not only your eyes open, but also tuning in into your other senses.

Or:

You need to have some respect for the forest, because if you are walking somewhere where there are living creatures that are as big as humans, you need to have respect, because you know that in the forest there are not only humans but also other creatures.

## **Opinions on the Size of the Bear Population**

The first survey in Slovenia to examine the general public’s attitudes towards bears covered a small part of the bear range in Slovenia (Kaczensky et al., 2004: 663). Attitudes towards bears were positive among the hunters and residents surveyed in the study area, but they were mostly opposed to the expansion of bears into other areas and to increasing population numbers (Kaczensky et al., 2004: 670). This was later confirmed by survey research by Majić Skrbinšek et al. (2019). Majić Skrbinšek notes that the social carrying capacity for bears among the population living in bear areas in Slovenia is exceeded, especially in the Dinaric Karst area. In fact, the local population is increasingly opposed to an increase in bear abundance/density (Majić Skrbinšek et al., 2019: 22).

Her findings are also supported by the results of the focus groups and the analysis of participants’ responses regarding the number of large carnivores. None of the focus groups, despite their positive attitude towards bears, expressed a preference for increasing the bear population. Farmers mainly associated the unpleasant feelings caused by the growth of large carnivores with damage and threats to their property or livelihoods: “Large carni-

vores need to be brought down to some normal number of animals to make it manageable. So that the farmer, the beekeeper, the fruit grower, the sheep farmer can live.”

Or:

If there are 900 bears, there will be no damage. On the entire territory of Slovenia. Only occasionally there will be reports of any damage. But if there are 1,900, it will certainly be some damage done, even though there is enough available living space. The population will not die out if there are 900 instead of 1,900.

They also see higher population numbers as a threat to the preservation of the countryside: “If there are too many large carnivores, the preservation of the countryside is threatened.” They want different interests to be heard and for the species to be managed in a way that allows coexistence.

Hunters have raised concerns about population growth and pointed out, for example, the associated increase in road accidents: “The overabundance of bears around the village is taking its toll on the roads.” And on the declining numbers of other species that bears feed on:

The bear has also destroyed many other things. This occurs far too often. You cannot see the big forest ants anymore, I forget how the species is called. I have seen them in enclosures where sheep graze. They are still in the pastures. Where the area is fenced off. This is the moment when you start to think about what happens when a certain species grows too much. You know this better than I do that these ants all have a purpose. So too much of anything is not good. Even the deer.

When asked what they consider a healthy forest ecosystem, they answered: Hunter A: “It is having all these animals present. From beasts to ants.” Hunter B: “For everything to be in balance.” Hunter C: “Yes, that one is not heading in that direction, the other is heading towards extinction.”

They also see the negative consequence of the increasing bear population as “hunting tourism will decline with the abundance of bears”, as bears are too easily accessible and hunting loses its appeal. Bear hunting in Slovenia is carried out on the basis of a hunting permit for bears issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning. The prescribed method of culling is using a high stand, which ensures greater safety when hunting. Hunters believe that with the introduction of hunting regulations and the increasing abundance of bears, interest in hunting them has declined. Hunters described hunting

from a high stand, where there is no need to track the bear through the forest, as unfair to the bear: “There is no point in hunting anymore. The poor being over there, I pity the poor animal that comes, because [...] I know exactly that this bear will come. A bang, and good hunting congratulations, let’s go! [ironic]”

There was less discussion in the group of tourism workers and artists about the “appropriate” number of carnivores to cull. One of the artists stressed the importance of the experts in determining this:

My personal opinion on bears and wolves is that we should professionally study how many of these carnivores our forest system can support, how much forest we have, and how much is too much. Because the numbers cannot keep increasing indefinitely, common sense tells us there must be a limit, just as forests are limited. Various experts are called in to do this, including experts from Biotechnical faculty and hunters. Those who live with nature.

Others:

There aren’t too many of them around our area, it is fine as it is. Personally, I think there are too many bears in many places, probably in Kočevsko area, and in the south of Slovenia, in Cerknica, there are too many wolves.

The solutions proposed by the artists to resolve human-bear conflicts were no different from those proposed by other groups. Most of them consider culling to be an appropriate solution, but they have also suggested the establishment of fenced areas for animals.

However, a debate has broken out among tourism workers, who agree on the need to control the number of bears:

Person A: There should be fewer bears, just as they control other wild animals. They say there are more cubs every year. But there has to be a certain number of animals that ensures their normal survival, and prevents extinction of the species. I still think that if there is not enough food in the forest, they will come to the villages and accidents will happen ...

Person B: What kind of accidents will happen? Where?

Person A: I am not sure there will be that many ...

Person B: Bulls kill more people per year. Ticks too, but people just do not get vaccinated. We have a 20 % vaccination coverage against tick-borne menin gitis in Slovenia. In Austria, it is over 90 %. You do not do what

you could do yourself, but you expect from others to do act ... why are we humans acting like this.

Person C: There are certainly more bears than there used to be, you even said so yourself. You know what, I suggest condoms for bears. [ironic]

Person B: Just one more thing. Bear population has always been regulated. Already last year, when Alpe Adria Green made a complaint, I immediately said it would be a disaster. That was it, bears have always been regulated. The number was around 450 to 500. As of last year, culling has stopped.

Person D: If we let the number of large carnivores increase too much, there will be a shortage of other animals, deer and roe deer.

Person E: The problem is that there a lack of food. When have you last seen an anthill in the forest? There used to be big anthills. There is no food!

Person F: There are no clearings and no anthills.

Person E: There are too many bears that have eaten everything.

Person C: If you go to Pohorje, there are still as many anthills as they used to be here.

Person E: I have not seen an anthill like this for a few years.

Person G: We have probably already encroached so much on nature that we cannot just walk away from it all. Sometimes I also think that nature already regulates so that everything is right, but with the interventions that man has already made in this environment, this is not possible, so humans have to keep on intervening. But to circle back to what [name] was saying earlier about how the forest is mysterious... I think that the forest as such must remain mysterious, that when we go to the Snežnik forests we must be afraid and that the large carnivores must be part of it. If you do not dare, if you are too afraid, you do not have to go. Go for a walk in the park.

The case also illustrates the ongoing controversy over the number of bears to be culled, where it is virtually impossible to reach a consensus. However, it is important to monitor in particular the attitudes of the stakeholders most affected by the presence of these species, since, as already noted, beliefs about population size have a major influence on public expectations of population management. If the prevailing belief is that there are too few bears, the public opposes any interventions that would reduce the size of the population, while at the same time expecting measures to better conserve the population. The reverse is also true – beliefs that there are too many animals trigger demands for greater control of population size (Majič Skrbinšek et al., 2019: 22).

Studies show that bears avoid humans, both temporally and spatially (Ordiz et al., 2017), and that the increasing popularity of recreation in natural areas can have a significant impact on them (Fortin et al., 2021).

## Bear Conservation

In 1994, Alenka Korenjak carried out a survey in which she investigated attitudes towards large carnivores among various interest groups (hunters, farmers, zoo visitors) in Slovenia and Austria. The results show that 87 % of hunters thought it was important that carnivores exist in their country. Farmers in both countries were the least favourable, although 41 % of farmers in Slovenia were in favour of the large carnivores despite the damage they cause, compared to only 16 % in Austria (Kaczensky, 2003: 74). The positive attitude of hunters towards bears was also noted by Prosen in 1998. The reasoning given for the conflict was primarily fear of encountering a bear, followed by damage to livestock (Kaczensky, 2003: 77). Participants in the study cited compensation for damages and even restrictions on human movement in the area inhabited by large carnivores as possible solutions to the conflict (Kaczensky, 2003: 74). Kaczensky notes that knowledge about bears influences the inclination to conserve them. The hunters, who are more familiar with it and most in favour of it, are leading the way. Sheep and goat farmers, on the other hand, feel directly threatened and want the state to protect them from attacks by large carnivores. They feel that they are not understood by the experts and the urban people (Kaczensky, 2003: 82). We came to similar conclusions more than 20 years later by conducting focus groups.

All the focus groups express a desire to conserve large carnivore populations, but at the same time want to see a limit on the size of population. The group of hunters often expressed a sense of pride that all three species of large carnivores are present in Slovenia, which they say is a rarity in Europe:

Photographers coming from abroad are publishing pictures in scientific magazines, including National Geographic and the like, and they are putting Slovenia at the top of the list where all these populations are still present.

The tradition of coexistence with bears was seen as an example of good practice in the European context, e.g. “In Paris museum there showcased Loški Potok as an example of good practice of coexistence between bears and humans.” They are in favour of maintaining the population of large carnivores, but at the same time point to the importance of active management of the species and of reaching a broader social consensus on their abundance: “The aim is to keep the large carnivores, but at a certain number.” At the same time, they are also aware of the negative impact of humans on large carnivores and their habitat:<sup>7</sup> “By constantly being in nature, the bears are getting used to human presence, and for bears there is no difference whether they are in the middle of the village or 20 km away deep in the forest.” They do not rule out the negative impacts of hunting practices: “Even we as hunters are a disturbing factor in the forest.”

Despite their critical view of the increasing presence of people in the forest, hunters are more in favour of developing bear-related tourism: “The benefit of bear presence is photo-hunting or bear-watching.” They believe that the increase in tourism has also contributed to a change in attitudes towards bears in the local environment, where bears have become an integral part of the tourist offer:

In fact, we also see that local people were more sceptical, but now they have a different perception of the issue. That is how we do it, too, sometimes we take guests from guest house to guest house. And now they can see for themselves that this benefits everyone. There would also be some honey on offer, and similar and ... because they already see that the location fits this story. And now all of this is easier.

You have to know how to package it in the right way. If you had asked ten years ago, the prevailing opinion was that all of them should be killed, but now they look at it a little differently. If you have the right approach.

There is an anthropocentric aspect to bear marketing, as nature is valued primarily in terms of how much benefit or value it brings to humans: “The state must protect bears because it is in the national interest, but it must have a project to do so. People need to get something out of it, not just have something imposed.”

Farmers also support the existence of large carnivores: “The presence of large carnivores is imperative.” They see themselves as nature’s caretakers and connected to it: “We as farmers are connected to nature, so we do not want to kill or destroy a population.” They consider large carnivores important because of their role in the ecosystem: “If large carnivores were not in our environment, we would be worse off as far as arable land is concerned. The wolf and the bear are essentially hygienists, and they also maintain the deer population.” Farmers recognise large carnivores as “indigenous to Slovenia” and want to see them preserved, while non-indigenous carnivores that have no natural enemies (e.g. jackal) should not be introduced. They point out that the conflicts regarding wolves can influence the tolerance towards bears: “The bears will get the short end of the stick, mainly at the expense of wolves, because wolves do most of the damage and people’s negative attitudes are mostly geared towards wolves.”

They agree that adequate abundance of large carnivores is key to coexistence with humans: “We farmers are also protective of animals, but some groups in Ljubljana go to extremes. We would like them to experience bears as a financial and life-threatening problem and something they are dependent on.” This statement reflects the division of opinion on acceptable bear population size that occurs between rural and urban inhabitants. It is the farmers’ feeling that the townspeople (or representatives of NGOs working for a ban on culling) are less connected to nature and rural life and do not understand the real challeng-

es farmers face, and should experience these problems personally to better understand the farmer's perspective. The split between the rural and the urban area is particularly evident in the case of the presence of the wolf, where the conflict often goes beyond the challenges associated with the presence of the species and is marked by a deeper rift between urban and rural values, in which rural inhabitants, who are most affected by the presence of large carnivores, often feel abandoned and subordinated to urban perspectives (Zscheischler and Friedrich, 2022: 1051).

The hunters' group, who are also rural residents, even consider that the treatment of the "bear problem" reflects the difference between rural and urban treatment. In the city (i.e. Ljubljana), they say, when a single bear arrives, they start screaming and shouting, but in the countryside, where there are far more bears, decision-makers ignore the warnings of the villagers:

The Rožnik bear has beautifully shown how different we are in different parts of the [country]. When it moved towards Ljubljana, everyone was in uproar. Everyone got involved: the cavalry, the police, every single armed official, I am sure you can remember. A state of emergency. But when it comes to our village, no one is concerned. Once a mother bear passed the inn with her three cubs, this was quite a few years ago. The centre of the Hrib village was full of people. When the bear past the school, it was recorded by the school camera. It came right in front of the school. Do you think this is normal?

If only this happened in Ljubljana or somewhere else, because you could see the uproar when she came above Pijava Gorica, when this mother bear strolled into the backyard of a certain minister. What a commotion it caused.

But we are treated differently.

In some situations, the bear has therefore become a symbol of the differences between different areas and perspectives, especially between the city and the countryside. For some people, especially those who do not share their habitat with bears, it is a symbol of wilderness and nature preservation, but it often evokes a sense of danger and fear in the inhabitants of the environment where it is actually present (Jonozovič, 2000).

Artists consider large carnivores to be an integral part of the Slovenian area just as hunters and farmers do: "Large carnivores belong in our area." They point out that the presence of large carnivores has been an important part of Slovenia's historical and cultural heritage and is therefore part of its identity: "If I can speak for the Kočevsko area, it is deeply entwined with history over millennia, or at least centuries, and the absence of bears, wolves and lynx would be one big loss." They see the possible disappearance of large carnivores in apocalyptic terms, equating the loss of bears with the loss of nature: "Losing bears



means losing nature.” Carnivores are seen as umbrella species, i.e. species whose protection or conservation requires the management and protection of a large area of habitat, which in turn contributes to the conservation of many other species in the same ecosystem. When asked if Slovenia would change if there were no large carnivores, one of the artists said:

I think that would be the most grim prognosis for life, because if it started with the umbrella species, it would proceed to the bees, and that is the worst stage of the apocalypse, and it affects each and every one of us, whether we are personally connected, or whether these animals are directly in our environment, or 5 km away, or 100 km away. They influence us. And the prognosis of such a world, without this diversity or richness ...

They call for a change in people’s attitude towards nature, which is not an unlimited source of assets, and stress the need for greater respect for nature and more sustainable ways of living:

This attitude towards nature has already changed a lot. I think that even farmers as far back as I can remember, the old generation, actually, if it started happening to them – they would shoot the wolf immediately, shoot everything immediately, everything. Today, however, everyone’s attitude towards nature has changed, because they have started to respect nature a little more. Also because of the ecological issue. We have begun to feel that our attitude to nature has been wrong, that we have been behaving like masters who know no bounds, and in particular our attitude to nature will have to change radically. For a very long time, we have acted as if the world’s resources are unlimited and we can do with them as we please, and that we can rule nature with no repercussions. This attitude is wrong. And this is where we will have to change radically.

The focus group of tourism employees made few statements on the conservation of large carnivore or bear populations, although the conservation of populations is crucial for the survival of their business. “Whether large carnivores are a burden or a benefit to us is pointless to discuss. They are part of us and they will always be here. Our coexistence with them will determine the state of things.” This is supported by recent research which concludes that coexistence of large carnivores with humans in European landscapes is not constrained by habitat availability, but by other factors such as people’s favourable tolerance and politics (Cimmati et al., 2021: 603), which, as will be discussed below, depend, among other things, on the manner and content of the messages conveyed to the public through the mass media.

## Media Publications and Public Opinion on Bears

Conflicts between humans and bears are mainly related to the bears' opportunistic foraging and consumption of food, with damage to sheep and goat herds being the most prevalent (Krofel and Jerina, 2012: 240). However, only 3,91 % of the Slovenian population is professionally engaged in agriculture (Republika Slovenija 2021: 60), and even less in sheep farming. The loss of sheep to bears therefore only directly affects a small number of people in Slovenia, which means that most people learn about bear-human conflicts second-hand and through media reports (Kaczensky et al., 2001: 122). In the late 1990s, the main source of information about bears was the print media, with more than 55 % of the local population obtaining some of their information from that source (Kaczensky et al., 2001: 122). As bear attacks on sheep and goat herds increased between 1995 and 1998, Kaczensky et al. (2001) used media content analysis to investigate whether the main themes in the print media followed the increasing trend of bear-human conflicts and became more conflict-oriented, and whether there was an increase in negative and highly emotional articles, which they were unable to confirm. However, they found that daily newspapers were increasingly conflict-oriented, most likely due to the fact that journalists' attention is drawn to specific events or changes in the status quo (Kaczensky et al., 2001: 131).

Before the rise of the internet and social networks, national newspapers reached a wide range of people. The internet and social networks have completely changed the way the public receives and passes on news. The ability of the Internet to disperse information both rapidly and geographically widely allows online media to reach a much wider audience than print media. Sharing plays a powerful role, as millions of people routinely share news on social media platforms, influencing each other and passing on their emotional mood and feelings to others. Social media have thus become crucial in shaping public opinion (Nanni et al., 2020: 1).

An analysis of online newspaper articles on attacks on humans by large carnivores by Nanni et al. (2020) showed that information shared more frequently on social media is often sensationalist. Although large carnivores rarely attack humans, such attacks receive sustained media attention. The way the media report on large carnivores can influence people's perception of risk (Bombieri et al., 2018: 2).

A review of the publications on the most widely read Slovenian web portal, MMC RTV Slovenia, which is managed by the public service broadcaster, between January 2023 and including September 2024, shows that there were 50 direct posts about bears in the past 21 months, i.e. 2.38 posts per month. Of these, bear attacks, bear-related deaths and bear culling were reported in the majority of articles, 32 in total. 2 articles have been published about bears killed by vehicles. 9 articles provided "fun" content about bears, and 7 articles dealt with issues regarding large carnivores.

Even more posts about the bear, which were also more prone to sensationalism, were published by the privately owned web portal 24ur.com, which published 110 posts in the same time period, or 5.24 posts per month. 40 articles reported on bear attacks, 17 on bear culls, 9 on bears killed by a vehicle and 7 on bear encounters. 18 articles dealt with large carnivore issues, and 19 articles with entertainment content.

Interestingly, most of the reports of both portals do not refer to bear attacks in Slovenia (both media reported only two attacks), but to attacks that occurred in other countries: Italy, the USA, Romania and Sweden. At the same time, for example, deaths due to road accidents or other causes in those countries were not reported.

## Kočevska Region

A certain reversal of the above-described trend is represented by the situation in Kočevska, a province in the south-east of Slovenia, where the bear population is the largest and where, as a consequence, most interactions between people and bears take place. This is also the area where all the initiatives for the protection of bears (and other carnivores) in Slovenia have been developed, as reflected, for example, in the saying “protected like the Kočevje bear”.

Almost 90 % of the Kočevska region, which is part of the Natura 2000 site<sup>8</sup>, is covered by forest, and 6 of the 13 primeval forests preserved in Slovenia are located in Kočevska region. In 2017, one of them, the Krokar primeval forest reserve, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when emigration abroad, particularly to the USA, began, the Kočevska region was mostly a farmed environment. The current percentage of forest cover was reached in the decades after World War II, which was marked by the move of the majority of the German-speaking population to the then German Reich. Large areas of Kočevska region have remained unoccupied. Most of the villages burnt during the war were not rebuilt or resettled, and large areas were part of the so-called closed military zone of Kočevska Reka, where movement was prohibited or restricted. These less pleasant conditions for humans have given wild animals a good chance to survive and increase their numbers.

Today, preserved nature is the most important market segment of the so-called Destination Kočevsko, which unites the municipalities of Kočevje, Kostel and Osilnica under a common tourist brand and promotion. The so-called five-star product<sup>9</sup> that the destination offers to its visitors is the “Observing and getting to know bears in their natural habitat” (Kolmanič, 2023: 18), where tourists visit the forest in small groups accompanied by an experienced guide (usually a hunter). Besides bears, they also learn about other animal and plant species. A destination that has given itself the promotional slogan “Kočevsko –

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“The Kočevsko Natura 2000 site is spread over 13 municipalities. Some of them are included in full, others only partially, namely Kostel, Osilnica, Kočevje (partially), Ribnica (partially), Sodražica (partially), Loški Potok (partially), Bloke (partially), Loška dolina (partially), Dobropolje (partially), Črnomelj (partially), Semič (partially), Dolenjske Toplice (partially), and Žužemberk (partially).” (Slovenia Forest Service, 2015: 11)

**9**

Due to the uniqueness of this experience, the Slovenian Tourist Board has included it in the group of 5-Star Slovenia Unique Experiences (Opazovanje in spoznavanje ..., 2024).

the Mysterious Forest of Slovenia”, was marketed in 2023, among other things, by cameras being placed in the forest and footage of various animals, including bears, being published online (Kolmanič, 2023: 18). This has put the lives of forest dwellers centre stage. The mascot representing the destination at various promotional events is Berti the Bear.

The bear became the symbol of Kočevska area in the decades before the *Destination Kočevsko* brand was created in 2016. You could say it is ubiquitous, because it is present even when it is hiding in the forest. It is depicted in the form of numerous souvenirs, wooden sculptures in front of and inside private homes, in the centre of the city of Kočevje, where you can have a snack at the popular “Medo” (meaning Bear) pastry shop, and the Roška footpath, which is marked with a bear’s paw. A life-size wooden statue of a bear, the work of local artist Matija Kobola, has been the centrepiece of the new roundabout at the entrance to the residential part of Kočevje since 2019. Since 2014, Kočevje and its surroundings have been hosting a popular sporting event, In the Bear’s Footsteps. All of the above points to how the inhabitants identify with the bear. The fact that the bear in Kočevska area is promoted as a tourist attraction, which provides direct and indirect income opportunities for (part of) the local population, offers a partial answer to the question of why this is the case and why it is more tolerated in this region than elsewhere in Slovenia. On the other hand, its long presence in the area, which has allowed inhabitants to adapt or develop the strategies they use to coexist with bears, also contributes to this fact.

While the publicity in the mainstream media is often negative, especially when bears cause damage or injury to humans, and, in some municipalities, warnings are issued about bears as soon as they appear, the picture is different in Kočevje. Reviewing the printed newsletter published by the Municipality of Kočevje, it was found that only 2 articles related to the bear were published in the same time period as the above-mentioned RTV SLO and 24ur.com web portals. Both addressed the issue of culling. A few short reports on the tourist product of bear watching were published in the same newspaper by the Public Institute for Tourism and Culture Kočevje.

The website of the local newspaper Utrip (privately owned) does not pay much attention to the bears either. It usually warns of bears near (or in) settlements in short notes, which it also shares on its Facebook page. A look at the comments under these news articles shows an interesting trend, namely that the commenters mostly ridicule these posts. The article entitled “Peeking out of the bushes and crossing the road”, published on 30 July 2024, almost apologised to readers in advance for publishing the news:

Today at around 10:00, a young bear was walking in Mrtvice, close to the cycle path. The animal, which was clearly frightened, crossed the road at a self-service gas station and then continued on its way. Despite the significant presence of bears in our area, it is worth noting the possibility of encounters in the area of a popular cycle path (E-Utrip, 2024a).

Nevertheless, a number of (humorous) comments were posted, such as:

Person A: I'm shocked (astonished emoticon), a bear was spotted in Kočevje (thinking emoticon)

Person B: Good thing Ljubljana has not closed everything all the way to the Karavanke Tunnel (six laughing emoticons)

Person C: But is that really so unusual?? OMG ... but it is not like an elephant was spotted (upside down laughing emoticon)

Person D: Journalists are master of creating panic. The bear looked left and right and crossed the road. How many of the pedestrians and cyclists do the same!!!!!!!

Person E: It went to fill up because it ran out of petrol, lol

Similar comments were written under a post on the same profile on 23 May 2024, which drew attention to a bear cub wandering along a street in Kočevje near a popular bar, and was titled Bear trampling around Gaj (E-Utrip, 2024b).

Person A: It went for a pint, but all it got was a salad (laughing emoticon)<sup>10</sup>

Person B: So many bears

Person C: But we are all over the woods ...

There are many more similar cases of Kočevje residents mocking online media publications about bears. Media reports about the presence of bears in Kočevska area do not provoke a moral panic (Cohen, 2011), as seems to be the case at the national level. Occasionally, there are comments to the contrary, but these are mostly in favour of the bear. They show that bears are perceived as part of the local environment and that residents are not (to a greater extent) disturbed by encounters with bears. At least not as long as the encounters do not turn into conflicts (cf. Lescureux and Linnell, 2010: 394).

## Conclusion

Densities of brown bears are high in the Dinaric part of Slovenia and are among the highest known for this species in the world (Jerina et al., 2020: 2). Slovenia was among the first countries in Europe to protect bears, first on a private initiative and then officially by a 1935 “decree” of the Banovina Administration, which was also the first known attempt to designate the bear’s habitat (Simonič, 2000). Today, the brown bear is fully protected all year round by the Decree on the protection of endangered animal species (Official Journal of the Republic of Slovenia, 57/93). Its protection is further provided for, directly or indi-

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There is a restaurant in Gaj where the bear stayed for some time.

rectly, by other legal provisions. However, research shows that it is not only formal legal protection that is required for coexistence with bears, but also public sympathy, especially from bear-related interest groups.

Public opinion surveys show a predominantly positive view of bears in Slovenia. However, attitudes towards the presence of bears and other large carnivores vary among different stakeholders in the large carnivore field. Interviews with groups of hunters, tourism workers, farmers and artists, focusing on the benefits of large carnivores for humans, show that all groups are generally supportive of bears, but that there is also a sense of discomfort when encountering bears, often more marked by awe than fear.

Tourism professionals identify the main benefit of the presence of bears as the economic advantages resulting from improved conditions for tourism development. They see the bear as the core of a marketing strategy to attract tourists to their area. However, we often found that they had unpleasant feelings when they encountered a bear. Of all the focus groups, hunters have the most knowledge about large carnivores and the most frequent encounters with large carnivores in the wild. They describe these experiences as unique, special and unforgettable. Data from other surveys also show that hunters in Slovenia are favourable towards large carnivores, an attitude which is probably partly due to their continuous professional involvement in monitoring large carnivore populations. On the other hand, farmers are the least favourable towards large beasts. This is particularly true of sheep and goat farmers, whose animals are killed off by bears. However, their statements show that they do not want to eradicate the bear population. The group of artists experience large carnivores as a source of inspiration and appreciate their aesthetic value. They also cited additional, but less obvious benefits linked to the intrinsic value of bears, arguing that the presence of large carnivores teaches us respect and patience, enables us to build better relationships with other people and promotes mutual understanding.

Indeed, conflicts with large carnivores can present an opportunity for broader social learning and improved stakeholder relations – participatory processes in relation to large carnivore management are increasingly being used to share different opinions and increase knowledge of differing viewpoints, as well as to acknowledge the legitimacy of various stakeholder positions (Salvatori et al., 2021: 14). Similarly, the purpose of this chapter was not to judge what is right and what is wrong, but to present the situation in Slovenia with additional considerations that can shed light on the background of certain human behaviours, including the views of different stakeholders. The background of the public opinion analyses presented in the first part of this paper is the nature conservation paradigm, which is also pursued by the educational institutions dealing with large carnivores in Slovenia. Their work focuses on the conservation of the bear population, not on the individual. They do this by seeking public consensus and ways for people and bears to coexist in areas where bears are present. The example of the Kočevska region, where bears appear in greatest numbers, shows that the people there, because of a long tradition of coexistence with the

bear, have accepted its presence/existence as something natural. The identification of the inhabitants with the bear, which, along with the (primeval) forests, has become a symbol of Kočevska area, also contributes to greater tolerance. But there are also direct and indirect benefits that people believe are connected to bears. In the opinion of the authors of the present study, these may contribute to a positive change in the way bears are perceived in Slovenia, from a pest to a creature of intrinsic value (Golež Kaučič, 2023).

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## Načini videnja medveda v Sloveniji

Poglavje temelji na prepletanju kvantitativnih (ankete) in kvalitativnih (fokusne skupine, diskurzivna analiza) pristopov, kar omogoča prikaz celovitejše slike družbene realnosti (gl. Podjed 2019: 27), tj. vpogled v stališča in videnja lokalnega okolja glede medveda, v določenem obsegu pa tudi v mehanizme, ki ta stališča in videnja določajo. V ozadju izvajanja analiz javnega mnenja je naravovarstvena paradigma, ki jo zasledujejo tudi izobraževalne ustanove, ki se v Sloveniji ukvarjajo z velikimi zvermi. Njihovo delovanje se osredinja na ohranitev medvedje populacije, in ne posameznega osebk. To pa skušajo doseči z iskanjem konsenza javnosti in načinov sobivanja med ljudmi in medvedi na območjih, kjer je medved prisoten. Temu cilju je sledila tudi raziskava kulturnih ekosistemskih storitev, ki je potekala v sklopu projekta *Carnivora Dinarica Interreg Slovenija Hrvaška* na Biotehniški fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani in pri kateri sta obe avtorici aktivno sodelovali. Dobršen del pozornosti avtorici namenita predstavitvi podatkov, zbranih s fokusnimi skupinami, v katerih so svoje poglede predstavili likovni umetniki, delavci v turizmu, kmetijci in lovci z območja velikih zveri. Osredinjata se na tri teme, ki izhajajo iz opravljenih pogovorov in se nanašajo na občutenja srečanj z medvedi, percepcijo njihove številčnosti in mnenja o ohranitvi populacije, obravnavata pa tudi razlike med pogledi, ki jih imajo različni deležniki na območju prisotnosti medveda. Izvedeni intervjuji so potrdili podatke raziskav javnega mnenja, in sicer so vse fokusne skupine izrazile željo po ohranjanju populacije velikih zveri, a kljub svoji siceršnji pozitivni naravnosti do medveda nobena skupina ni izrazila naklonjenosti večanju števila medvedje populacije. Lovci v pogovoru pogosto izrazijo občutek ponosa, ker so v Sloveniji prisotne vse tri vrste velikih zveri. Skupaj s turističnimi delavci prepoznavajo potencial turizma, povezanega z medvedom. Kmetje so zaradi škode na pašnih živalih velikim zverem najmanj naklonjeni, vendar podpirajo njihov obstoj in omenjajo vlogo, ki jo imajo v ekosistemu. Umetniki prepoznavajo intrinzično vrednost medveda, saj menijo, da nas prisotnost velikih zveri uči spoštovanja in spodbuja medsebojno razumevanje.

V drugem delu poglavja avtorici skušata odgovoriti na vprašanje, ali je v percepciji medveda prišlo do obrata v smislu njegovega dojetja od »nebodigatreba« ali »škodljivca« do simbola neokrnjene narave ali celo do nečloveške subjektivitete. Obravnavata vlogo medijev in socialnih omrežij kot (so)oblikovalcev odnosa do velikih zveri. Na koncu pa na podlagi analize medijskih objav in spletnih omrežij predstavi primer pokrajine Kočevske, kjer je populacija medvedov v Sloveniji najštevilčnejša, a so prebivalci zaradi dolge tradicije sobivanja z medvedom njegovo prisotnost/obstoj sprejeli kot nekaj naravnega. K večji toleranci pripomore identificiranje prebivalcev z medvedom, ki je, poleg (pra)gozdov, postal simbol Kočevske. Svoje pa pridajo še posredne ali neposredne koristi, za katere ljudje menijo, da jih medved prinaša. Te pa lahko, po mnenju avtoric pričujoče študije, prispevajo k pozitivnemu obratu, ki se sicer že zarisuje v videnju medveda v Sloveniji, in sicer v smislu spremembe njegovega dojetja od škodljivca do bitja z intrinzično (gl. Golež Kaučič, 2023) vrednostjo.





Teya Brooks Pribac and Susanne Karr

# Down the Donkey Trail: An Imaginary Autoethnography

## I.

I was born in a village about one hour south of here. I don't remember much of my childhood. There are smells and sounds I come across occasionally my body seems to recognise as if I had experienced them before but my memory cannot ever locate their source in my past. I do remember fragments: my mother's soft hair – she must have had the softest hair in the entire donkeydom – and her warm breath that made me feel cosy and safe. Then the sudden separation and the unbearable lightness of the void her absence carved inside me. One of my first vivid memories. I still shudder with terror when it crosses my mind, and I think I always will. I was standing in this large pen in a sales yard with other donkeys. I was shaking. We all were. Everything was foreign: the environment, the people – donkey people, human people. The donkeys were telling stories they'd heard, horror stories of donkeys being taken by humans who then abused them. 'Is that why we are here? We will be taken by these humans? I will be taken by one of these humans and then what?' I couldn't wrap my head around it. 'This is not happening, it's a bad dream, I'll wake up and everything will be back to normal.' I was wrong.

\*

We walked for an hour, up and down hills, and then up again to the last hill, which was going to be my new home. By that stage I had been taught how to walk on a leash. I didn't particularly like it but I complied. It makes things easier with humans; if I start pulling then they pull and then we get into a fight and such waste of energy for no real reason. The view was nice, open, I could see mountains on the north side and glimpses of the sea on the south side. I had a barn that felt comfortable, the food was okay – some dry, some fresh. But boy, was I lonely!

It wasn't immediately clear what I was doing there, in that barn, in that yard, with those unfamiliar humans and no other donkey in sight. Then one day a donkey walked past! She was dragging a cart behind with an old human with a stick sitting in it. I was so excited! 'Hi there!' I yelled out. She didn't respond, she didn't even look at me. Could she not have heard me? 'I'll try louder next time,' I thought to myself.

\*

They call me Moro. It took me a while to figure out what that particular vocalisation meant. At first I thought it may have been a human sound for 'food' but then I realised they used the same vocalisation when they weren't bringing me food. With time I filtered out the less likely options and worked out that Moro was my human name.

Moro. I kinda liked it. It was easy, distinct. 'Mooooo' they'd call when they needed me. 'I'm on my waaaaay!' I'd call back, except when I was eating something yummy, in that case I'd ignore them. They weren't too fussed about it.

The first week was all about getting to know one another. I spent most of the time with the chickens and the two pigs. It was good to have someone around but I couldn't really see us becoming good friends. The humans would come every day, scratch my back, one day they measured my body and then came back with some straps and other stuff to tie around me. It felt a bit weird but it was all padded so it wasn't too uncomfortable. Then they dragged out a cart from one of the buildings, very similar to the one I saw the lady dragging a few days before. They attached it to me. 'I don't need this stuff on me!' I protested. They ignored me. So I kicked them. They kicked back. I kicked back. They got a thin stick and whipped me on my bum. 'Ouch!' It was painful. 'How am I going to get out of this?' I didn't have ideas. I wasn't sure I could.

The female donkey walked past again, dragging the same cart with the same human sitting in it. The stick! He had a stick too! Bloody humans. I called out to her again. 'Hi there! Can you hear me? Are you okay? Do they beat you too with that stick? I don't like it!'

And again, no sign that she'd registered my presence. Odd. Eventually, I decided to

give this cart a go. Clearly, the humans wanted me to walk around dragging the cart. Why? I tried it. It wasn't too bad. After we walked around the yard for a few days we took a longer trip. 'Hmm. This is kinda cool,' I thought to myself, as it was starting to get quite boring in that yard. We walked down a laneway, past trees and houses and yards like my own with more chickens, more pigs, some cows and ... 'Oh my goodness! Who are you???'

'I'm Martha. Who are you?'

'I'm Moro ... I think.'

'Hi Moro. Where do you live?'

'Down the road,' trying to think of some way of being a little bit more specific since all yards looked very similar, 'near the three birches.'

'Oh, I can see the canopies from my yard but we never walk down that way.'

Martha. She had the most beautiful face, a perfect blend of masculine and feminine features. It gave her a kind of authority-infused softness. I could have spent the rest of my life there, just watching her.

'Ouch! You asshole human and your bloody stick!'

'You better go, Moro, life is much easier if you manage to get along with the humans. I'll see you around. We'll probably be travelling together quite a bit.'

'Travelling? Together? With Martha?' Things were looking up.

\*

We started off at dawn. Unlike the previous walks, the cart this time was packed with stuff: a variety of vegetables, bread, eggs, it was pretty heavy. Where are we taking all this?

'To the markets in town.'

'I know this voice. Martha!'

We were going to the markets, according to Martha. We lived in a village that the humans called Padna. There they grew vegetables, wheat, olives, they made olive oil, bread, took eggs from the hens, loaded it all onto the carts which we then dragged to the nearby towns where the produce was sold at the markets. It took about an hour to get there. It was a nice walk when the weather was favourable but not so nice when it was windy and rainy.

We took the path through the forest down into the valley. It was a moderately smooth journey down; in a few places it was quite steep and I had to use a fair amount of muscle power to resist the pressure of the heavy cart, but generally the walk was pleasant and there

was vegetation along the path that I could occasionally take a nibble of. Once we reached the bottom we crossed a creek. It was fairly narrow, thank goodness, because the bridge over it looked quite scary and not all that stable, so I was glad it was a very short walk across. The first time I saw the bridge I was terrified, I didn't want to step onto it. Then I saw other donkeys managing it without much hassle so I figured my feet would be okay too.

Then up the next hill. That was a fairly difficult one because the cart was full and heavy. I was always very happy when we reached the top. Except when it was windy and I felt like I was going to get blown off all the way to Venice! That hill overlooks the sea, and while the view is truly beautiful, the wind in that area can be hellish. There's a copper engraving by a human named Valvasor (1689) from the seventeenth century depicting the power of the wind around there: it shows humans and horses; the humans are riding the horses and getting blown off by the wind. One human is holding onto the horse's tail. 'Poor horses,' I always think. Clearly, they didn't want to be there any more than I wanted to be there in that wind, but the humans forced them to (Figure 1).

Then we descended again, into the valley, towards the sea.

\*

The trips were always very interesting. It was an opportunity to spend time with other donkeys, we told stories, Martha in particular was always very chatty, she knew so much! Her ancestors had lived in our village for a long time. Unlike me and many others of our friends, she hadn't been moved there from some other place, she was born there, and so had been her mother, and her grandmother, and her great grandmother, and her great-great grandmother, and her great-great-great grandmother, as far back as ancestral memory goes.

\*

We tend to underestimate (hi)stories and cultural knowledge. No one functions by pure instinct. All animals have cultures, learn from others and with others. Culture – the dissemination of 'behavioural traditions through social learning' (Whiten, 2021) – is so widespread and so important that it is referred to as a second inheritance system, complementing the inheritance of genes governing innate behaviours (Jesmer et al., 2018). Free-living animals, from bighorn sheep to elephants to donkeys and all others, rely heavily on cultural knowledge in their search for food, water, shelter, as well as, of course, social norms and etiquette. No one is born into this world with social skills hard-wired in our brains and bodies, we are all works in progress.

Donkeys, thus, are not just trainable trailing machines, as some humans would have it. Donkeys are biologically, psychologically and socially complex beings, comparable to humans in everything that counts. If donkey mums are happy and stress-free, donkey ba-

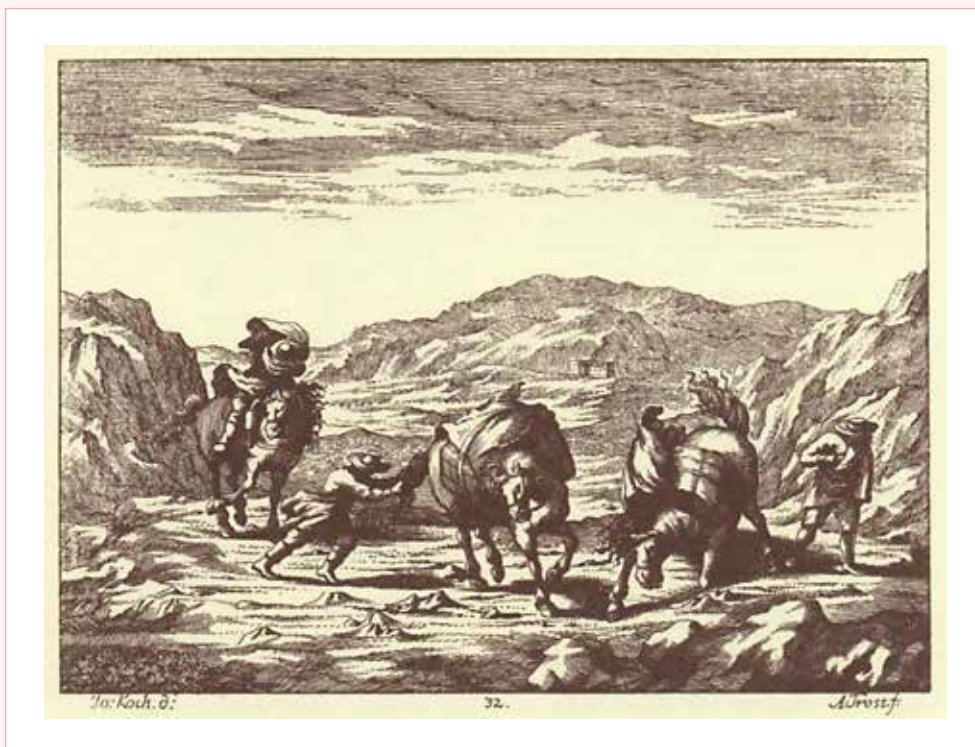


Figure 1: Kraška burja. Valvasor, 1689.

bies will more likely be happy and stress free. We will learn things faster and more eagerly, and the whole bicultural human-donkey space we are trapped in will be easier for both parties – donkey and human.

Not all donkeys are lucky enough to have had a normative upbringing. Many are forcefully removed from their mothers before mother and child are ready for weaning. This leaves psychological scars that are passed on across generations. That's what they mean when they say that something – good or bad – is in your blood. It becomes so ingrained in your system that it would take very special circumstances for you to be able to reset yourself – your body, your psyche (Panksepp and Biven, 2016; Coan, 2016; Polan and Hofer, 2016).

Often donkeys end up with abusive humans. When you see a human abuse a donkey you are reading the human's 'blood landscape' like an open book. Rosa knows all about it. Rosa is the donkey I saw in my first few days in the village, who was not responding to my calls. It turns out Rosa wasn't deaf and wasn't too immersed in her own thoughts to completely miss my presence. She did not respond because she couldn't. If she had responded, the human sitting in the cart would have beaten her savagely. He did it often. Mihael was his name. He did it to Rosa. He also did it to his wife. Everyone knew. No one did anything. Village life. You see and you un-see.

Rosa was a good friend of Martha. Rosa would go to the fields with the evil male human but she'd come to the markets with his wife, who was much nicer and, as a consequence, on these trips to the market, Rosa was a completely different person compared to the Rosa on the trips to the fields. Rosa also came from an old family that has been, not in the village itself, but in the region for many generations. Cumulatively over the years, Martha, Rosa and their ancestors met many donkeys, both in the villages and at the markets, so there was a lot of knowledge there to pass on to younger generations and to friends. We all listened with big open ears.

Once we got to the markets, we met other donkeys from far and wide. Sometimes I knew someone's voice because we donkeys hear so well, but I had never seen their face. In a desert environment, apparently, we hear other donkeys almost one hundred kilometres away! (Thompson, 2022) For us it was a bit less, due to the hills and various noises, but we still heard donkeys from a considerable distance, and it was nice when they first came to the markets and I could put a face to that familiar voice. At the markets we shared more stories. Sometimes, the human women would go to the markets in the town of Trieste across the bay. They would leave us in this huge barn in the town of Koper and take the ferry across. I loved it. We had hours to munch on nice hay and socialise with other donkeys, some of whom had come from places far away with different climates, vegetation, terrains, cultures.

In the beginning, the ancestral story goes, there was the wild donkey. More specifically: the African wild ass, a beautiful, slender, silver-coated, stoic animal who, while almost extinct in the wild, lives on through and within us. Our tribe, which the humans refer to as ‘domesticated’, (Rossel et al., 2008) appears to have emerged in Egypt over seventy thousand full moons ago.

Our ancestors played an essential role in the economic advancement of the region. As always, they had to carry all kinds of goods on their backs, not only in the Nile Valley but also in the neighbouring deserts. They were the reason why Egypt was able to trade so much and was so rich. You can find depictions of donkeys on the tomb walls of the Old and Middle Kingdoms. Even then, humans were apparently often under the mistaken impression that donkeys were their property and could therefore be sold. There are old contracts that document the sale and lease of donkeys. And they were believed to have a powerful, dark side to them, as donkeys were associated with the god Seth – ‘a sky god’ (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). I’ve always liked that!

Back on earth, our people differ in size and many other features. For example, there’s the zonkey from Africa, a descendent of a donkey and a zebra (*Zonkey*, 2024). They have a sturdy donkey body and a zebra-like striped coat. I’ve never seen one. I’ve never seen the Baudet du Poitou donkey, either, but those who have say they are very impressive. While most of us have smooth coats, these donkeys of the Frenchlands wear beautiful, long, thick dreads, and they tend to be tall and commanding.

The smallest people of all of us, known as miniature donkeys as they tend to be less than a metre in height, originate not far from here, down south, in the lands of the Sicilians and the Sardinians. I once saw one of them. He was reeeeeaaally friendly. All donkeys are friendly, but he was friendlier than normal, apparently, they are quite notorious for that (OKSA, n.d.).

Humans marvel at how friendly and socially plastic donkeys are with one another. We live in groups of donkeys of various ages and genders, we don’t have dominance hierarchy structures (Looke et al., 2024), we form close friendships and we fall in love. If we get separated from a loved companion, we can literally die of grief and a broken heart (a condition known as hyperlipidemia): the stress of separation causes high levels of fat particles in our blood, which can then deposit on the walls of our blood vessels and restrict blood flow, leading to a heart attack or stroke. It happened to Oskar when Ema suddenly disappeared and never came back. I think it would happen to me if I lost Martha.

I once heard that free living donkeys dig wells, known as *ass holes* (Lundgren et al., 2020). Donkeys generally don’t need much water because we’ve evolved in arid areas but we do need some water, so if you’re stuck in the middle of the desert or in a drought-stricken area, as some donkeys are, you may need to get resourceful. So, they do. They dig

holes of up to two metres in depth, exposing subsurface water which other animals in the area also come to drink from.

Such noble creatures, we donkeys. It's so sad that so many suffer under the hands of humans. However, I once heard of an abused donkey being taken into a human courtroom, up in the lands of the Britons, and upon seeing the poor bony donkey, covered in wounds and blood, the magistrate had no choice but to find the human – a Mihael-type-of-human – guilty (Lee, 2021). On a different occasion, back in the Frenchlands, a female donkey and a male human were brought to court accused of bestiality. The donkey was deemed of good character and acquitted, while the human was sentenced to death. Sadly, these appear to be exceptional cases; mostly, abusive humans walk free (Sykes, 2011).

\*

I often wonder whether our peoples can ever set ourselves free. Individuals and small groups have done so, yes, but all of us a species? Wouldn't it be nice to have complete self-determination, to not have to carry the weight of fruits, vegetables, human bodies, their psyches and minds?

## II.

Warm golden rays of sunlight immerse the ancient trees in a mild evening light. Socrates and Aristotle let themselves be enveloped by the light breeze, which carries the scent of the nearby sea with it. After the heat of the day, the air wraps around their bodies like a cooling shawl.

Mary takes a look at the garden through the small window in the stone shed. Looking in from outside, you can see the old, silver-grey, faded wooden beams that support the roof. They have irregular carving patterns. The shed has been renovated, but still bears the traces of the time when donkeys found shelter there after a long day's work. It was here that the heavy loads of vegetables and fruit were taken from them so that they could be shipped on to the harbour. The humans took the goods onto the ships and left the donkeys in the shed.

Mary steps out of the shed and walks with natural grace to the other two. Her sensitive nose twitches.

'I was just about to call you,' Socrates says. 'It's not hot now any more. Time for storytelling! What an interesting guy, your grandfather!'

Mary lifts her head to check the temperature and odour of her surroundings. She puffs out her nostrils slightly. 'That's right! It's pleasant.' Her long ears cast moving soft shadows on the wall of the shed. 'I miss Moro and his stories.'





*Figure 2: A Baudet du Poitou donkey (Image credit Wikimedia Commons)*

‘Tell us more!’ His shining eyes turn expectantly to the beautiful old donkey lady, her dark silvery fur looking shiny and plushy. His own light-coloured mane sticks out wildly in all directions.

Mary savours the expectant mood, but at the same time feels the sombre tinge of memories of toil and suffering. Aristotle, until now occupied with a nibble of fresh hay, looks up: ‘Yes, I’m also really interested! I know some stories from my family, when donkeys like us had to carry fruit and vegetables over the mountains.’ He looks towards the wooded hills rising steeply behind the harbour town. ‘What has always puzzled me: Was that something they were proud of, too, or was it solely a burden placed on them?’

Mary looks off into the distance as she begins to speak. ‘Maybe it was both, Aristotle.’ Then she looks at her two younger friends. ‘My grandmother, Martha, witnessed it all when she was a foal. She didn’t have to work herself, she was still too small, but she saw everything. Back then, donkeys like us had to drag heavy loads over the steep mountain paths.’ Carried by her melodious voice, the donkeys travel back in time. ‘She also told me how the donkeys often complained when they came back. How their hooves hurt. And their backs. They were forced to keep going despite the pain, because there was no other way for humans to get their goods to the markets and to the harbour.’

Socrates snorts. ‘Yes, I’ve heard that too. They were loaded with heavy baskets full of apples, grapes and tomatoes, onions, aubergines, beans and I don’t know what else, and it was hot and dusty. The steep paths were arduous!’

‘I’ve often tried to imagine it. The heat, the steep stony path, only a faint breeze here and there. Surrounded by greenery in the forest, occasional red cornelian cherries along the way. Stretches of path directly in the sun, the grass already withered in the heat. You can hear the water in the valley, but the stream in the forest has dried up. And the donkeys have been forced to walk in the heat with heavy packs on their backs. Whether they were exhausted, hungry or thirsty, the schedule had to be adhered to.’ Aristotle shakes his silky mane contemptuously at the memory of the stories and then continues: ‘Humans often tried to force the weaker donkeys, who were already almost collapsing, to go faster, with sticks. They beat and punished them instead of thanking them. And if they stopped to rest, they were shouted at.’

A serious shadow is reflected on Mary’s face. ‘Unfortunately, there have always been humans who believed that they were entitled to exploit everyone. And that everyone else had to serve them – other humans too, but especially nonhuman animals. Moro knew some of them, like Rosa. She didn’t even dare to answer his call when he first noticed her, for fear of being beaten.’

All three donkeys are silent and lower their eyes. The uneasy atmosphere seems to spread for a few moments like an inescapable billowing grey cloud. A feeling of being at the mercy of others mixed with the knowledge of the agony and hardship to come. It spreads from the pit of the stomach to the whole body.

A slight movement suddenly passes through the donkeys' slender bodies. And as if on a secret command, the three of them shake themselves, shake off the memories of the past, free themselves from the trepidation.

Then Mary continues as if nothing had happened: 'A few stories have been passed on by birds. There were also orioles in the forest back then. One of them was a good friend of Moro and other donkeys who travelled here. He told them news from the area in his golden voice. For example, what other animals had passed by. How they were coping with the heat. What the three young fox cubs had been up to. How the tawny owl, which had been living in the recently fallen tree, had found a new home. That they were all better off in the forest – whether deer, fox or wild boar.'

Aristotle has closed his eyes and seems to be travelling along the forest path. He feels as if he can clearly hear the sound of hooves on the dry, often dusty karst soil as the donkeys emerge from the forest.

'Scree or sandy ground doesn't bother us when we walk because we have an excellent sense of balance.' Mary lifts her dainty hoof and adds: 'You know, even though the outer layer of the hoof doesn't feel the temperature, the inner areas and the sole are sensitive. Very hot ground is unpleasant and is often avoided.'

'Unfortunately, that wasn't always possible!' interjects Aristotle. 'Otherwise, humans would have had to carry everything themselves.'

Mary nods with a furrowed brow. 'Yes, and what's more, we're extremely all-terrain beings. Everyone knows that. That's why the donkeys who used to work in transport, even if they carried a lot, were much safer than the humans who walked with them without any luggage.'

'What did our ancestors think of that?' Socrates wants to know. 'Were they at least well paid? And did they have enough free time? After all, they sold their labour. Their lifetime. And these hot treks can't have had much to do with their own ideas of a good life.'

Mary snorts pensively. 'That was different. Some of them thought it was okay to help humans if they were well looked after. Some humans understood that the donkeys were helping them and treated them well. They stroked and groomed them and provided them with the best

hay. They gave them enough water when they were thirsty and rested with them when the sun was at its highest. These humans saw the donkeys as partners, as friends, without whom they would never have brought their goods to the harbour towns.'

'And the donkeys thought that was okay?' Socrates asks sceptically.

'As far as I know, some found it acceptable if they were given enough time to rest and a nice place to stay with good food in return. But there were also humans, my grandmother said, who saw a donkey as just a tool, as something, not someone, that was useful to them. As if they were moving machines. They didn't care about the donkeys' welfare as long as they carried their loads. The donkeys often felt like prisoners, forced to lead a life that was not their own.'

Socrates' eyes widen as he hears Mary's words. 'Like prisoners? Like slaves?' he asks cautiously.

The sun has now sunk below the horizon, the light taking on a rich golden colour casting long, soft shadows. Looking into the distance towards the sea, one can see a varied play of colours on the water. Tones of deep orange fade into a delicate pink, immersing the scene in a kind of suspended state.

Aristotle takes up the conversation again. 'Yes, they must have felt like slaves, I bet they did. Because if they had at least been regarded as employees, they would have had more rights. They could have had a say in how many breaks they needed and what pay they received. But for many, their lives were just an endless slog. Certainly not honour, but compulsion. I can imagine that they often dreamed of being free to determine their own lives and not always having to follow the orders of unfeeling, stupid humans.'

Mary nods. 'I'm sure it was often like that. Our ancestors had different experiences and perspectives. Some felt trapped and oppressed, some felt like labour slaves. Others saw themselves as friends of the humans who played an important role.' Her wide eyes look from one to the other. 'How do you feel when you hear that?'

'I remember the story of the Town Musicians, I think it's great,' says Aristotle.

'Is that the one with the donkey, dog, cat and rooster?' asks Socrates.

'Yes, exactly. The animals leave the ungrateful humans they've been living with. First and foremost a wise old donkey.'

‘Oh yes, I remember. The donkey realised that his “master” had something bad in mind and ran away.’ Socrates pronounces the word “master”, an expression that nobody here takes seriously, in an ironic tone.

Aristotle nods. ‘He meets a dog that is to be shot because he is no longer good at hunting and no longer useful to humans. Donkey and dog decide to form a band and are joined along the way by a cat and a rooster.’

‘I think the story is similar with the cat and the rooster,’ adds Socrates. ‘They no longer “serve” humans in the way as they had imagined in their fantasies of omnipotence.’ This time, he speaks the word “serve” with an ironic tone. ‘Because the cat no longer wants to catch mice, she should be drowned, and the rooster should end up in the soup pot.’

Aristotle grimaces. ‘Primitive customs!’

Mary joins in the conversation. ‘Yes, it’s a widespread delusion among humans that other animals are their subordinates and therefore must serve them. It’s written in a book they consider sacred.’

Aristotle nods with a grim expression. ‘That’s exactly what the Town Musicians didn’t want to put up with anymore! So they formed a band and headed for the city together. Instead of resigning themselves to their fate, they freed themselves. Their songs must have been all about empowerment.’

‘Yes, the songs were very famous. Some were surprisingly melodious, despite the harsh content,’ confirms Mary. ‘Martha knew many of them. The lyrics were quite political, messages against dependence on unjust treatment and exploitation. They also addressed the transition from a passive role as a “tool” of the people to actively shaping one’s own life.’

‘There were so many places where donkeys were abused as servants,’ Socrates adds. ‘Unfortunately, the question is still relevant, especially when I think of other animals! We need to raise awareness of this! The stories of our ancestors show us how strong we are and what we have been through.’


‘It’s good to know where we come from,’ agrees Aristotle. ‘And unlike the contradiction theorem, there can be several experiences that are all true in their own way. But nevertheless, I must state that I consider such labour conditions to be completely inappropriate, even if the donkeys were treated well. I am very happy about the end of slavery. It wasn’t that long ago.’

**1**

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.) *The Golden Ass*, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Golden-Ass> (Accessed: 29 September 2024). “The Golden Ass, prose narrative of the 2nd century c.e. by Lucius Apuleius, who called it *Metamorphoses*. Though Apuleius’s picaresque novel is fiction, its hero has been seen as a partial portrait of its author. The work is particularly valuable for its description of the ancient religious mysteries. Lucius’s restoration from animal to human shape with the aid of Isis and his acceptance into her priesthood suggest that Apuleius himself had been initiated into that cult.”

‘There was also another crisis – with the rise of the beauty industry, the demand for donkey skins increased,’ says Socrates with a shudder. ‘The hides were used to make collagen – so ageing humans wouldn’t have to look at their ageing skin. It was so bad that donkeys were even threatened with extinction in some areas.’

‘A terrible time,’ remarks Mary. ‘There was nothing to stop donkeys being killed en masse! Just because humans had the obsession to stay beautiful for a long time, donkeys were robbed of their lives. As if these wonderful beings were disposable, unsouled objects.’

‘Donkeys have contributed so much to human culture that it cannot even be called “human”, but many humans seem to have forgotten this time and again. Donkeys already appeared in Egyptian pictorial texts,’ says Aristotle. ‘The hieroglyphic system of the humans of Egypt also included donkeys . Humans then were aware of how important we donkeys were for them to prosper, even though they still traded donkeys, as if they could ever own someone else.’

‘Donkeys were somehow related to Seth, who was considered god of the deserts and thunderstorms,’ (Rosicrucian Museum, 2024) Socrates interjects. ‘Humans found that donkeys are ambivalent creatures. Their cunning and sometimes malice seems to have fitted in well with ideas about this god. Donkeys were also present in their magic rites – with both threatening and protective abilities’ (Vandenbeusch, 2020).

‘Yes, there was a protection spell against danger for the human king in the old empire: it helped against the triple threat of a female hippopotamus, a female donkey and the creator god Khnum,’ explains Socrates proudly. ‘The menacing donkey was a kind of intermediate creature, a mixture of donkey and snake, and was feared as monstrous and loud.’

‘I know, but by association with the destructive god Seth, the donkeys have suffered much violence,’ Mary sighs. ‘Further proof of irrationality, if any was needed. First, humans invent something and then they’re afraid of it, of their own invention.’ She shakes her head.

‘I think there’s something good about that,’ Aristotle points out. ‘After all, humans have finally realised that we are powerful beings. Not only incredibly strong and clever, but also very potent in erotic terms. Humans can’t compete with that. That impressed the Romans in particular.’

‘And they knew about donkey magic!’ Mary says with a secretive smile. ‘There must have been a long-cherished wish of some humans to become donkey – just like in the story of the golden Ass.’<sup>1</sup>

‘That’s right,’ says Socrates with satisfaction. ‘But I have also heard that there were humans who pointed out the invaluable influence of donkeys on human prosperity in songs and poems. Mary, do you know any?’

‘Yes, Moro told me several. There’s the story about the magic donkey that could spit and shit gold for the humans (Grimm Stories, n.d.). But I don’t like it. It features human treachery and greed. And even though this magic donkey is the creator of abundance for the humans, he is not especially featured. When will they ever learn?’ Mary looks a bit annoyed, but continues. ‘In Brazil, on the other hand, human musicians have composed songs in honour of donkeys. They have publicised and acknowledged the historical and cultural importance of our people,’ says Mary. ‘One is called “Leave the Donkey Alone”<sup>2</sup>, and another is called “Apology to Donkey”<sup>3</sup>. These humans have recognised that the donkeys have achieved a great deal and yet have often been treated badly. A song lyric by Chico Buarque says (Mary sings):

‘The donkey is our brother!  
And the man, in return  
What does it give you?  
Punishment, blow, stick in the legs, stick in the loin  
Stick on the neck, stick on the face, on the ears  
Ah, donkey is good, man is bad!  
[...]  
But I like him  
Because he is a little server who is damned! (she frowns a little as she sings this line of text)  
Sacred animal!  
Donkey, my brother, I recognise your worth!’

The timbre of her dark voice fits well with the melancholic melody of the piece. There is silence for a moment. Then Aristotle says:

‘As far as I know, a human called Antonio published an extensive study on donkeys. The title of the book is ‘The Donkey, Our Brother’ (Vieira, 1964). In it, he vehemently takes the side of donkeys and condemns the gruesome practice of exporting and slaughtering donkeys. This book has been said to be one of the most comprehensive studies on donkeys,’ says Aristotle.

‘Antonio seems to have been a pleasant human,’ Socrates opines. ‘I’ve heard that he also wanted to introduce a public holiday in honour of donkeys. Unfortunately, he didn’t succeed.’

‘But someone else must have because there actually is a (human) world donkey day!’

‘Really?’

**2**  
Béliier, Eline (2019) *Deixe o Jumento em Paz*, YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR4BJRuW\\_tw&t=18s&ab\\_channel=ElineB%C3%A9lier](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR4BJRuW_tw&t=18s&ab_channel=ElineB%C3%A9lier) (Accessed: 29 September 2024)  
“Deixe o Jumento em Paz”, see also <https://www.vista-se.com.br/ativistas-veganais-se-unem-e-gravam-musica-em-manifestacao-contra-o-abate-de-jumentos-no-brasil/>.

**3**  
Aires, Cassio; Luiz Gonzaga - *Apologia ao Jumento.wmv*. YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Mbi7J5KEwI&t=6s&ab\\_channel=CassioAires](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Mbi7J5KEwI&t=6s&ab_channel=CassioAires) (Accessed: 29. 9. 2024).

‘Yes, celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May every year!’

‘Great! We’ll celebrate the day from now on and let everyone else know,’ says Socrates happily.

Aristotle looks thoughtfully from one to the other. ‘I’m glad we’ve heard so many stories today.’

‘Yes,’ says Mary, ‘these stories are important. And there are so many others. The donkeys working in the brick industry in India, for example. Or the ones that were forced to carry humans that were too lazy to walk by themselves, in the Greek islands...’ She takes a break and then continues in a better mood: ‘Luckily, that’s all in the past now. But let’s talk about this another time. They remind us of who we are and why we are here today. It’s our job to pass on these memories. To participate in the liberation of others. So that one day you can tell of the grey pre-historic times when donkeys carried the weight of the world on their shoulders.’

‘And it’s essential that it is us, the donkeys, who tell the stories,’ says Socrates with a serious look.

### III.

We are in the hilly region of Padna, in the hinterland of Koper, where you can catch a glimpse of the nearby sea. Istria begins here, a fertile area with wine, fruit and vegetable cultivation. It’s a hot Friday morning, 19 July 2024. We set off to track the actual journey that in the late 1940s and early 1950s Moro would have taken from Padna, where he lived, to the market in town, a route that for centuries other donkeys were forced to use. The trip to Koper takes us just over an hour.

Moro was a real flesh-and-blood donkey, enslaved by Teya’s family. He was purchased in a village in the Croatian part of Istria, and so named for his velvety brown coat. Moro’s job was to accompany Teya’s grandmother, Ana, to and from the fields where she grew vegetables and then to the markets in the nearby towns where the vegetables were sold. Rosa was also a real flesh-and-blood donkey, living a few doors down from Moro, in an abusive household. The rest of the story narrated in the first part of this essay is an imaginary autoethnography, inspired by extant science, available ethnographic data, and the smells, sounds and sights of the forest we walked through.

Nonhuman animal cultural studies, a fairly recent yet prolific area of inquiry, complements the findings from the fields of critical ethology, cross-species neuroscience, psychology and critical animal studies to help us re-paint the picture of the nonhuman animal



as no longer just an accumulation of instinctual actions and reactions but as a human-comparable being with a sophisticated psycho-bio-social fabric and an interest in life, freedom and well-being. True well-being cannot be achieved in a setting that instrumentalises the animal, i.e., that views and uses the animal as a tool for human interest and benefit. In such a setting, by definition, the animal's interest is not prioritised. Well-being and psychological resilience can only be approximated when normative needs and potentials are catered for and when it is recognised that, for every animal, their own life and that of their loved ones is/are the most important thing. While food is a critical component of a happy life, no animal "lives by bread alone", and the absence of physical pain, while equally crucial, is only a component of the complex phenomenon of "the good life", which for humans and other animals starts shaping at conception and grows until the day we die. Everything that touches us and that we touch on the way contributes to it, for better or for worse.

In the second part of the essay, we dive into a Utopian future. The setting transforms; no animals are burdened with labour anymore. Now, donkeys roam freely across the meadows and coastal trails, or wherever they wish to go, their strength no longer abused for human work but used for their own enjoyment and well-being instead. They are able to choose their own home, their own friends, partners, decide on their own lives and destinies and those of their children. The self-determination that, for centuries, their bodies and minds ached for has finally reached the donkey realm, and is there to stay.

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## Po oslovi poti: imaginarna avtoetnografija

Smo v vasici Padna, v zaledju Kopra. Na severni strani obzorje krasijo gore, na južni pa utrinki morja. Tukaj se začenja Istra, rodovitno območje za pridelavo vina, sadja in zelenjave. Petek je, 19. julij 2024, in kot se za julij spodobi, vroče. Zgodaj zjutraj se odpravimo na pot skozi gozd do vasice Šmarje in naprej proti Kopru. To pot, od svojega padenskega doma do koprške tržnice, je osliček Moro v poznih štiridesetih in zgodnjih petdesetih letih dvajsetega stoletja skupaj z drugimi zasužnjenimi osli in človeškimi spremljevalci redno opravljal, kakor so to, pod prisilo, počeli osli stoletja pred njim. V Kopru je stala tudi stavba, kjer so človeške živali pustile osle v oskrbi, pridelke pa so s trajektom odpeljale na tržnico v Trst. Osli so v tej zgradbi kakor tudi na samih tržnicah poleg oslov, s katerimi so običajno potovali, imeli priložnost srečati tudi osle iz bolj oddaljenih krajev.

Moro, ki ga spoznamo v prvem delu prispevka, je bil resnični osel, ki ga je zasužnjila družina ene od soavtoric (TBP). Kupljen je bil v hrvaški Istri, ime pa je dobil po žametni, rjavi dlaki. Morova naloga je bila človeške »lastnike« spremljati na polja, od tam domov pripeljati nabrano zelenjavo in jo nato odpeljati na eno od bližnjih mestnih tržnic. Rosa, ki jo srečamo v prvem delu, je bila prav tako resnična oslica. Živela je v Morovi sosesčini in bila žrtev okrutnega ravnanja človeškega zasužnjevalca. Preostali del zgodbe je imaginarna avtoetnografija, ki navdih črpa v sodobni znanosti, razpoložljivih etnografskih podatkih ter vonjih, zvokih in vizualnih elementih, ki jih vpijamo na enournem sprehodu do Kopra.

Kaj razumemo pod izrazom »imaginarna avtoetnografija«? Avtoetnografija je akademski pristop, ki vključuje avtobiografske sestavine. V tem okviru se postavimo v Morovo kožo in si poskušamo zamisliti, kako je doživljal potovanja in interakcije z ostalimi osli ter širše ekološko-socialnimi dejavniki na poti, tržnici in v življenju na splošno. Moro se pojavi v vlogi imaginarnega avtorja in imaginarno-kritično naracijo razvijamo z njegove perspektive.

V drugem delu prispevka potujemo v utopično prihodnost, v kateri so osli svobodni in v življenju uživajo samodeterminacijo v odnosu do sebe, svojih otrok, prijateljev in ostalih; nič več se ne zasužnjujejo v človekovo korist kot delovna sila ali v druge namene. Tukaj spoznamo Morovo pravnikinjo Mary in njene prijatelje, ki razpravljajo o čezgeneracijskem spominu in pomembnosti zgodb – zgodb, ki se iz roda v rod prenašajo po kulturni poti preko medgeneracijskega učenja, in zgodb, ki se prenašajo po krvni poti in se odražajo na psihofizični zgradbi posamezne živali: človeka, osla in drugih živali.

Kultura pri nečloveških živalih je sorazmerno nov vendar zelo plodovit raziskovalni fokus. V radikalnem nasprotju s protiznanstveno predpostavko separatistične ideologije, ki v nečloveški živali vidi zgolj skupek instinktov, kumulativna dognanja na področju živalskih kulturnih študij ter izsledki, predvsem v zadnjih dveh desetletjih, s področij kritične etologije, čezvrstnih nevroznanosti in psihologije ter kritične animalistike zarisujejo podobo nečloveške živali kot biološko, psihološko in socialno kompleksnega bitja, popolnoma primerljivega s človeško živaljo.



## AUTHORS / AVTORICE

### **TEYA BROOKS PRIBAC,**

PhD, is a scholar and multidisciplinary artist, living in the Australian Blue Mountains with sheep and other animals. She holds a PhD in animal grief and spirituality from the University of Sydney. Her research interests include evolutionary thanatology, animal emotion, cognition and psyche, animal spirituality, human-nonhuman animal relations, animal self-determination and liberation. Her latest publications include the award-winning monograph *Enter the Animal* by Sydney University Press (Nautilus Book Awards 2022, shortlisted for the American Academy of Religion Book Award 2022) and memoir *Letters To My Sheep* (Nautilus Book Awards 2024, Los Angeles Book Festival runner-up 2024). Outside academia she works with governmental and grassroots entities furthering animal and nature protection and rights. She is a passionate cook, specialising in plant-based cheeses. Personal website: [www.veganoman.org](http://www.veganoman.org).

### **MARJETKA GOLEŽ KAUČIČ**

is a Principal Research Associate at the Institute of Ethnomusicology Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia and was from 1994–2015 its head. The focus of her research today are broader folklore studies, animals in Slovenian, European and World folklore and literature (zoofolkloristics, ecocritic, critical animal studies) and culture. She is a Full Professor in Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, and teaches the courses: »Slovene folk songs and literary poetry – folkloristic and intertextual viewpoints« and »Ecoculture: Studies of Animals and Nature in Folklore, Literature and Culture«. She is a principle investigator of the research project Thinking Animals. She has published scholarly monographs titled *Folk and Literary: Two Faces of Creativity* (2003), *The young man are gathering – war and soldiers in Slovenian folksong* (2013), *Slovenian Folk Ballad* (2018), »*The Man is the Worst Beast*« (2023) as well as a number of articles and papers in Slovenia and abroad. From 2002–2017 she has been the Vice President of an international association for ballad research, now its President (the International Ballad Commission: KfV) and from 2004–2011 a member of the SIEF Executive Board.

### **VALENTINA HRIBAR SORČAN**

(born 1969), PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, where she received her bachelor degree in Philosophy and French Language and Literature. She currently lectures on the subjects of Philosophy of Art, Aesthetics, and Philosophical Anthropology. She is a member of the *Slovenian Society for Aesthetics* and *The European Association for Aesthetics*. Valentina Hribar Sorčan has a PhD in Contemporary French Philosophy. She works in the area of aesthetics, ethics and philosophical anthropology, linking all three fields, lately mainly in the direction of eco-critics, the concepts of atmosphere and participation (*genius loci*), and with the image of animals in art (especially in painting and in contemporary visual and performance art). She is interested in how art treats animal subjectivity and how it can contribute to better animal rights with its creative and conceptual solutions.

### **SUSANNE KARR**

Dr. phil. Independent Scholar, Philosopher, Life Coach and Cultural Editor. Born and raised in Munich, Germany, she studied these fields in Vienna, combining them to inform her professional and philosophical approach.

Susanne's philosophical work focuses on critical animal studies, exploring the relationships and connections between human and nonhuman animals. She investigates different possibilities of communication in which humans and other animals relate to one another. She questions artificial dichotomies such as nature/culture and body/soul, promoting a more integrated understanding of these relationships. Susanne Karr is the author of *Connectedness* (Verbundenheit), published in 2015 by neofelis, Berlin, which examines communication and its prerequisites, especially within the context of human-animal relations. (<https://www.neofelis-verlag.de/animal-studies/verbundenheit>). Her research delves into how human-animal relationships impact overall well-being, and she incorporates these insights into her coaching practice. She also writes a blog called 'Striped Insights' (<https://aureliapangolini.substack.com>).

### **IRENA KAVČIČ**

is a researcher at the Department of Biology, Biotechnical faculty, University of Ljubljana. She earned her PhD in 2016, exploring the impacts of supplemental feeding and other anthropogenic food sources on the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) activity. Since 2010 she has been involved in a range of conservation projects related to large carnivores. Her work encompasses areas such as cultural ecosystem services, the non-consumptive use of large carnivores in tourism, engaging local communities in conservation efforts, and communicating the social benefits of large carnivores.



### **JELKA KERNEV ŠTRAJN**

is a literary theorist and translator from Ljubljana. As a theorist she focuses on the theory of tropes, feminist theory, animal studies and eco-criticism. She has been publishing in the journals *Primerjalna književnost*, *Delta*, *Literatura*, and in various monographs. In her work she relies primarily on approaches developed by contemporary semiotics, as well as by philosophical texts of Deleuze and Guattari and their theoretical legacy. She is the co-editor and co-author of the monograph on ecocriticism, *Ecology Through Poetry*, which was published in 2012 by the Sampark publishing house in Calcutta. In the year 2009 she published a book, *The Renaissance of Allegory* (ZRC SAZU). In July 2019 she participated in an international symposium within the framework of the ICA (International Congress of Aesthetics) with the treatise “Ecocriticism as Subversive Aesthetics”, which was published in the journal *Art and Media* (2020). Jelka Kernev Štrajn is a member of AILC/ICLA (The International Association for Comparative Literature), and a member of ICA. Currently, her main interest is the problem of the representation of animals in literature.

### **SUZANA MARJANIĆ**

works at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore in Zagreb (Croatia), where she realises her interests in the theories of ritual and myth, critical animal studies and the performance studies. She published six books: *Voices of “Bygone Days”: Transgressions of Worlds in Krleža’s Notes 1914–1921/22* (2005), *Chronotope of Croatian Performance Art: From Traveleri until Today* (2014), *The Topoi of Performance Art: A Local Perspective* (2017), *Cetera animantia: From Ethnozoology to Zooethics* (2022), *Myths and Re/constructions: Tracing Natko Nodilo’s Old Faith of Serbs and Croats* (2022) and *Performance Art nad Kynicism: Performance Line of Resistance* (2022). The book *The Chronotope of Croatian Performance Art: From Traveleri until Today* (2014), which is the first history of performance art in Croatia, won the Annual award for the Croatian Selection of AICA and the National Award for Science. She co-edited eight collections, for instance, the collection *Ecofeminism: between Women’s and Green Studies* (2020) with Goran Đurđević and *Cat-Collection: from Bastet to Catwoman* (2022) with Rosana Ratkovčić. She is a member of Animal Friends Croatia from 2001.

### **ANJA MORIC**

is a political scientist and cultural anthropologist, a researcher at the Scientific Research Centre of Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, and an assistant professor at the University of Ljubljana. She is active in the field of minorities, migration and cultural heritage. Director of a non-governmental organisation, the *Putscherle Institute, Centre for Research, Culture and Cultural Heritage Preservation*, which deals with the preservation of cultural heritage in the Kočevska/Gottschee region. Author of five exhibitions, three ethnographic films, four children’s books and the blog: [www.gottscheerblog.com](http://www.gottscheerblog.com).

### **VESNA LIPONIK**

completed her MA in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory and Slovene Language at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. Her MA thesis *Anthropomorphisation: a critical analysis of a (non)trope* was awarded the faculty Nahtigal Prize for the best final thesis. She works as a Junior Research Fellow at ZRC SAZU, Institute of Philosophy and is a PhD student at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU. Her research interests span across the field of connections between ethics, ontology and aesthetics, as well as literary theory and stylistics. She is particularly interested in the transformations of the concepts of “animal” and “human” in contemporary philosophy and aesthetics. She is writing her PhD thesis under the supervision of Dr. Marina Gržinić Mauhler.

### **ULRIKE SCHMID**

is PhD, studied Educational Sciences at the University of Innsbruck. The doctorate dealt with the social construction of animals (using the example of some mammal species) in biology textbooks at lower secondary level in Austria as a critical-discourse-analytical study. Since 2022 semestral external teaching assignment in the field of elective package ‘Sustainability’ for bachelor students at the University of Innsbruck. Main research interests: Relationships between humans and (wild) animals in socialisation contexts and critical discourse analysis.



## REVIEWS / RECENZIJI

## Animals in focus/ Živali v žarišču

Edited/Uredili: Marjetka Golež Kaučič and/in Saša Babič

The edited volume *Animals in Focus* is concerned with human-animal relations from an animal ethical position with a view to changing them for the benefit of the animals. It challenges the traditions of anthropocentrism, speciesism, and Cartesian rationality, which categorically separates mind and matter, culture and nature, and humans and animals. Following ethological and biological findings that blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman beings, the editors recognise the latter as equally autonomous subjects with their own worlds rather than subordinate beings and objects for human use.

On this premise, the editors have compiled chapters that not only seek to deconstruct traditional world views and cultural traditions but also provide positive examples for social and cultural transformation. They are predominantly located in the humanities, addressing literature, the arts, and folklore. Two chapters speak to political dimensions, and one picks up on the question of education. They all follow on from the animal turn in the humanities and social sciences and, by addressing new aspects of human-animal relations, make inspiring contributions to this research field.

The chapters in more detail:

**Vesna Liponik**, offers a perspective from Comparative Literature and Literary Theory. In her article, *We have always been grotesque*, she suggests the grotesque as a possibility for bridging and transcending the human-animal dualism by connecting the seemingly incompatible and thereby radically transforming the concept of species itself. She grounds her paper in Agamben's discussion of the grotesque images of the self-righteous with animal heads at a messianic feast in a miniature of a Hebrew Bible from the 13th century and weaves in posthumanist threads of thinking in terms of radical interconnectedness and becoming, trans-corporeality and intra-action which defy clear boundaries and identities to open up forms of being beyond fixed ascriptions. The potential of the author's anti-speciesist position lies in drawing attention to the genetical, biological and cultural interdependency between homo sapiens and other animals ("the simultaneous existence of several species in one species"), homo sapiens's animal nature and the deconstruction of the pre-formation of bodies along concepts such as species and disability.

Literary theorist **Jelka Kernev Štrajn** discusses the difficulties of language in representing the (nonhuman) other, of bridging the gap between the human speaker and the (nonhuman) other. The title of her chapter, *The nonhuman animal between metaphor*

*and metamorphosis*, announces her attempt to escape from “the cage of language and of mind, to enter the area of pre-reflexive states and [...] the open, where non-human animals already dwell” through zoo poetics. Rejecting metaphor as a means of representation and substitution that effectively hides what it might mean to be the (nonhuman) other, the author follows Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of metamorphosis that resonates with their “becoming-animal” as, e.g. in Kafka’s animal stories. She presents and elaborates on four literary examples which “transcend the [...] interspecies barriers with the aid of imagination”, e.g. through mingling human and imagined nonhuman perception and communication, provoking readers with their limits to knowledge and knowability and experimental excursions beyond human language.

Philosopher of Arts **Valentina Hribar Sorčan** in her chapter *Reviving Interest in Realistic Animal Painting using the Example of Rosa Bonheur* draws the readers’ attention to 19th-century painter Rosa Bonheur whose realistic animal portraits were increasingly deemed old-fashioned by the advent of the 20th-century and are only being rediscovered today in the context of the animal turn in the humanities. Contrary to her past and contemporary fellow artists, she did not anthropomorphise animals “in symbolic, historical and genre depictions” in her paintings but with a keen interest in their welfare showed them in their individuality, human-induced suffering but also agency and resistance. Although, as the author remarks, Rosa Bonheur was a member of the Animal Protection Society, her artistic work did not challenge social sensibilities. However, it can be seen as an inspiration for contemporary zooimagery with a potential for sensitizing the public for animal ethical questions.

Educational scientist **Ulrike Schmidt** presents an analysis of Austrian school textbooks in her chapter *Squirrel, lynx, and a field mouse. The contribution of school text books to a speciesistic perception of animals*. While schools and textbooks are ostensibly concerned with transmitting objective knowledge, they are also places and means of forming children’s bodies and minds according to the dominant worldview and political and economic interests. In the case of biology textbooks for 5<sup>th</sup>-graders, the author’s critical discourse analysis contradicts the expectation to find “truth” or “objective scientific facts” and reveals an intricate set of strategies that taken together legitimize the commodification and (often lethal) manipulation of animals and the systematic disregard of their inherent value, their subjectivity and interests. She calls for revising biology textbooks to make the pervasiveness of cultural values and political interests visible, and to include up-to-date biological and ethological knowledge to enable an understanding of animals’ needs and interests and animal ethics.

With a background in Literary Science, **Marjetka Golež Kaučič** contributes a chapter on zoofolkloristics. Under the heading *Home slaughtering pigs or redefining tradition and industrial holocaust* she takes the reader through a brief history of pig symbolism and then discusses the treatment of home slaughter in the ethnological literature as heritage

and ritual. Although home slaughter compares favourably to industrialized mass slaughter, the fact that it is regarded as a ritual reminiscent of ancient sacrifices and as a heritage and festival for human culinary pleasures obfuscates and normalizes animal suffering and death. Nevertheless, folklore songs and literature also express traces of empathy for the frightened, struggling and squealing pig – the nonhuman family member who is about to be killed. This cognitive dissonance provides an opening for sensitization and cultural transformation that is consciously enlarged by modern critical Slovenian literature, e.g. by poet Detela, and pig rescue centres that enable alternative lived and narrated pig stories.

Another contribution from ethnology and folklore research is provided by **Suzana Marjanić** under the title *GMO apocalypse or the so-called mysterious extinction of bees*. She discusses a “mysterious” dying of bees in the local context of Croatia and Serbia and the dangers of the GMO foods, which disregard natural processes by implementing genetically modified organisms into plants and poisoning our ecosystem with glyphosate and herbicides.

Cultural anthropologist **Anja Moric** and biologist **Irena Kavčič** report on people’s perception of bears based on an empirical study in Slovenia in their chapter *Ways of Seeing Bears in Slovenia*. They draw attention to the European history of near-extinction and recuperation through protection legislation and the ambivalence towards bears as a predator who violates the border between wilderness and civilisation and worries humans. Nevertheless, the authors find a high level of approval among the local population for various reasons including economic advantages and local identity.

Finally, artist and writer **Teja Brooks Pribac** and philosopher **Susanne Karr** lend their voice to an Istrian donkey who relates his life as a transport animal in a fictitious autoethnography as well as biological, historical and cultural aspects of “donkeydom” based on scientific and ethnographic data, the family history of the first author and the embodied experience of both authors with the nature and culture of this region.

Overall, the book makes a very welcome and important contribution to the fields of human-animal studies and critical animal studies, not least because it adds expertise and perspectives from the Alpen-Adria region to a discourse that is strongly dominated by Anglo-American and Northern European academia. Moreover, the book conveys a positive outlook with several enlightening concepts, approaches, and practices that may effectively make a change for nonhuman animals. Especially the little cracks in anthropocentric and dualistic certainties that open space for nonhuman subjectivation and articulation presented in this volume will be a source of inspiration for academics and students in a wide range of disciplines as well as scientifically interested activists.

**Dr. Reingard Spannring,**

editor of the *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial* (Lexington, 2021) and research associate at the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck

## **Animals in focus/ Živali v žarišču**

**Edited/Uredili: Marjetka Golež Kaučič and/in Saša Babič**

In a world where tens of billions of animals are slaughtered annually for human consumption alone, and where the biomass of humans and “livestock” for their use constitutes 95 percent of the total mass of mammalian bodies, critical voices that shed light on this unprecedented massacre are necessary. *Animals in Focus* is thus a more than welcome addition to these voices, as it covers diverse fields ranging from philosophy, literary studies, comparative studies, zoofolkloristics, anthropology, art history, critical animal studies, critical animal pedagogy, and conservation biology. The core idea of the collection of essays is to provide a different perspective on human-animal relations, emphasizing a non-speciesist and non-anthropocentric understanding of our fellow creatures.

The collection consists of eight chapters by renowned international scholars in the broad field of critical animal studies who seek to go beyond a mere welfarist perspective on improving the conditions of instrumentalized animals. On the contrary, all the contributors share a deep commitment to valuing animals not only as sentient beings whose suffering should be minimized, but also as fully-fledged subjects who deserve respect and should be de-instrumentalized. Vesna Liponik, a young and promising Slovenian scholar of animal and feminist studies, opens the collection with her study of the grotesque and its significance for deconstructing speciesism. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben, Mikhail Bakhtin, and other notable figures, Liponik argues that the notion of the grotesque combines human and non-human bodies in such a way that it offers interesting possibilities for thinking that avoids speciesism. Jelka Kernev Štrajn, another important Slovenian scholar in the field of critical animal studies, reflects on the use of metaphors in the representation of non-human animals. The text argues an extremely interesting point, namely that human poetic language most closely resembles animal communication. In addition, Kernev Štrajn claims that consideration of the other, especially when the other is the animal, is the only acceptable ethical stance.

Kernev Štrajn's text is followed by Valentina Hribar Sorčan's reflection on the revival of interest in realistic animal painting and how it contributed to a more morally acceptable attitude toward nonhuman animals. Ulrike Schmid from Innsbruck, Austria, is another promising researcher, who offers a text that shows how animals are predominantly presented according to utility considerations and that the discourse conveyed in textbooks



is structured in a utilitarian-anthropocentric way. Marjetka Golež Kaučič is undoubtedly one of the most prominent Slovenian scholars working in the field of critical animal studies, and her work focuses on zoofolkloristics, examining the so-called “negative traditions,” i.e. those traditions based on anthropocentric exploitation of animals, such as pig slaughter and various forms of hunting. In this collection, her text again focuses on pig slaughter, but brings a different perspective by comparing it to the industrial holocaust.

Suzana Marjanić is one of the best known Croatian scholars in the field of critical animal studies, and her contribution to this volume is dedicated to the animals that are often left out of the human-animal debate: insects, or more specifically, bees. She links the recent extermination of bees to pollution practices, which she examines from various angles. Irena Kavčič and Anja Moric dedicate their chapter to one of the most divisive issues in Slovenian public space: the presence of free-roaming bears. As the authors try to show, the perception of the bear could change from that of a nuisance to a welcome guest that can bring many benefits. However, the question remains as to how this perspective remains rooted in anthropocentrism. The honor of writing the final chapter goes to Slovenian-Australian scholars Teya Brooks Pribac and Susanne Karr, who reflect in essay form on the fate of Moro, a real donkey who lived and worked in the Slovenian coastal region. Their essay provides a valuable insight into the fate of exploited ruminants.

It is safe to say that the volume *Animals in Focus* prove to be an indispensable compendium for understanding the new directions of the already well-developed field of critical animal studies in Central and Eastern Europe. As such, the book is a testimony to the ongoing global efforts to end the unnecessary exploitation of human-like beings who have long been subjected to the most brutal forms of abuse.

**Dr. Tomaž Grušovnik,**

editor of the *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial* (Lexington, 2021)  
and Full Professor, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

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