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Unthinking Mastery

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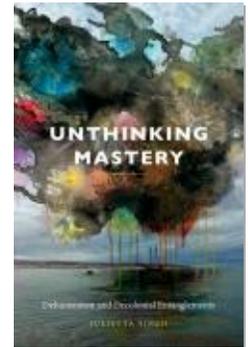
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CHAPTER 4

Humanimal Dispossessions

In the opening sentences of Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, the teenaged protagonist Animal declares: "I used to be human once. So I'm told. I don't remember it myself, but people who knew me when I was small say I walked on two feet just like a human being" (2007, 1). The novel is a thinly veiled representation of the 1984 Bhopal disaster, broadly interpreted as the world's worst industrial disaster, in which the American-owned Union Carbide corporation exposed over half a million people to methyl isocyanate, among other chemicals. It represents the disaster and its long aftermath, politicizing the power of transnational corporations and their dehumanizing effects. Animal, whose spine is twisted, has been formed into a quadruped as a result of toxic exposure. The movement of Animal's inaugural sentences presents us with a fascinating formulation of the human, and of Animal's particular relation to its figuration. He begins by signaling that the human is not something that simply "is" but rather is something contingent that can be moved toward and away from. In the second fragmentary sentence, Animal signals the human as a narrative creation: "So I'm told." The human from the very outset of the story is thus positioned as provisional, as a product of narrative structure, and Animal distances himself from his humanity through his insistence on the past tense of it. More subtly, he complicates the narrative of his former humanity in his own telling, posing this "human" past as one in which he walked on two feet *just like* a human being. Even when he was a human, then, Animal's sly rhetoric signals that he was always only ever proximate to it.

In the previous chapter, I explored posthumanitarian fictions, in which humanitarian actors face their complicity with the dehumanization of those they wish to humanize. Here, I turn to figurations of the human *as* animal in postcolonial literature. This is not as sharp a turn as might first appear. The question of the animal emerges in the final section of the preceding

chapter with Mr. Singh's simultaneous recognition of his own complicity and his desire to utter the "howl of a demented dog" (Devi 1998, 20). At the end of Mahasweta Devi's story, Singh straddles humanity and animality, unable to claim either as his proper topography. This is to my mind a most poignant promise at the end of a story that can so easily be read as hopeless. Singh finally does not, and cannot, locate himself within a fraudulent typology that rends the human from the animal. As I argued in chapters 1 and 2, anticolonial discourse has been caught up in a recuperation of the proper humanity of the colonized, one that remained in many respects bound to a masterful formulation of an emergent postcolonial subjectivity. In contrast to this tendency within anticolonial discourse, I am interested here in postcolonial writers who have affirmed the animality of humans as a hopeful politics of postcolonial becoming. To mobilize one's animality is to dispossess oneself from the sovereignty of man, to refuse the anticolonial reach of becoming masterful human subjects. This literature pressures a sovereign imperial worldview that both refuses the human's animality and insists on the mastery of "animal" others. Against the recurring tendencies that I emphasized in the first two chapters of this book to disavow animality in anticolonial movements that aimed to restore the colonized subject to full humanity, postcolonial literature offers us critical counternarratives of human becoming—ones that struggle with and in opposition to the sovereign subject's disavowal of its own and other animalities.

I build in this chapter on Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou's work on dispossession, a "troubling concept" that signals both a hopeful dispossession of the masterful sovereign subject and the systematic jettisoning of populations from "modes of collective belonging and justice" (2013, xi). Although the "double valence" of dispossession suggests distinct if not antithetical modalities (3), Butler and Athanasiou engage the fundamental relation between, on the one hand, the "dispossessed subject" that avows the "differentiated social bonds by which it is constituted and to which it is obligated," and, on the other hand, those communities that are and have been dispossessed by an external force (ix). We might say that in the first instance, the dispossession of the sovereign subject from its masterful reign is an act that aims toward unmasterful forms of being and relationality, while in the second instance, dispossession is made manifest through an external masterful force. Yet for Butler and Athanasiou, these dispossessions are crucially linked through an acute shared awareness of our funda-

mental dependencies on “those powers that alternately sustain or deprive us, and that hold a certain power over our very survival” (4).

Animal’s Dehumanist Solidarities

Dehumanism—which articulates the brutalities of dehumanization at the same time as it names the open and antimasterful possibilities that can emerge from dehumanized forms of living in the world—shares with dispossession a “double valence.” Although they do not dwell extensively on the animal, Butler and Athanasiou argue that we must struggle against the “versions of the human that assume the animal as its opposite” and that the formation of an unmasterful political subject requires a mobilization of the human’s own animality (2013, 34). Through its dispossessed protagonist, *Animal’s People* persistently collapses a neat distinction between humans and animals and politicizes forms of humanness that refuse their demarcation.

The novel shows us the unity between the two valences of dispossession: Animal is, on the one hand, dispossessed through abject poverty and a dehumanizing physical disability produced by external forces; and, on the other hand, he refuses to be given back to the human by insisting on his own animality. Animal is thus doubly dispossessed through the force of neocolonial power that has disfigured him, and through self-cultivating practices that willfully reject “the world of humans” in an effort to cultivate other forms of solidarity (Sinha 2007, 2).

Animal engages in what I call *dehumanist solidarities*—social bonds that are mobilized and sustained through a refusal of the sovereign human subject and that enact agential forms of inhuman relationality. In this sense dehumanist solidarities are inherently queer ones. They are, to recall Donna Haraway, practices of “becoming worldly” through transformative acts of “becoming with” our own and other creaturely selves (2008, 3).

I clearly do not wish to elide the crucial fact that Animal comes to embrace his animality *because* he has been critically dehumanized; I do think, however, that through this dehumanization Animal comes to tell his readers—to whom he narrates and implicates directly as the “Eyes” interpreting his story (Sinha 2007, 12)—something vital about their own disavowed animalities. The title of the novel itself politicizes the possessions and dispossessions of the human, complicating from the outset the prescriptive di-

visions between humans and animals. On the one hand, “Animal’s people” indicates the people “of” or “belonging to” Animal and thus appears as a simple possessive form. Within this apparently simple form, we are already asked to consider what form of possession the animal can have over people. This becomes more complex when we read “Animal’s people” as a contraction of “Animal *is* people.” In the most humanist formulation, we might read this as an insistence that Animal is “human” despite his abjection. But what if we read Animal as a “person” who *is also animal* in and through his belonging? The title wavers provocatively between the ontological mode (Animal *is* a person) and a relational one, in which Animal is caught up in an undecidable form of belonging with and to “people.” This wavering, from the title onward, loosens the borders of the human and opens toward more expansive dehumanist forms of relational collectivity.

I have written elsewhere (Singh 2015b) about *Animal’s People* as a post-humanitarian fiction through which readers are brought critically into the fold of Animal’s dehumanization, but at this juncture I am interested in how Animal teaches us about the potentialities born from being dehumanized, from claiming one’s own vital potentialities from outside the masterful reign of the human. Until the final page of the novel when he commits unwaveringly to his animality, Animal vacillates between an insistence on his inhuman status and an often “wild” desire to become human. But even before this final commitment to his animal subjectivity, he illustrates dehumanist solidarities through his relations with other nonhuman and dehumanized characters. Among the most poignant of these is his friendship with his canine companion, Jara. His narrative introduction of Jara refuses initially to name her species, and readers are confronted by their assumptions that she, like Animal, is “really” human: “Jara’s my friend. She wasn’t always. We used to be enemies. In the days of living on the street we were rivals for food” (Sinha 2007, 17). Jara’s emergence in the novel posits her as a former “rival” and as a current “friend” who shares with Animal a struggle for basic bodily sustenance. While some of Animal’s most overtly animal performances happen in relation to her—“I rushed at her snapping my jaws, growling louder than she, the warning of a desperate animal that will stick at nothing” (17)—Jara also becomes for Animal a reflection of himself: “She was as thin as me, her hide shrunken over her ribs. . . . A yellow dog, of no fixed abode and no traceable parents, just like me” (18). Here we witness a rhetorical repetition with a critical difference: The *just*

like of the novel's inaugural sentences in which Animal becomes distanced from the properly human subject ("I walked on two feet *just like* a human being") resounds in this passage but works instead to bring Animal into transspecies alliance with the canine Jara. Both her physical abjection and her "untraceable" genealogy enable for Animal a compassionate alliance with another creature fighting for her survival. Jara thus becomes folded into the novel initially as a "friend," as one who has made the passage from "enemy" to ally, and as one whose species is registered as ancillary to a more expansive form of alliance.

Animal's vacillation across the novel between wanting to claim his animality and wanting to become human is repeatedly articulated along sexed and gendered lines: part of his animality resides in a stature that exposes his genitalia to public view; he desires (at times desperately) to have sexual intercourse with a human female and understands this as a possibility only if he can become human; and he is offered by the novel's white, Western, female humanitarian the opportunity to become "upright" (aka human) through the promises of Western medical intervention. The novel works through human/animal distinctions via sexuality, especially through its evocations of sexual violence and sexual liberation.¹ Animal imagines that "the whole world fucks away day and night" and thus bemoans his exclusion from this copulating human world (Sinha 2007, 231). His articulation of exclusion from the world of human heterosexuality produces both a compulsive desire to "master" his penis, to conquer it so as to make it cower "like a sulky dog" (245), and a deeply violent and disturbing fantasy of female penetration, in which Animal declares: "I'll pierce her and open her up until my cock is stroking her heart and she's crying my name, 'Animal! Animal! Animal!' and I will suck the sweetness of life from her lips" (231).

Teased for an inability to control his frequent erections, Animal becomes impotent at the moment he is given the opportunity to sexually penetrate the prostitute Anjali. Far from fulfilling his murderous sexual fantasy, Animal fails to enter into the economy of sexual intercourse and instead, in the aftermath of a drug-addled Holi celebration, finds himself curled up with Anjali, characterizing them as "two rainbow-coloured animals" (Sinha 2007, 242). From this position of shared "animality"—the prostitute who has been sold into prostitution and lives outside civil society and the once-human boy whose disfigurement marks his exclusion from the human world—Animal reconceives of sex and sexuality. Moving away

from the violent desire to “pierce” a woman’s body and to “suck the sweetness of life from her lips,” Animal now desires not to penetrate but simply to witness sexual difference by looking at Anjali’s genitals. What he finds in his desire to see sexual difference, however, is a “nothing” that “is” and makes everything possible: “She shows me how the rose cave leads to a tunnel whose mouth at first was hidden, this is the way that leads to the womb, where life begins, where I began, where we all began. I try to imagine the womb and realise that it’s an empty space, which means there’s nothingness at the very source of creation” (243–44). With the discovery of this “empty space”—the “very source of creation”—Animal moves away from the rhetoric of sexual difference toward an intensified desire for liberation. Saving the funds he has earned over the course of the novel through his work for a justice group seeking recompense from the company that has devastated the community, Animal tells his readers on the last page of the novel that rather than spend his money toward “corrective” surgery, he will embrace his animality unwaveringly and will use his funds to “buy Anjali free” (366). While Anjali’s freedom will bring her to live with Animal, there is importantly no sexual contract between them (her freedom is crucially not premised on their marriage), and the novel ends with the promise of a dehumanist community—the newly freed prostitute, the newly avowed Animal, and the canine Jara—who will live in queer solidarity despite the systemic forces that have produced and will continue to produce and enforce dehumanized lives.

Humanimal Bonds

I am taken by the dehumanist possibilities of transspecies identification and cross-species solidarities and the queer collectivities that can form through active, unmasterful forms of self-dispossession. As I think my way through such possibilities, I am keenly aware of my longtime companion Cassie, whom I can hear downstairs navigating blindly toward her food. I first encountered Cassie in 2000, when I was an early undergraduate and she a feral stray living on a Canadian riverbank behind my mother’s home. She was young and small in stature, though her age (as with all cats, especially strays) was difficult to pinpoint. She displayed bodily signs of having birthed offspring, though she had been spayed. I have no sense of how long she had been living as a stray, though her staunch refusal of human contact

suggested that it had been some time. My mother, afraid that Cassie would not survive the brutalities of an oncoming Canadian winter, persuaded me to house her in my miniscule undergraduate apartment. It took four adults (with a couple of pairs of oven mitts) to capture her, and when I released her into her new home, she mauled my hand so badly I was sent to the hospital for shots and bandages. Because of my mother's certainty that Cassie would be beheaded by the government and her head shipped to Ottawa for testing (this still sounds absurd to me, but she was unwaveringly insistent), I pretended in the hospital that I had been randomly attacked by an unknown street cat.

Like Animal and Jara, then, we were initially adversaries: between the mauling and her repeated escapes from my apartment—after which, to rub salt in my psychic wounds, she would reappear at my mother's house!—I did not have any special love for this creature. There was, however, a critical moment of transformation that fundamentally changed our relationship. One fall afternoon, as I watched Cassie (yet again) hightail it out my back door, down the fire exit, and toward the river (where she would no doubt begin her journey back to my mother), I decided not to chase but to follow her. Conceding to her preference for another home, and her insistence on remaining a creature of the outdoors, I trailed after her with a calmness I had not yet experienced with her. She knew I was behind her but she also knew I was not giving chase, and very quickly the lines became blurred between which of us was following the other. Eventually, we wandered home together, back up the fire escape steps and into our apartment. We began to wander together every day, without fixed destination, sometimes exploring the river bank and at other times just meandering along the sidewalks of our neighborhood. We became, and would remain across three cities and two countries, a somewhat notorious neighborhood phenomenon (she was often hailed by neighbors who did not know us well as “the cat-dog,” and I “the cat-girl”). I would frequently read novels as I walked, and Cassie would tear up and down trees, getting ahead and trailing behind as she so desired. For most of our lives together, I lived in places from which she could come and go at her leisure, and she made plain to me at every turn that she had *chosen* to stay with me but in no sense depended on me for her survival. Across seventeen years, ours has been a friendship founded on the refusal of mastery and on a vital resistance (despite the well-worn insistence of veterinarians and many cat lovers on the

benefits of bounded feline domesticity) to the prescribed roles of animal “pet” and human “owner.”

Cassie dispossessed me of a masterful desire to domesticate her “properly”—one that was for me built into a socially instantiated idea of what an urban relation between humans and felines *should* look like. While I never shared with Jacques Derrida (2008) his famous discomfort with being nude under the inscrutable gaze of his feline companion, I did share with him a relation to another creature that insisted on the profound recognition that my initial desire for mastery over her was predicated on positing Cassie as an “animal” against my own confirmed and practiced “humanity.” Against this enforced division, we cultivated a *humanimal bond* in which neither of us could simply stand as conceptual unities. We were specific beings and shared as such a relationality founded on our individual and collective needs, and on what we could and were willing to sacrifice. We came increasingly toward each other and discovered a frame of alliance that remained—for most of her life and much of mine—vital and sustaining. While I would not say that we have ever been in any sense “equals” (I confess, against liberal discourse, that I have always been ill at ease with a politics of equality that seems relentlessly to produce its opposite), her *style* of being and her mode of *becoming with* me urged me toward an embrace of my own (often forgotten, elided, and disavowed) animality.

The endurance of our solidarity is marked by many things, including that our relation has spanned the entirety of my adult life. Some years ago when I was pregnant, Cassie began to climb insistently on my body and purr, as though conjuring the creature developing inside me. She seemed in communion with this forthcoming addition to our humanimal pack and lay committedly against the seam of my flesh, over the curious temporal mappings of zygote, embryo, and fetus (what strange ways to imagine becoming!). But she was also communing with *me* in a more intense, more persistent way throughout a period in which I simply could not ignore that I was an embodied and embodying creature. Pregnancy was an intensely pedagogical time, not because I was eager to take in the discourse of parenting that was suddenly inundating my daily life but because it was an unrelenting lesson in my own primate animality. Housing another creature within me, I could neither disavow the animality of my own being nor forget the daily bodily acts that we are otherwise trained to ignore (that is, to master) as we move through the world as humans. Insightful creature that



4.1 Cassie and infant child together, adjacent in repose. Photograph by Julietta Singh.

she is, Cassie responded to these dynamic forms of creaturely becoming with striking attentiveness. I had been warned through popular parenting discourse and pedagogy against the “dangers” of allowing animals to commune with newborns, but Cassie drew me away from such enforced distinctions when, in the first days with this newborn child, she enacted such keen sensitivities toward our new creature. Anyone who had known Cassie across time, or who knew the legend of her becoming, was amazed by how this “wild” cat had become friend, ally, and in some critical ways parent to other (human) beings. She has played no small part over the last years in the pedagogy of our human child, in the teaching of relational boundaries and care, and in the formation and flourishing of a queer family unit.

As I type bleary-eyed through increasingly achy fingers, I hear Cassie’s howl and can so easily envision her own now blind and arthritic body navigating the well-charted paths toward food, litter, and rest. She is undeniably old and a very different creature from the ones she has been across the many stages of our lives. (We are aging together, but her body is stiffening much faster than mine and transforming in ways more readily apparent.)

I admit to being deeply pained by this stage, not only because it feels “final” but because I am haunted by a feeling that I am failing her in companionship. She is dependent on me now in ways that she was not before. And in biopolitical fashion, I have claimed the right to treat her kidney disease and high blood pressure medically, just as I will likely claim one day the right to end her life. I feel tugged away from the humanimal bond we shared across a decade and a half, a tug that is produced in part through the dependencies of creaturely disease and aging, and a preemptive mourning for what we once were.

This mourning for what feels like an increasingly distant humanimality is also located squarely within the specifically human productions and performances with which I am now more than ever acutely engaged in my roles as both mother and intellectual. As a mother, I find myself ceaselessly crafting my child—at times quite uncomfortably—as a material, ideological, and narrative being. While I urge her toward unconventional ways of thinking (I am told that this is a “plight” of children raised by intellectuals), which entail ways of conceiving our relations to others human and inhuman that are in excess of and sometimes in stark contradiction to empirical thinking, I also realize that I am raising her *as* a human subject. My responsibilities “as” a mother sometimes feel in tension both with my relation to Cassie and with my intellectual passions (which are more than “just” intellectual) for unthinking my own claims to humanity. I am in the odd position of having another human in my care who has from the outset depended on me for survival, and whose sense of the world is being shaped by particular performances of—and pedagogies in—family, community, and citizenship that are geared toward being and acting human.

As an intellectual situated within the humanities, and currently propelled by the encroaching temporality of the tenure-track, there is no doubt that I have become increasingly driven by certain modes of human mastery—especially over myself—even while my intellectual thought is compelling me to work against them. This became most palpable two years ago when, hard at work on a text about Gandhi’s complex ethics toward the animal, Cassie suffered the detachment of her retinas and became suddenly blind. She howled and wandered aimlessly through the house, summoning me with an urgency I could not interpret. I moved back and forth over the course of hours between attempts to comfort her and the drive to meet a writing deadline. I thought initially that she was suffering from the demen-

tia of old age, and I was, admittedly, annoyed at her “neediness” during my few sacred child-free writing hours. As the pitch of her howl intensified and her confusion became impossible to dismiss, I wondered if she had gone deaf. Finally, in our first emergency visit to an animal hospital, we learned that she had been blinded as a result of other as yet undetected medical conditions.

There could have been for me no more palpable contradiction between my intellectual ethics and my performance as a subject than this moment in which—working through Gandhi’s own often confounding relation to animals he vied so earnestly to protect—I repeatedly turned my back on Cassie’s call in her moment of creaturely crisis. Working toward my instantiation as a tenured professor of the humanities has necessitated certain forms and practices of mastery that starkly confront my own political hopes and aspirations. Recalling that painful moment in which I moved between Gandhi’s writings on animals and my beloved old friend, I am keenly aware of how disciplinary knowledge production obscures—at times violently—other ways of reading, creating, and being. The discomfort of that moment and its recollection produces in me a wish to return myself to my own humanimal bonds, not in the sense of moving back in time but in the queer sense of moving forward toward forgotten possibilities. This is a wish made manifest in my own animal body, a wish that remembers our changing humanimal bodies and our still mutual and vital dependencies—even those we are not, through our blind and bleary eyes, yet able to see.

Feeling Undisciplined

At the 1997–98 Tanner Lectures, sponsored by Princeton’s Center for Human Values, J. M. Coetzee stood before his academic audience and read stories, respectively titled “The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Poets and the Animals.”² These coextensive stories situated particular kinds of humans (philosophers and poets) in relation to animals (writ large). Coetzee has become renowned for reading stories in academic settings, which are notoriously better accustomed to academic prose. At his Princeton reading, he emphasized the potential of creative work to disrupt conventional disciplinary boundaries, delivering what Marjorie Garber calls a “lecture-narrative” (1999, 73). With the crucial exception of sexual difference, the protagonist Elizabeth Costello is, like the author himself, an

aging, white postcolonial novelist invited to deliver lectures at a prestigious U.S. academic institution. The *genre* trouble Coetzee engages in this text is thus entangled with *gender* trouble (Butler 1990), implicating his readers/audience in the policing of specious boundaries that produce authoritative knowledge. They (Coetzee and Costello) are expected to speak within their realm of expertise as novelists: that is to say, they are expected to elaborate some aspect of the human condition. Instead, they discomfort (a term I will return to in detail in the next chapter) their academic audiences with anti-intellectual “lectures” driven by counterlogical claims about human/animal relations and the urgent need to rethink our relations with and responsibilities toward animals.

Coetzee toys with the theme of the Tanner Lectures, “Disciplinary and Its Discontents,” reading aloud a fictional tale that advances a politics of feeling in place of the violence and erasures produced through Western reason. In so doing, he formally compromises the validity and value of the lecture as authentic knowledge production by articulating it through the imaginary terrain of fiction. The content—the unethical human relation toward animals—is likewise disruptive, positing the animal as subject where listeners and readers expect to find the human. Thus, while his audience may anticipate that the South African writer will tell them something illuminating about the function of racial violence, white supremacy, or postcolonial guilt—something that he “knows” by virtue of his race and nationality—Coetzee posits at the center of his text the “illogical,” unmasterful claims of an aging female novelist. He tells us, in other words, about how an aging white woman *feels* about the human treatment of animals. What, we might well ask, could seem less important to postcolonial thought?

Although *The Lives of Animals* has been interpreted as one of Coetzee’s least “postcolonial” narratives, the central preoccupations of these narratives are critically aligned with those of postcolonial studies. From the very earliest formulations of postcolonial studies—whether through Edward Said’s (1979) attention to orientalist discourse and its own racist refrains about the non-West or through the Subaltern Studies Collective’s insistence on the need to redress the exclusions of official historical narratives³—the postcolonial project has pressed on disciplinarity as a system of knowledge production that necessitates claims to authenticity as it subjugates other perspectives and peoples. In *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee

emphasizes this foundational postcolonial critique but extends its potential beyond the human. The boundaries that have historically differentiated properly human subjects from inhuman objects must today, his protagonist insists, be extended to a thinking of the limit that separates humans from animals. By proposing a critical turn toward the animal, the narrative unsettles what have now become conventions of postcolonial thought by insisting on a rethinking of the status of the animal therein. While there has been a recent scholarly turn in postcolonial studies toward the environment, most notably through the publication of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010) and Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), the question of the animal remains a vital hinge between the "postcolonial" and the "ecological" that still needs careful consideration and mobilization. In the language of anticolonial discourse and postcolonial studies, the animal continues to be put to work as a figure for injustices toward dehumanized human subjects—or as that which, because of its inhumanity, remains a largely unquestioned and thus "proper" sacrificial body. Among others, Fanon has insisted on the historical and material forces that produce some humans *as* animals. Coetzee's text does not displace that critique but pushes us to consider the animal not solely as a figure for racist logic. It folds Fanon's processes of producing particular bodies as animal (such as Animal's) into a wider thinking of the animal (like Cassie) as a being whose existence exceeds and is not predicated on its relation to the human. This excessive singularity is the ground for humanimal relations.

In his antidisiplinary mobilization of queer failure, Jack Halberstam argues that "disciplines actually get in the way of answers and theorems precisely because they offer maps of thought where intuition and blind fumbling might yield better results" (2011, 6). If we are accustomed to believing that disciplinarity makes intellectual inquiry possible, Coetzee shows us that it also necessarily obscures aspects of its own task and ignores what falls beyond its purview. The discipline follows in the footsteps of the masterful subject by being founded on the refusals of its own vulnerabilities. To make concrete its authority, a discipline must remain blind to what is beyond its limits, disavowing the ways that it remains affected and permeated by its outside. Coetzee breaks provocatively with discipline, productively confusing the lines between fact and fiction, between

author and protagonist, and between human and animal. In a sense, Coetzee's lecture-narrative—perhaps especially through the genre and gender trouble it offers—is an act of dispossessing his own claim to authority by submitting himself (as woman, as animal, as fiction) to others trained to disavow vulnerability. Through his female double, he engages imaginative, even utopian performances of humanness that radically extend the horizons of our ethics. Although the protagonist of his narrative is bound to fail in her anti-intellectual emotional plea to her intellectual audience, her failure against the force of discipline ultimately brings us toward “more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (Halberstam 2011, 2–3). Through what Halberstam calls “counterintuitive modes of knowing,” Costello privileges *feeling* over the rational mode in order to dispossess us from the disciplined and disciplining subjectivities from which we have been crafted and to which we have remained bound.

Disciplining Anxieties

Underlying the academic response to *The Lives of Animals* has been an anxiety about how much of Coetzee's political and ethical beliefs are registered through his fictional female protagonist. Initially delivered orally, then published in 1999 as a Tanner Lecture, and finally included as two chapters in the novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), the text upsets the rigid boundary between truth and fiction, lecture and story, author and text, male and female, and human and animal. This interpretive anxiety tells us something vital about the relation between intellectual thought and fiction, about how ungrounded we become when “truth” is disrupted by less authorized ideas, genres, forms, and concepts. Perhaps just as importantly, it reveals how profoundly we—and by “we” I mean to include those situated squarely within Western culture, those working in relation to Western academia, and, perhaps most perversely, those of us who are literary scholars—distrust the word (and the *world*) of fiction. The novel *Elizabeth Costello* “helps” to ease both the genre and gender trouble caused by Coetzee's addressing his audience “as” an aging white woman writer.

Critics of *Elizabeth Costello*, Derek Attridge writes, “complain that Coetzee uses his fictional characters to advance arguments . . . without assuming responsibility for them, and is thus ethically at fault” (2004, 197). According to the logic of this complaint, by couching his arguments in fictional form,

the genre becomes an alibi that absolves the author of responsibility. Attridge refuses this logic by returning to the relation between Coetzee and Costello through the event of the public readings of the lecture-narratives, proposing that “the arguments within [the lecture-narratives] should more strictly be called *arguings*, utterances made by individuals in concrete situations—wholly unlike the paradigmatic philosophical argument, which implicitly lays claim to a timeless, spaceless, subjectless condition as it pursues its logic. They are, that is, events staged within the event of the work; and they invite the reader’s participation not just in the intellectual exercise of positions expounded and defended but in the human experience, and the human cost, of exposing convictions, beliefs, doubts, and fears in a public arena” (198). Fiction as a vehicle of knowing is not only critically different from philosophical modes of truth production; it also makes very different demands of its interlocutors. While philosophical arguments lend themselves to masterful reading practices, literary “arguings” must be engaged vulnerably, which is to say with an openness toward forms of “exposure” that may well upset the most rudimentary preconceptions of its interlocutors.

The tension between “truth” and “fiction” emerges everywhere in Amy Gutmann’s introduction to *The Lives of Animals*, but also and more subtly throughout the multiple disciplinary “reflections” by Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and Barbara Smuts that follow Coetzee’s narrative. In her short response, Marjorie Garber—the literary critic invited to reflect on the text—reads the text through multiple registers: form and content, psychoanalysis, and gender studies. Although she engages the problem of “partitioning” bodies of knowledge and insists on reading the text from various vantage points, her conclusion is quite striking: “In those two elegant lectures we thought John Coetzee was talking about animals. Could it be, however, that all along he was really asking, ‘What is the value of literature?’” (Garber 1999, 84). This closing inquiry implies that Coetzee uses the animal as a literary trope to speak about something *else*—that is, the status of literature. Literature reigns supreme for Garber at the end of the text, but this is certainly not so for the philosopher, the historian, or the anthropologist whose individual responses to the text derive from their own firmly entrenched relations to their individual disciplines.

This is all to say something quite obvious: interpretation and analysis are not freely flowing acts but rather are governed by specific intellectual

currents. A disciplined scholar has authority by virtue of having “mastered” a body of knowledge and guards against the penetration of its mastered domain. In Garber’s case, her discovery of literature at the end of a text that is already very clearly concerned with literature and its voice, its power, and its authenticity in the world beyond itself offers us an interpretation of the text that avoids the question of the animal in the name of literature. If the text is about *both*—the ethical problem of human–animal relations *and* the plight of literature in the moment of advanced capitalism—and we feel compelled to choose one over the other, we might very well miss the absolutely essential relation between them. By reading the animal strictly as a trope, as a nonliteral means of speaking about literature, we fail to understand how the text formulates a complex relation of dependency and struggle between the animal and literary studies. Rather than to subjugate the ethical question of animal liberation to literary studies, we might instead consider how the text relationally frames and negotiates animals and/as texts. To do so necessitates a willingness toward vulnerable reading, toward a reading practice by which we do not foreclose dependency and struggle among “subjects” but rather concede to the porousness of our disciplined ways of knowing. Recalling Animal’s gesture of looking “into” Anjali’s body and imagining therein a “nothingness” that creates “everything,” perhaps through Coetzee’s text we are offered a related invitation to risk seeing more than we are able to “know” concretely. Tailing Animal, what we risk is being dispossessed of our disciplinary mastery and the authority of our instantiated ways of knowing.

Costello’s Wounded Humanimality

In “Force of Law” (2001), Derrida argues: “In *our* culture, carnivorous sacrifice is fundamental, dominant, regulated by the highest industrial technology, as is biological experimentation on animals—so vital to our modernity. . . . Carnivorous sacrifice is essential to the structure of subjectivity, which is to say to the founding of the intentional subject” (247). The unquestioned ability to inflict violence against animals is, for Derrida as for Costello, a structural aspect of Western subjectivity. There is no way then to challenge human mastery over animals without first calling this subjectivity into question. But how might we accomplish this from within it? The aging Costello relies on “seven decades of life experience” to argue

that reason looks to her “suspiciously . . . like the being of one tendency in human thought” (Coetzee 1999, 23). Like the acts of vulnerable reading and writing, Costello opens herself to an experimental mode of knowing across experience and through language. In a crucially postcolonial gesture, she insists that reason partitions thought by forcefully policing its specious (and species) borders.

Costello begins her first lecture by evoking Red Peter, Kafka’s fictional ape from “A Report to an Academy” (1971).⁴ In the story, the educated ape recounts to the academy his ascent from life as a beast in the jungle and his postcapture emergence as a thoughtful being whose ability to speak intelligently renders him *almost* human.⁵ In order to gain human status and rights, however, Red Peter must perform particular tasks in a disciplined manner to satisfy his audience. Like the scholar who works to master her field and forget what lies beyond her intellectual terrain in order to be validated by disciplinary interlocutors, the captive animal must in turn captivate his intellectual audience by proving his human likeness. Collapsing the distinction between herself and Red Peter as she stands before her audience, Costello declares: “Now that I am here . . . in my tuxedo and bow tie and my black pants with a hole cut in the seat for my tail to poke through (I keep it turned away from you, you do not see it), now that I am here, what is there for me to do? Do I in fact have a choice? If I do not subject my discourse to reason, whatever that is, what is left for me but to gibber and emote and knock over my water glass and generally make a monkey of myself?” (Coetzee 1999, 23). Costello posits herself here *as* an animal who, like Red Peter, stands before intellectuals and is expected to conceal her “tail” (her animality) by submitting her “tale” (her lecture) to the discourse of reason. Without a disciplined engagement with Western rational discourse, she will—like her animal double—remain unheard and dismissed (even dehumanized) by her audience. “Becoming” animal in this moment, Costello in one sense plays on the fact that as an aging woman she is already in some sense less than fully human. But there is also a fascinating and doubled gender switch at play here, since Coetzee “becomes” the female Costello, who herself “becomes” the male ape, Red Peter. There is something provocative about these ambiguous masquerades that persistently co-implicate sex with species. This returns us to Animal, whose overactive sexual impulses situate him paradoxically as “animal” (he cannot control himself) and as a “proper” heterosexual man who desires

intercourse with women. Undoubtedly, Costello's willingness to "become" an animal is vitally different from Animal's, not least because his radical humanimality is staged from within the Indian slum as a geopolitical space of dispossession, while Costello's is literally performed on the stage of the Western academy. Despite their radically uneven material lives and the critical distinctions between them, these figures of difference share a mutual willingness to inhabit the break between the human and the animal.

Unlike Red Peter, who struggles as an ape to validate his entrance into the human world, Costello moves in reverse as a human toward an embrace of her animality. By drawing on forms of *thinking-feeling* that exceed reason, she attempts to speak for the animal *as* an animal—one that identifies itself as wounded within and by its human capture: "I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak" (Coetzee 1999, 26). While her "tail" pokes through her clothing but is not seen by her audience, this ambiguous "wound"—a branding of sexual and species difference—is concealed beneath her clothing but "touched on" through speech. As if in sympathetic response to Costello's "wound," Butler mobilizes the concept of woundedness as an opening toward the Other. She writes: "I am wounded, and I find that the wound itself testifies to the fact that I am impressionable, given over to the Other in ways that I cannot fully predict or control. I cannot think the question of responsibility alone, in isolation from the Other; if I do, I have taken myself out of the relational bind that frames the problem of responsibility from the start" (Butler 2004, 46). While Butler's is a wound that implicates the Other as human, Costello opens the borders of the wound, urging us toward animal others. If for Butler the wound enables us to see our otherwise disavowed impressionability in relation to other humans, Costello affirms the wound as an opening toward animal others, including those that we already are. By affirmatively "touching on" her own humanimal wound, Costello calls for a radical expansion of our ethical horizons.

Vulnerable Listening

During the brief question and answer period following her public lecture, Costello is asked by a well-intentioned but perplexed audience member to clarify her thesis: Is she advocating for the mass closure of factory farms?

Does she want to convert her audience to vegetarianism? Does she want more humane treatment for animals, or to stop testing on them? To this request for clarification, Costello replies: “I was hoping not to have to enunciate principles. . . . If principles are what you want to take away from this talk, I would have to respond, open your heart and listen to what your heart says” (Coetzee 1999, 37). Costello’s response is wholly inadequate to the context and no doubt strikes her audience as an evasion and a sign that she lacks a strong thesis. Indeed, it does both of these things, but it also does more. Implicit in her response is an assertion that the act of *listening* (to which I will return in the coda to this book) has greater ethical potential than speaking. Declarative speech is tied to the proscriptive, to the realm of law, which like reason is tautological and justifies its own ends. It is through a practice of *vulnerable listening* that Costello imagines we might hear something not merely spoken but felt. Recall here the discussion in the previous chapter of Singh’s howl, which he cannot finally utter. Or Cassie’s howl—one that I could hear but stubbornly could not read during the sudden onset of her blindness. What is at stake for Costello is not a reasonable claim about animals but a practice of learning to encounter animals vulnerably, including the wounded animal that she is. That we all are.

In her response to Coetzee’s text, religious historian Wendy Doniger (1999) challenges Costello’s position on animal silence by suggesting that far from confronting us with silence, the animal repeatedly speaks a language we simply refuse to hear. It is through this language—through the voice that is not heard precisely because another voice disables or refuses its recognition—that we can critically consider the productive potential of silent engagement. In Jean-Luc Nancy’s formulation of the philosopher, he tells us that the philosopher is one who “cannot listen,” who “neutralizes listening within himself, so he can philosophize” (2007, 1). To exceed philosophy, then, we must press on listening to those voices that appear voiceless in order to produce new forms of engaged entanglement with and beyond ourselves. The potential of vulnerable listening resides in an exchange between (animal) “silence” and (human) listening, an exchange that exceeds the didactic clamor of disciplinarity by crossing the borders of reason. To Doniger’s mind, the question is not whether the animal *has* language but about the human refusal to hear its “silences.”

Doniger extends Costello’s formulation of animal language to include not only voice but also gesture, gaze, and so on. Like Costello, she posits the

act of listening as absolutely central to understanding. Recall that Costello urges her audience members to “listen to their hearts” rather than to be governed by the didactic structure of the lecture form. Listening—even when we struggle profoundly to hear—is therefore absolutely fundamental to a becoming with the Other. As Doniger suggests, these other languages are forms of communication that must be not only heard but also interpreted. “This is the language we must learn to read,” she insists. Like the human languages I discussed in chapter 2, animal languages will likewise continue to defy our will toward mastery over them. Yet since the act of reading (most broadly defined) is in all cases an imaginative and interpretive one, it is also therefore an act through which we might radically reconceive our responsibilities toward and as others. The voices of “barbarians,” natives, and slaves were, after all, once similarly voices not worthy of being heard by the colonial ear. Both Costello and Doniger imply that by listening to those voices that have been forced to submit, voices that are so “foreign” that they have remained unheard, a radical reconceptualization of subjectivity itself can emerge. While this reconceptualization of vulnerable listening informs relations among humans, both Costello and Doniger insist that it necessitates a wholly new sense of being with/as animals.

Future Humanimalities

Rather than to articulate the animal as a figure for the oppression of more worthy human subjects, as anticolonial discourse has been wont to do,⁶ Costello’s commitment to sympathetic imaginings and practices of cultivated listening enables her to posit the animal as subject and her own subject-position as animal. In doing so, she urges us toward what I call the *future humanimalities*. Once we begin to take seriously the animality of the human, we must rethink the reach and methods—as well as the subjects and objects—of the humanities. Traditional humanities have taken for granted the human as an empirical object of study (as I discussed in different contexts in chapters 2 and 3) and have understood their importance as a pedagogical act of humanizing certain (human) subjects. Once we deconstruct the presupposed differences between humans and animals, the disciplinary division erected on that distinction will begin to crumble. To cultivate the future humanimalities, we might first ask how our already existing skills as scholars can move us beyond the masterful human en-

closures of disciplinarity. Through her attention to metaphorical language, Costello enables us to begin to imagine how a future engagement with humanimal literary studies could dispossess us from our entrenched subjectivities and cultivate us otherwise. This future humanimalities will be, remembering José Esteban Muñoz (2009), a utopic one in the sense that it will be a practice that is forever dawning, never quite here.

Costello appeals to her academic audience to engage what she calls the “sympathetic imagination,” a term that has gained attention in Coetzee scholarship (Durrant 2006). It is her own imagination of human characters, she reminds us, that has earned her an invitation to speak at a prestigious American university. Costello’s magnum opus is a 1960s feminist rewriting of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* from the perspective of Leopold Bloom’s wife, Molly. Therein, Costello has created a world and a subject position for the fictional Molly Bloom, a character for whom Costello’s readership reveres her. By imagining and articulating the world of Molly Bloom—literally a figment of Joyce’s imagination made accessible to the world through Costello (who is herself literally a figment of Coetzee’s imagination)—she has given rise to a character that her readers sympathize with and indeed love. She uses this example to illustrate the unlimited human potential for imaginative sympathy: “there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination” (Coetzee 1999, 35). Costello submits to a romanticized sense of literary potential, and in so doing, denies the notion of ideology. She suggests that writers (and by extension readers) have the capacity to think beyond the discourses in which they operate. If we can imaginatively sympathize with a fictional character like Molly Bloom, she contends, we must certainly be capable of thinking our way into the real lives of animals. She dares us, in other words, to blur our engagements with the real and the fictional. Unlike Molly Bloom, after all, animals are living beings whose lives are not bound to the page but are physically among us: “If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed,” Costello declares, “then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, a being with whom I share the substrate of life” (35).

Her academic audience is unsurprisingly puzzled by the romanticism of this appeal. The term “sympathetic imagination” is from the start under suspicion within an institution founded on objective inquiry and rational thought. If knowledge is something pursued in order to be mastered,

the sympathetic imagination defies this mastery by extending itself to that which thought cannot foreclose. (Think again of Animal's wonder at the "empty space" that was nothing and everything all at once.) Despite the inevitable failure of her appeal, Costello insists that everyone—most urgently perhaps academics by virtue of being custodians of knowledge—must move beyond empirical knowledge into a form of thinking that implicates feeling. Picking up on this failure of imagination (of feeling and sympathy) within the academy and far beyond, Sam Durrant (2006) argues that *The Lives of Animals* is a text that continuously rehearses the failure of the sympathetic imagination in order to make way for a more effective relation toward the Other. For Durrant, this failure is "a precondition for a new kind of ethical and literary relation, a relation grounded in the acknowledgment of one's ignorance of the other, on the recognition of the other's fundamental alterity" (120).

Humanimal Metaphorics

There is arguably no more contentious moment in *The Lives of Animals* than Coetzee's turn toward the Holocaust, where the future humanimalities as a politics of dispossession comes into view. If ignorance of the Other is indeed always necessary, and as Durrant argues perhaps even productively so, Costello attempts to move her interlocutors toward a practice of responsible ignorance. Such a practice stands in contrast to the ignorance enacted during the Holocaust, during which people living near the camps ignored the practices of extermination that were so clearly signaled around them. This ignorance, Costello declares, situates those citizens imbued with full humanity as complicit with Holocaust executioners. Like the executioners, she provocatively claims, they refused to imagine themselves in the place of those being tortured and killed. In this way, the Holocaust represents a collective failure of the sympathetic imagination (Coetzee 1999, 34). This is the juncture at which Costello links the politics of Holocaust complicity to Western culture at large, which overwhelmingly ignores the mass torture and slaughter of factory-farmed animals. In each case, the failure to imagine oneself in the (horrific) position of the Other is a collective failure. She reminds her audience that "sympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object" (34–35). This call to imagine oneself in the place of the Other might seem to risk the same collapse of difference in the

name of empathy that I criticized in the preceding chapter. But I want to suggest that Costello is in fact recommending something different. This is because she insists that the sympathetic subject is in no sense bounded—or limited—by the object toward which it reaches. Imagining oneself *in the place of* the Other does not require that we imagine ourselves to be *the same as* the Other. It is not, in other words, a lack within the Other that produces the Holocaust victim or the factory-farmed animal. In Levinasian terms, it is not the Other's lack of a face that signals its alterity but, as Matthew Calarco (2008) has argued, it is the turning away of our own faces that constitutes the Other's alterity for us. This marks the paradox of Hegel's master/slave dialectic; it is, after all, the master who is lacking, and not the subjugated slave. Costello points us toward the delicate maneuver between reckoning with our ignorance of the Other (there is a space between us and the Other that we cannot close) and the fact that we still bear responsibility for the Other. Our ignorance cannot justify ignoring their plight.

Costello insists on language as a locus for social change (and in this sense, she preaches to a literary choir). Her arguments press on language as that which reveals the unconscious and often conflicted tendencies in human thought. The rhetoric of the Holocaust is a prime example of this, illuminating the animal's function as the most crucial figure through which to evoke the atrocities of the Holocaust: "They went like sheep to the slaughter.' 'They died like animals.' 'The Nazi butchers killed them.' Denunciation of the camps reverberates so fully with the language of the stockyard and slaughterhouse that it is barely necessary for me to prepare the ground for the comparison I am about to make. The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals" (Coetzee 1999, 20). The animal as simile for the murdered human works to convey the sheer barbarity of the Holocaust. The Nazis were "butchers," and the victims suffered and died as though they were nothing more than "animals." In this metaphorical configuration, the Jew as animal deserves our deepest sympathy. Yet perversely, while the animal has become the most poignant simile for the Holocaust victim, it simultaneously also best describes the brutality of the executioners: "In our chosen metaphors, it was they and not their victims who were the beasts. By treating fellow human beings, beings created in the image of God, like beasts, they had themselves become beasts. The human victims of the holocaust were treated *like* animals, but those who did the killing *are* animals" (21). As simile, the animal is a dis-

posable object that is likened to the Holocaust victim as tortured subject. As metaphor, however, the animal is loathed by virtue of its violent nature. Our language reveals an ambivalent need to claim and decry the animal, to make it evoke both innocence and evil.

If for Costello poetic language offers us a crucial “feel” for the animal’s experience of the world (Coetzee 1999, 30), it is also the figure of the poet in *The Lives of Animals* that refuses outright her attempts from within language to move us toward a humanimal politics. The respected (fictional) poet Abraham Stern is, like Costello, invested in language, form, and function. But he categorically refuses her use of rhetoric to develop her case for an animal ethics. Responding in written form to her analogy between concentration camps and slaughterhouses, between the slaughtered Jews and factory-farmed animals, Stern writes to Costello:

You took over for your own purposes the familiar comparison between the murdered Jews of Europe and the slaughtered cattle. The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say. That is a trick with words which I will not accept. You misunderstand the nature of likeness; I would even say you misunderstand willfully, to the point of blasphemy. Man is made in the likeness of God but God does not have the likeness of man. If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way. (49–50)

It is not Costello’s desire to rethink the animal that affronts Stern but rather that she relegates Holocaust victims to animal status in the service of her argument. He is not so much “against animals” as he is invested in the preservation of the exalted humanity of Holocaust victims. Here God guarantees the unidirectional movement of the simile; Stern must leave behind the language of poetry for the preservation of religious and cultural identity. Yet his refusal of rhetorical language to invert the “familiar” simile between Jews and slaughtered cattle reveals more than his position as an affronted Jew. As with the enormous chasm between animal similes and metaphors in Holocaust rhetoric, language poses a vital interpretive problem. For Stern, the reversal of the simile—from Jew treated as animal to animal treated as Jew—bears down on memory, history, and the murdered Jew. Describing the Holocaust victim as one sacrificed *like* an animal therefore signals the force and horror of the act. To reverse the simile threatens rea-

son by issuing a comparison that renders the Jew as disposable as livestock. Stern's subject position—imbued with a profoundly traumatic history and invested with a desire to cling to the Jew's exceptional character—makes Costello's "trick with words" not merely difficult to digest but absolutely unpalatable. Paradoxically, while language provides for Costello the means to engage the sympathetic imagination, it is also her drive to toy with it that prevents Stern from sympathizing with animals.

This ideo-linguistic tension elicits Michael Rothberg's critique of "competitive memory"—the process by which two or more histories collide in a competition for historical supremacy and thus contemporary resources. Rothberg calls instead for a thinking of "multidirectional memory," wherein historical events as distinct as the Holocaust and decolonization struggles "coexist with complex acts of solidarity in which historical memory serves as a medium for the creation of new communal and political identities" (2009, 11). Multidirectional memory thus enables a noncompetitive coexistence between different traumatic pasts, enabling distinct histories such as the slave trade, the extermination of Jews and indigenous populations, and decolonization struggles to sound with each other rather than to compete in an economy of suffering. I want to suggest here that extending the concept of multidirectional memory to include the mass torture of animals can enable new conversations between Holocaust, postcolonial, literary, and animal studies rather than confirming a competitive hierarchy among them. It also allows us to reach toward a multidirectional sense of human-animal being and to work through structures, histories, and languages of dehumanization toward a dehumanist politics.

While the animal may not remember its traumatic past in a conscious way (or does it?), it certainly continues to experience and be molded by its trauma. The absence of evidential animal memory in no way exonerates human populations from linking the modern violence done to the animal with other acts of violence enacted by and on humans (some remarkably similar in nature when we consider the striking resemblance between the extermination camp and the slaughterhouse). Rothberg argues that "a certain bracketing of empirical history and an openness to the possibility of strange political bedfellows are necessary in order for the imaginative links between different historical groups to come into view; these imaginative links are the substance of multidirectional memory. Comparison, like memory, should be thought as productive—as producing new objects

and new lines of sight—and not simply as reproducing already given entities that either are or are not ‘like’ other already given entities” (2009, 18–19). Stern makes clear the problem of thinking the Holocaust victim and the factory-farmed animal as “bedfellows,” since to his mind the link cannot help but to confirm the Nazi discourse that Jews were subhuman beings deserving of extermination. His resistance also signals the limits of decolonial thinking, which has, as I argued in the first half of this book, sought to redress the relegation of the colonized to animal status without accounting for the ways in which the human/animal distinction itself is deeply problematic within and beyond the human. Redressing the ways that humans have been rendered “animal” across time and space marks the limits of postcolonial thinking as much as it signals the limits of Stern’s thought as affronted Jew. Both discourses remain limited by their political parameters and mired by unimaginative modes of comparison. In forgetting the productive potential of acknowledging the animality of all humans, we abandon the urgent need to redress the human/animal distinction that makes possible the subjugation of *all* beings. Dehumanist readings of fiction can be a venue for Rothberg’s necessary “bracketing of empirical history,” a venue through which we can begin to repoliticize animal metaphors toward the liberation not only of particularly dispossessed humans but also of the animal as a sacrificial object. Recalling Animal’s disarmingly productive insistence at the start of this chapter that he is both “just like” a human *and* “just like” his canine friend Jara, we might begin to assemble a politics that enables us—from within and beyond language—to be always both different from and proximate to those others to whom we are bound.

Toward a Dispossessed Humanimity

If humanist discourse has become instrumental to seeking rights and equality for those dehumanized by colonial force and its reverberations, it will seem to many counterintuitive, laughable, even an act of betrayal, that I engage postcolonial texts with an openness toward what I am calling a *humanimal ethics*. Yet by claiming the human—over and over again, across discrete historical moments and within particular political contexts—we have in this act of bringing some into the fold of humanity continued to produce others as abjectly outside. Anticolonial discourse has produced a series of human, dehumanized, and inhuman “remainders” through its

claims to a universal human subject, a point I have laid stress on in chapter 1. Subsequently, I have explored how human rights discourse and humanitarian intervention have been represented in postcolonial literature as sites of violent erasure. Such critique—though vital—does not feel to me enough. I also feel compelled to experiment—in the Gandhian sense of experimentation, which entails a willingness to falter and an understanding that violence is inescapable—with other forms of discourse, intellectual practice, and embodied ethics that might become less harmful and exclusive than those we have to date been redeploying even in the name of “liberation.” It may well be that literary and philosophical thinkers such as Matthew Calarco (2008), Mel Y. Chen (2012), Vanessa Lemm (2009), Susan McHugh (2011), and Cary Wolfe (2010) are already leading us toward a dispossessing of humanimalities to come. We do not have to be Animal, crippled by toxic exposure in the so-called Global South, nor do we have to be the white, aging female fiction writer of Coetzee’s narrative in order to feel that there is something menacing about how the human has been claimed, performed, and enacted, or to desire more entangled forms of ethical becoming.

If a future humanimalities will enable—even require—a break from our disciplined trainings, it will also urge us toward more careful practices of dispossession, both in the sense of dispossessing ourselves from the humanist subjects that we have become and in the sense of producing more intimate ways of engaging those who have been forcefully dispossessed. From such grounds of dispossession, we might begin the work of sculpting ourselves as different kinds of beings. The future humanimalities offer us an impossible temporality in which we are learning from a future we have not yet reached; this is a utopian practice of learning how to break (in the now) from structures that have enabled us to turn away from the alterity of ourselves and others. If we have come to learn that our disciplines, like our subjectivities, are structured by violence—even (and perhaps especially?) those that have sought to humanize us—we can in response embrace the styles of thinking-being-performing together (with our disavowed “animalities” and with each other) that exist and are in the making, and that can revise the structures of subjectivity that have mapped us to date.

This is a scholarship that cannot be parsed from our mundane lives, a practice in which our “animal” aspects cannot be refused by the fully “human” work of intellectual inquiry. The dispossessions of this future hu-

manimalities thus entail intimate acts of embracing and enfolding through which we call up the animals we have always been, and practice, along with Donna Haraway, new ways of becoming with the creatures we are, and the creatures that we live among. It is both a promise and a paradox of the future humanimalities that literature—a distinctively human form of communication/expression—may be one of the vital places where we can unteach and unlearn practices of the human.