I have previously suggested that Derridean theoretical practice can be understood to be “always already” queer theory, if queer theory is understood in one of its valences, that is, as an immaterial de-normativization that works at the level of language, thought, and ideology to critique, but in a viral fashion, by replicating terms and re-purposing them so that their operation moves down paths that are overgrown with the bushes of normative philosophical thought. These paths are inscriptions; they don’t quite open up, but they leave—or are—traces, and can be followed, like the tracks that Derrida is following in *L’Animal que donc je suis.* In *Queer/Early/
Modern I argued that key terms that have emerged from
deconstructive gestures include queer, though “queer,” I think,
carries with it—as the wind does scent—a faint but specific whiff
of sex/sexual identity/sexuality. One way to think about this is to
say that after Derrida all theory is “queer,” or rather that Derrida
helps us to understand how theory is always already queer, and
to affirm this queerness further. I also wanted to find in Derrida’s
spectrality a way to queer temporality that takes into account the
affective force of fantasy, that is, the way the past lives on as a
kind of immaterial materiality through affect, a force that is not
something we “see” necessarily, but something we feel. Derrida’s
queering of temporality, through the spectrality of returns and
to-comes—marked, again, like scent on a trail, track or trace, by
the inscriptions of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man—have
inspired much of queer theory’s efforts to de-normativize
progressive, telos-oriented temporal narratives, whether literary or
critical, and to complicate hetero-normative temporalities that
seem to carry with them ideologies of “reproductive futurism.” In
my work, this takes the form of arguing for fantasmatic—and
figural—historiographies. Such a practice attends to the way topoi
—discursive commonplaces—haunt texts across historical eras to
address the non-causal, non-linear relation of events and affects, the
way history or the past is lived in and through fantasy in the form of
ideology. These topoi may take the form of metaphor, metonymy,
or theme; they may be direct intertextual allusions or rhetorical
echoes. However they make their appearance, their relay between
times and places looks more like a haunting—an affective insistence,
persistence, a spectral materialization—than a progression, a
borrowing, or a coming after. Affects do not obey sequence; they
have histories, but they do not respect the historical injunction to
move on, to get beyond. Rather, the properties proper to affect,
even within the genetic narratives of history, seem better described
in the language of psychoanalysis: persistence, repetition, stasis,
fading/waning, sudden change. Spectrality, then, allows for
thinking not only the out-of-jointness of time but also its affects,

including the sorrow and mourning that attend the unfinished returns of the past. This too, it seems to me, has been useful to queer theory, marked as the latter is so indelibly by an injunction to mourn, and occasion to do so.5

Derrida’s later work that moves elsewhere than the human, toward not specters but the non-human living, that is, his work on animals and the living in general, also has the potential to invest an already queer theoretical domain—let’s call it “animal theory”—with a meditation on subjectivity that brings with it traditions of western philosophizing on the human and non-human. If a certain way of dis-placing the subject and de-normativizing the norm, and if a certain contribution to the spectralities of history, temporality, and affect are some of what a Derridean legacy can be understood to be, then I think that Derridean thinking on—about and with—animals can also help a queer theory devoted to the rejection of the humanist subject in favor of other models of being, or becoming, and the ethical relations among them. Animal theory is a queer theory in this respect, that it displaces humanism, de-normativizes subjectivity, and turns us toward not difference but differences, one of the most emphatic of Derrida’s lessons having been the impossibility of a reference to “the” animal in favor of singular, differential, abyssal relations (L’Animal, 51-53; “The Animal,” 398-99). Derrida’s deconstruction of the western carno-phallogocentric subject—especially when he writes about the living in general—queers ontology and creates queer ontologies, i.e., relations of desire among the living.6 At the very least, Derrida will have been the western philosopher whose introduction of the non-human living into philosophical and ethical consideration has allowed for a meeting of post-humanism with ethology, ecological activism,

eco-feminism, and other disciplines queered by their attention to the trivial, beside-the-point, non-eventfulness of minor, daily, “ordinary” histories and stories that are nonetheless part of the afterlives of trauma. As Donna Haraway says of these sorts of histories, “I think we learn to be worldly from grappling with, rather than generalizing from, the ordinary.”

Animal lovers, animal rights philosophers, ethologists, and others delight in Derrida’s staged scene of the encounter with an animal that is the occasion, the starting point, for his exploration of the human and non-human in L’Animal. Although Derrida, as he himself writes, has had many animals running through his oeuvre (an astonishing number, actually, which he documents in this essay), this is the first appearance of what he refers to as a “real cat”:

Je dois le préciser tout de suite, le chat dont je parle est un chat réel, vraiment, croyez-moi, un petit chat. Ce n’est pas donc une figure du chat. Il n’entre pas dans la chambre en silence pour alégoriser tous les chats de la terre. . . . Le chat dont je parle n’appartient pas à l’immense zoopoétique de Kafka . . . . Le chat qui me regarde, et auquel j’ai l’air, mais ne vous y fiez pas, de consacrer une zoothéologie negative, ce n’est pas non plus le chat Murr d’Hoffmann ou de Kofman . . . Un animal me regarde. Que dois-je penser de cette phrase? Le chat qui me regarde nu, et qui est vraiment un petit chat, ce chat dont je parle, qui est aussi une chatte, ce n’est pas davantage la chatte de Montaigne qui dit pourtant “ma chatte” dans son Apologie de Raimond Sebond. (20-21)

7. Donna Haraway, When Species Meet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3. Hereafter cited in the text as WSM. I thank Jody Greene for drawing my attention to this thread in Haraway’s thought. Ann Cvetkovich, in An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), also discusses the importance of attending to the afterlife of traumas that could be seen to be uneventful when compared to what are understood to be avowedly historical and public catastrophic events. These are the questions I explore at the end of Queer/Early/Modern, not so much to “solve” a problem of temporal accountability as to suggest alternative ways to respond to—and survive—the not strictly eventful afterlife of trauma in a just, queer, fashion.
I must make it clear from the start, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. It isn’t the figure of a cat. It doesn’t silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth. . . . The cat I am talking about does not belong to Kafka’s vast zoopoetics . . . . Nor is the cat that looks at me, and to which I seem—but don’t count on it—to be dedicating a negative zootheology, Hoffman’s or Kofman’s cat Murr. . . . An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence? The cat that looks at me naked and that is truly a little cat, this cat I am talking about, which is also a female, isn’t Montaigne’s either, the one he nevertheless calls “my [pussy]cat” [ma chatte] in his Apology for Raymond Sebond. (374-375)

What can a reader possibly make of this claim here to be talking about a “real” cat, a cat who follows Derrida into his bathroom each morning, and/or who is there, across from him in his morning nakedness, observing him, “just to see,” observing him and “not hesitating to concentrate its [his] vision” in the direction of his sex (19; 373)? On the one hand, I hear him echo Barbara Smuts’s somewhat impatient chastising of Elizabeth Costello (J. M. Coetzee) in her response to The Lives of Animals (where it is also, notably, a question of philosophers, poets, and non-human animals):

Why doesn’t Elizabeth Costello mention her relations with her cats as an important source of her knowledge about, and attitudes toward, other animals? . . . Whatever her (or Coetzee’s) reasons, the lack of reference to real-life relations with animals is a striking gap in the discourse on animal rights contained in Coetzee’s text.8

In L’Animal, then, Derrida, the philosopher, rectifies this error, an error for which this same philosopher indicts the history of western philosophy (31-32; 382-383, and 64; 408), i.e., for not having considered this experience of being seen by an animal, an actual

animal.

At the same time, Derrida positions himself within this philosophical genealogy that is not one, as he has done before, by citing—and then pursuing a digression on—the early modern philosopher, anti-Cartesian avant la lettre, Michel de Montaigne, whom he credits with having posed the question of an animal’s response, rather than her reaction: “Montaigne reconnaît à l’animal plus qu’un droit à la communication, au signe, au langage comme signe (cela, Descartes ne le dénier pas); un pouvoir de répondre” (21, n. 2); (“Montaigne recognizes in the animal more than a right to communication, to the sign, to language as sign [something Descartes will not deny], namely, a capacity to respond” [375, n.5]). Montaigne, who returns, again and again, in this essay about the animal one is, mentions his cat, feminized (as Derrida’s cat will be), and ventures an even more radical supposition concerning her: “Quand je me joue à ma chatte, qui sçait si elle passe son temps de moy plus que je ne fay d’elle?” (“When I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me?”). Derrida does not stay with his cat, something that elicits a complaint from Haraway: “He did not fall into the trap of making the subaltern speak. . . . Yet he did not seriously consider an alternative form of engagement either, one that risked knowing something more about cats and how to look back, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and therefore also philosophically and also intimately” (WSM 20).

But, as Derrida demonstrates, and at the very moment when he is at his most “ordinary,” the articulation of a relation to the other within the inhuman technology of language—however much it is a “grappling with”—cannot avoid a generalizing, whose agent may very well not be human at all. Derrida’s cat, remember,

is not any of these other cats, not Hoffman’s, Kofman’s, Rilke’s, Montaigne’s, Baudelaire’s, Buber’s, Alice’s (Lewis Carroll’s)—though it might in fact be a reading of *Alice in Wonderland*, he notes coyly—not La Fontaine’s or Tieck’s, though all of these cats and more do in fact find their reference in *Autobiogriffures*, and that title, if nothing else, might alert a reader to the sort of cat Derrida has in mind, if not before him. The repeated negations Derrida pursues—maybe unconsciously, he playfully notes (23; 376)—should alert a reader, make her suspicious, as the phenomenon of “dénégation” or negation must always do (the rhetorical equivalent is *occupatio*), that if this cat is not any of these other cats, if she is, “vraiment, croyez-moi,” a real cat, not the figure of a cat, then perhaps she is the cat of a figure. And, as a second order of reflection, Derrida is here raising the question of whether it is ever possible to “represent” a “real” cat. In an essay where precisely the problem of the [cat]egory—and the [cat]egorization—of “the” animal is at stake, and where the singularity of the other is also at stake (“Si je dis ‘c’est un chat réel’ qui me voit nu, c’est pour marquer son irremplaçable singularité” [26]; “If I say ‘it is a real cat’ that sees me naked, it is in order to mark its [his] unsubstitutable singularity” [378]), what can he do but write in this conundrum of reference to the place where the question of referentiality must also be at stake?

The second part of *L’Animal*, in fact, repeats this symptom as a reading of Emmanuel Lévinas. Seeing no fewer than eleven exclamation marks in the space of the eight pages of Lévinas’s text, Derrida detects the work of “dénégation”: “Et d’ailleurs, deux d’entre eux suivent un ‘Mais non! mais non!’ qui signe en vérité la vérité d’un ‘mais si, mais si’ au subject d’un chien qui reconnaît l’autre et donc répond à l’autre” (159). (“Moreover, two of them follow the


utterance ‘But no! But no!’ which in truth attests to the truth of a ‘But yes! But yes!’ when it comes to a dog that recognizes the other and thus responds to the other” [115]. He concludes that although Lévinas insists—as Derrida does—on the literality of the dog, its specificity, this singular dog with a name, Bobby (Derrida’s cat, in this essay, remains nameless), “le texte de Lévinas est à la fois métaphorique, allégorique et théologique, anthropothéologique, donc anthropomorphique, . . . au moment même où Lévinas clame, pretend, claims, en s’exclamant, le contraire” (160); (“Lévinas’s text is at once metaphorical, allegorical, and theological, anthropotheological, hence anthropomorphic . . . at the very moment when Lévinas proclaims, claims, prétend, by exclaiming, the opposite” [116]).

Inscribed, then, in a reading of the brother (the other whose theory of ethical fraternity Derrida carries with him) is a key to the undecidabilities of the singular/general animal, of the “real” cat, in the animal that Derrida is and follows. He reminds us, finally, that “tout animal . . . est d’essence fantastique, fantasmaticque, fabuleux, d’une fable qui nous parle, qui nous parle de nous-mêmes” (95); (“every animal . . . is essentially fantastic, phantasmatic, fabulous, of a fable that speaks to us and speaks to us of ourselves” [66]).

The reference to the “real” also recalls a more famous cat, a cat who is recollected in the moments when Derrida writes, “for example,” a cat: “par exemple les yeux d’un chat” (18); “for example the eyes of a cat” (372); “par exemple un chat” (28); “for example a cat” (380) (see also 29, 30; 383, etc.), the one on the mat that Tarski, Austin, Searle, and a whole host of philosophers have slung about as though they had it by the tail.14 Given that this is an

13. Derrida’s own line about the cat is: “Non, mais non, mon chat, . . . il ne vient pas ici représenter, en ambassadeur, l’immense responsabilité symbolique dont notre culture a depuis toujours chargé la gent feline” (26). (“No, no, my cat . . . does not appear here as representative, or ambassador, carrying the immense responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race” [378].)

example used in philosophy and linguistics to talk about (semantic) truth and reference, an example of “positing” or “asserting,” and that it features prominently in Austin’s discussion of “performatives” and thus also recalls a famously conflictive moment in Derrida’s own past (his “debate” with John Searle in Limited, Inc), it seems likely that this dénégation is just that—playful or otherwise. Searle, it will be remembered, devoted an essay—“Literal Meaning”—to the sentence “the cat is on the mat,” complete with line drawings of cats on mats in various poses and several time-space universes, including outer space. In spite, then, of what has often been referred to as Derrida’s “ethical turn” and the effort, within this essay and other texts devoted to non-human animals (“‘Eating Well’”; “And Say the Animal Responded?”; “Violence against Animals”), to meet animals in their phenomenality, to track them, as it were, and to respond to them as well, Derrida still and persistently returns to language and inscription, ironizing the effort to move beyond even as he does so. As he reminds his reader, “La lettre compte, et la question de l’animal” (25). (“The letter counts, as does the question of the animal” [378].) This is, in part, the reason why he also references the pseudonymous Lewis Carroll, logician Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, author of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, whose Cheshire Cat and whose kitten also thwart Alice’s efforts to pin down the “question” of the animal, language, response, and the real (23-26; 376-378):

Libre à vous d’entendre ou de recevoir la protestation qui dit,

je viens de le faire, “vraiment un petit chat,” comme la citation, en traduction, du chapitre XI de De l’autre côté du miroir. . . . J’aurais aimé, bien sûr, mais je n’aurais jamais eu le temps de le faire, inscrire tout mon propos dans une lecture de Lewis Carroll. Il n’est pas sûr, d’ailleurs, que je ne le fasse pas, bon gré mal gré, en silence, inconsciemment ou à votre insu. (23)

You are free to understand or receive the emphasis I just made regarding “really a little cat” as a quote from chapter 11 of *Through the Looking Glass*. . . . I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact, you can’t be certain that I am not doing that, for better or for worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing. (376)

And yet, there are perhaps another few cats lurking in the background, and in particular a cat belonging to another dear other in Derrida’s life, whose articulations haunt his pages like the lost friend in Montaigne. After all, the essay returns again and again to matters of living and dying, alterity, the absolute other, suffering, loss and mourning, to friends, neighbors, the proximate, in words that echo Derrida’s writing on mourning and friendship across his many works:

Quels sont les enjeux de ces questions? On n’a pas besoin d’être expert pour prévoir qu’elles engagent une pensée de ce que veut dire vivre, parler, mourir, être et monde comme être-dans-le-monde ou comme être-au-monde, ou être-avec, être-devant, être-derrière, être-après, être et suivre, être suivi ou être suivant, là où je suis, d’une façon ou d’une autre, mais irrecusablement, près de ce qu’ils appellent l’animal. (28)

What stakes are raised by these questions? One doesn’t need to be an expert to foresee that they involve thinking about what is meant by living, speaking, dying, being and world as in being-in-the-world or being towards the world, or being-with, being-before, being-behind, being-after, being and following, being followed or being following, there where I am, in one way or another, but unimpeachably, near what they call the animal. (380)
And “deuil pressenti car il y va, me semble-t-il, comme dans toute nomination, de la nouvelle d’une mort à venir selon la survivance du spectre, la longévité du nom qui survit au porteur du nom” (39); (“A foreshadowing of mourning because it seems to me that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name” [389].) 19

In the title essay of a collection that addresses, inter alia, the threats that seem to be posed by deconstruction—then most frequently referred to by the euphemism “theory”—to the U.S. academy, Paul de Man writes:

It is a recurrent strategy of any anxiety to defuse what it considers threatening by magnification or minimization, by attributing to it claims to power of which it is bound to fall short. If a cat is called a tiger it can easily be dismissed as a paper tiger; the question remains however why one was so scared of the cat in the first place. The same tactic works in reverse: calling the cat a mouse and then deriding it for its pretense to be mighty. Rather than being drawn into this polemical whirlpool, it might be better to try to call the cat a cat and to document, however briefly, the contemporary version of the resistance to theory in this country. 20

Here, in this other deconstructionist’s text (and, as Wlad Godzich points out, deixis is also what is at issue), we find an amusing and late reference to the cat on the mat, in comic proximity to a paronomastic reference to Derrida as the “mouse” being derided. 21

In a further oblique reference to a discussion and disagreement between friends—this time Paul and Jacques, rather than Searle and Derrida—de Man names Derrida as the man who, as in Rousseau, gets called a “giant” out of fear, a “tiger,” who, rather than being a “paper tiger,” is really a cat; there, in Allegories of Reading, it is also, as Godzich notes, a discussion about “the relation of figural language to denotation” (xiii). This playful game of cat and mouse echoes throughout Resistance to Theory, as in the overly stretched idiomatic phrase in the following:

Yet, with the critical cat now so far out of the bag that one can no longer ignore its existence, those who refuse the crime of theoretical ruthlessness can no longer hope to gain a good conscience. Neither, of course, can the theorists—but then, they never laid claim to it in the first place.

(R 26)

Note, too, the reference to William Blake’s “Tyger, Tyger” in the same essay, “The Resistance to Theory,” that renders undecidable the very question of how papery this tiger really is, not to mention whether the “actual trap” is set for a tiger, a cat, or a mouse:

Faced with the ineluctable necessity to come to a decision, no grammatical or logical analysis can help us out. Just as Keats had to break off his narrative, the reader has to break off his understanding at the very moment when he is most


23. This essay, “The Return to Philology,” 21-26, was originally published in Times Literary Supplement, December 10, 1982, where, in the last sentence, the word “theorist” read “terrorist” instead. I thank Andrzej Warminski for drawing my attention to this and to the reference to William Blake in the next quotation.
directly engaged and summoned by the text. One could hardly expect to find solace in this “fearful symmetry” between the author’s and the reader’s plight since, at this point, the symmetry is no longer a formal but an actual trap, and the question no longer “merely” theoretical. (R 16-17)  

I wonder if it is this private and so loving joke between friends that is recalled in the photograph of Derrida with the (not so little and certainly not paper) cub in South Africa?—(Fig. 1)  

De Man, like Derrida, also had a cat. And de Man, too, used cats as examples, usually ironic ones, as we’ve seen in these pages of *The Resistance to Theory*, a set of essays that documents the disturbance created by Derrida and de Man’s work. Through this other—“ce vivant irremplaçable qui entre un jour dans mon espace, en ce lieu où il a pu me rencontrer, me voir, voir me voir nu” (26); (“this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it [he] can encounter me, see me, even see me naked” [378-79])—Derrida understands “l’altérité absolue du voisin ou du prochain” (28); (“the absolute alterity of the neighbor” [380]) and mortality (the other’s and his own): “Rien ne pourra jamais lever en moi la certitude qu’il s’agit là d’une existence rebelle à tout concept. Et d’une existence mortelle, car dès lors qu’il a un nom, son nom lui survit déjà. Il signe sa disparition possible. La mienne aussi”—” (26); (“Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it [he] has a name, its [his] name survives it [him]. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also . . .” [379]). Indeed, later on in his address (for the text of *L’Animal* takes the form of an oral address, and bears its traces),


Fig. 1: Jacques Derrida, “En Afrique du Sud, dans la réserve de Potchefstroom, 1998, DR.”
Derrida talks about how Cérisy is a haunted place, and names some of the disappeared (although not de Man):

Cette château reste, pour moi, depuis le temps, un château de l’amitié hantée. . . . Oui, l’amitié hantée, l’ombre des visages, les silhouettes furtives de certaines présences, les mouvements, les pas, les musiques, les paroles qui s’animent dans ma mémoire, . . . J’ai de plus en plus le goût de cette mémoire à la fois attendrie, joyeuse et mélancolique, une mémoire qui aime à se laisser ainsi envahir par le retour de revenants dont beaucoup sont heureusement vivants et, pour certains d’entre eux, ici présents. . . . (43)

This chateau has remained for me, for so long now, a place of friendship but also of haunting. . . . Indeed friendship that is haunted, shadows of faces, furtive silhouettes of certain presences, movements, footsteps, music, words that come to life in my memory. . . . I enjoy more and more the taste of this memory that is at the same time tender, joyful, and melancholy, a memory, then, that likes to give itself over to the return of ghosts, many of whom are happily still living and, in some cases, present here. . . . (392)

On the one hand, absolute alterity; on the other, singularity, the unsubstitutability of that other: the friend, the cat. Derrida’s language in this essay echoes the ethical injunctions of another (absent) friend, Lévinas, and nowhere more so than when pointedly distancing himself from that other philosopher, in the question, “Comment un animal peut-il vous regarder en face?” (24) (“How can an animal look you in the face?” [377]), for here he cites the much

26. A propos of the unsubstitutable cat, in an interesting moment of ethical agonizing, Derrida asks: “Comment justifieriez-vous jamais le sacrifice de tous les chats du monde au chat que vous nourrissez chez vous tous les jours pendant des années, alors que d’autres chats meurent de faim à chaque instant? Et d’autres hommes?” Donner la mort (Paris: Galilée, 1999), 101. (“How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat you feed at home every morning for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant? Not to mention other people?” The Gift of Death, trans. David Willis [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995], 71.) Thanks to the late Helen Tartar for drawing my attention to this passage.
lamented interview when Lévinas, pressed on the question of the face of the other, retreated (albeit ambivalently) from conferring on the non-human animal the full dignity and responsibility of a face.27

And yet, Lévinas, too, devoted pages to an animal, a dog with a name, Bobby, a particular, specific dog, “nom d’un chien,” which is also the polite imprecatory substitute for “name of God,” whose disappearance marks the disappearance of all those in the camps who did not, like Lévinas, survive to mark their traces.28 Lévinas’s essay is rife with the linguistic playfulness and punning of Derrida’s, reminding readers of all the ways canine references live and breathe in French; he, too, refers to the Old Testament, to the dogs who collaborated with and conferred dignity upon the chosen people on the night of the death of the first-born in Exodus by failing to bark, thus erasing their traces (200-201; 48).29 Dog is the co-pilot: dog silence is God’s word, God’s voice backward (201; 48). Bobby, that errant dog (wandering Jew?), enters the lives of the “simianized” (“parler simiesque” [202]; “monkey talk” [49]) “band of monkeys” (“bande de singes” [201; 48]) the Jews have been forced to become—“êtres enfermés dans leurs espèce; malgré tout leur vocabulaire, êtres sans langage” (201); (“beings enclosed within their species; despite all their vocabulary, beings without language” [48]), signifiers without a signified. But Bobby, “chien chéri” (202); (“cherished dog” [50]), exotically named by those who loved him, leapt and barked gaily upon their return from hard labor each day, and, in so doing, reminded them that they were human (no, rather,


29. On this question of erasing the trace, see Derrida, L’Animal, 185; “And Say the Animal Responded,”136-137.
that they were *men*), and claimed descent from those silent ancestors on the shores of the Nile (202; 50). This animal other, he who does not have the capacity to universalize, nevertheless, writes Lévinas, confers humanity on the human, enters the human prison from the margins and calls to the human from within (202; 50). But does he have a face? This is not Derrida’s question, nor the cat’s friendship with “man” (which is why, perhaps, it is a cat and not a dog); rather, it is the cat’s look, his/her gaze, and the returned look of the “human” that is at issue.

But why this cat (not on a mat, but in the bedroom and the bathroom), following, staring? In a talk at a conference about the autobiographical animal, Derrida mentions Sarah Kofman’s *Autobiogriffures* (and here too it is a question of mourning a dead friend, invoked as the reigning muse of cat-scratch philosophy, for Kofman’s is the last in the AIDS-quilt-like litany of names that haunt Cérisy [43; 392]). Kofman reminds us that there is a veritable lineage of famous cats in history and literature and that they are the “*animaux préférés de bien des écrivains, comme s’il y avait une affinité particulière entre le chat et l’écriture, le chat et la culture*” (14); (“the animals preferred by many writers, as though there were a particular affinity between the cat and writing, the cat and culture” [my translation]). In *Autobiogriffures*, Kofman pursues the *griffes*—the claws and marks—of writing with Hoffman’s cat, Murr; from the very first pages, she reminds us of Derrida’s once-humanist (though not necessarily) articulation of *ar*chi-*écriture*:

\[
\text{Un certain ethnocentrisme “refuse le nom d’écriture à certaines techniques de consignation,” admet l’existence de peuples “sans écriture,” “sans histoire,” auxquels il refuse le nom d’homme. A fortiori ne saurait-on admettre chez l’animal, une certaine disposition à l’écriture, une certaine disposition à acquérir une certaine écriture. . . . Si les pattes de mouche du chat étaient des hiéroglyphes? Le chat n’était-il pas animal sacré en Egypte, pays où Teuth inventa l’écriture?}
\]

A certain ethnocentrism “refuses the name of writing to certain techniques of consignment,” and admits of the existence of peoples “without writing,” “without history,” to whom it refuses the name of man. *A fortiori* one would not be able to admit that the animal would have a certain
disposition toward writing, a certain disposition toward acquiring a certain writing . . . [but] what if the scrawls of a cat were hieroglyphs? Was not the cat sacred in Egypt, the country where Thoth invented writing? (A 10-11; my translation; quotations from Derrida’s *Grammatologie*)

The ethnocentrism identified by Derrida in *De La Grammatologie* is also an “anthropocentrism,” as Derrida argues in *L’Animal* and in his response, as animal, to Jacques Lacan, in “Et si l’animal répondait?“:

(. . . *Si la déconstruction du “logocentrisme” a dû . . . se déployer à travers les années en déconstruction du “phallogencentrisme,” puis du “carnophallogencentrisme,” la substitution tout initiale du concept de trace ou de marque aux concepts de parole, de signe ou de signifiant était d’avance destinée, et délibérément, à passer la frontière d’un anthropocentrisme, la limite d’un langage confiné dans le discours et les mots humains. La marque, le gramma, la trace, la différance, concernent différentiellement tous les vivants, tous les rapports du vivant au non-vivant.*) (*L’Animal*, 144)

(. . . whereas the deconstruction of “logocentrism” had, for necessary reasons, to be developed over the years as deconstruction of “phallogencentrism,” then of “carnophallogencentrism,” its very first substitution of the concept of the trace or mark for those of speech, sign, or signifier was destined in advance, and quite deliberately, to cross the frontiers of anthropocentrism, the limits of a language confined to human words and discourse. Mark, gramma, trace, and différance refer differentially to all living things, all the relations between living and nonliving.) (*The Animal*, 104)

Cats write, as the “*griffe*”—simulacral signature, inscription and trace—suggests. Such an inscription is also an auto-immune system and theft, a mark of violence: “*Griffe, instrument d’écriture, mais aussi d’auto-défense, moyen de s’emparer de la propriété d’autrui. Griffe, signe de rapacité et empreinte imitant la signature: un seul terme pour*

désigner la violence de l’écriture qui lacère le papier, et celle de l’écrivain” (A 63-64); (“The griffe [scratch, simulacral signature, mark], the instrument of writing, but also of self-defense, a way of seizing the property [and the propriety] of others. The griffe, sign of rapacity and imprint imitating the signature: a single term to designate the violence, both of the writing that lacerates paper and of the author” [my translation]). In 1976, Kofman reminds us that:

écritre, c’est s’emparer d’un privilège humain, c’est porter un rude coup au narcissisme de l’homme en le détrônant de la royauté de l’univers. Faire écrire un chat, c’est inscrire l’écriture dans la vie même et c’est, d’un seul geste, barrer l’opposition métaphysique de l’instinct et de l’intelligence, dénoncer la problématique cartésienne en se plaçant sur un autre terrain que celui de l’entendement et de la science. C’est faire de l’animal, sur le plan ontologique, l’égal de l’homme, et sur le plan économique, un rival. (A 61)

To write is to seize a human privilege, it is to deal a rude blow to man’s narcissism by dethroning him from his place of royalty in the universe. To make a cat write is to inscribe writing in life itself and is, in a single gesture, to cross out the metaphysical opposition between instinct and intelligence, to denounce the Cartesian problematic by placing oneself on a terrain other than that of understanding and of science. It is to make of the animal, on the ontological level, the equal of man, and, on the economic level, a rival. (my translation)

Writing, that inhuman technicity at the heart of the human, in the form of the cat’s griffe (grafted, as Kofman notes, from Hoffmann’s cat’s œuvre), “introduit l’autre dans le même, vient gommer ‘l’autos’ et lacérer le bios sous le fouet de Thanatos” (74); (“introduces the other into the same, gums up the ‘autos’ and lacerates the ‘bios’ under the whip of Thanatos [my translation]). It is a writing that lacerates, shreds the book, confounding inside and outside, totality, authorship, and private property: it “remet l’écriture humaine à sa place: celle d’être seulement un certain type d’écriture” (77); (“puts human writing in its place as being only one type of writing” [my translation]). In
shredding the books of men. Murr, the cat “met fin au privilège qu’a l’homme de détenir l’écriture, il met en question son hégémonie” (81); (“puts an end to the privilege man has to hold on to writing, puts into question his hegemony [my translation]). This struggle between “man” and animal around the trace—its effacement and inscription—is one of the issues Derrida identifies at stake in Lacan’s insistence that the non-human animal does not cover up its tracks, and that were it to do so, it would “make itself the subject of the signifier.”

In his reading of Lacan on, precisely, the link between tracing and tracking and their effacement, the undecidability of the antinomic senses of the word “dépister” (to track, to follow a scent or tracks, and to confuse by covering one’s tracks), Derrida reminds the reader that “la structure de la trace suppose que tracer revienne à effacer une trace (toujours présente-absente) autant qu’à l’imprimer, toutes sortes de pratiques animals, parfois rituelles, associant, par exemple dans la sépulture et le deuil, l’expérience de la trace à celle de l’effacement de la trace” (185); (“the structure of the trace presupposes that to trace amounts to erasing a trace as much as to imprinting it; all sorts of sometimes ritual animal practices, for example, in burial and mourning, associate the experience of the trace with that of the erasure of the trace” [137]). The point is not whether the animal can or cannot erase or efface its traces, but that the human cannot do so either:

La trace est ineffaçable. Au contraire. Il appartient à une trace de toujours s’effacer et de toujours pouvoir s’effacer. Mais qu’elle s’efface, qu’elle puisse toujours s’effacer, et dès le premier instant de son inscription . . . cela ne signifie pas que quiconque, Dieu, homme ou animal, en soit le sujet maître et puisse disposer du pouvoir de l’effacer. . . . À cet égard l’homme n’a pas plus le pouvoir d’effacer ses traces que le dit “animal.” (186)

The trace cannot be erased. . . . A trace is such that it is always being erased and always able to be erased. . . . But the fact that it can be erased [qu’elle s’efface], that it can always be erased or erase itself, and that from the first instant of its inscription . . . does not mean that someone,

God, human, or animal, can be its master subject and possess the power to erase it. . . . In this regard, the human no more has the power to cover its tracks than does the so-called “animal.” (138)

What rejoins Kofman’s description of the cat’s “innocent” lacerations of the human inscription/trace, and raises the question of usurpation, is Derrida’s remark that the distinction between the so-called human and the so-called animal upheld in Lacan’s argument testifies to a “réinstitution anthropocentrique de la supériorité de l’ordre humain sur l’ordre animal, de la loi sur le vivant” (186-187); (an “anthropocentric reinstitution of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living” [138]), and that “cette forme subtile de phallogcentrisme semble témoigner à sa manière de la panique dont parle Freud: reaction blessée non pas au premier traumatisme de l’humanité . . . mais encore au second traumatisme, le darwinien” (187); (“such a subtle form of phallogcentrism seems in its way to testify to the panic Freud spoke of: the wounded reaction not to humanity’s first trauma . . . but rather to its second trauma, the Darwinian” [138-139]).

Tracing, tracking, following; inscription, trace: these are the aporetic (and yet not!) paths of Derridean and feline animality, the in- or a-human in the human and nonhuman animal; this following [behind] is another way of saying “I am,” when what “I am” is following the other (L’Animal, 82-83; The Animal, 54-55). Before the question of being as such, “de l’esse et du sum, de l’ego sum, il y a la question du suivre, de la persécution ou de la séduction de l’autre” (94); (“of esse and sum, of ego sum, there is the question of following, of the persecution and seduction of the other” [65]).

Derrida says that thinking concerning the animal derives from poetry—the “animot” of his text—the animated words of animals. This is what philosophy deprives itself of. What, Derrida asks, is one following in this discourse on the trace of the other, and why is the trace of the other inscribed in this discourse as animal, as “animot”? (82-83; 55) To understand this, to follow it, is perhaps to follow the labyrinth of paths through . . . a library, or jungle, like Jorge Luis Borges writing of “The Other Tiger”:

I think of a tiger. The fading light enhances
the vast and painstaking library
and seems to set the bookshelves at a distance;
powerful, innocent, bloodstained, and new-made,
it will move through its jungle and its morning
and leave its track on the muddy edge
of a river, unknown, nameless
. . .
Afternoon creeps in my spirit and I keep thinking
that the tiger I am conjuring in my poem
is a tiger made of symbols and of shadows,
a sequence of prosodic measures,
scraps remembered from encyclopedias,
and not the deadly tiger, the luckless jewel
that in the sun or the deceptive moonlight
follows its paths. . . .
Against the symbolic tiger, I have put
the real one, whose blood runs hot,
. . .
but still, the act of naming it, of guessing
what is its nature and its circumstances
creates a fiction, not a living creature,
not one of those who wander on the earth.

Let us look for a third tiger. This one
will be a form in my dream like all the others,
a system and arrangement of human language,
and not the flesh-and-bone tiger
that, out of reach of all mythologies,
paces the earth. I know all this, but something
drives me to this ancient and vague adventure,
unreasonable, and still I keep on looking
throughout the afternoon for the other tiger,
the other tiger which is not in this poem.32

Derrida does not, like Kofman, focus on the cat’s claws, the
*griffure/griffe* that is the mark of marking, the animal weapon that
also inscribes. His fear, naked before his little female cat, is not a

fear of being clawed, lacerated, written on or over by the cat, no, it is
a look with which he is concerned, a mouth, too, that he is—for a
moment—afraid of:

Le chat m’observe nu de face, en face-à-face, et si je suis nu
face aux yeux du chat qui me regarde de pied en cap, dirais-je,
juste pour voir, sans se priver de plonger sa vue, pour voir, en
vue de voir, en direction du sexe. Pour voir, sans aller y voir,
sans y toucher encore, et sans y mordre, bien que cette menace
reste au bout des lèvres ou de la langue. (19)

The cat observes me frontally naked, face to face, and if I
am naked faced with the cat’s eyes looking at me as it were
from head to toes, just to see, not hesitating to concentrate
its vision—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the
direction of my sex. To see, without going to see, without
touching yet, and without biting, although that threat
remains on its lips or on the tip of the tongue. (“The
Animal,” 373)

Who, then, is this cat that looks, that perhaps, at least in Derrida’s
imagination, thinks about touching or biting, but doesn’t, at least
not yet? And when the tiger appears, a tigress, he reminds us, she is
a tiger who is looking in a mirror, who is, indeed, transfixed—prise,
capturée—by the great beauty of her image in the mirror (The
Animal, 69).

There is something feminine about the cat. She is a female
cat, Derrida says, after calling her a (masculine) cat; her gender
will appear and disappear over the course of the essay, for when
appearing as example, the cat is masculine (the unmarked gender),
but in her occasional singularity, she is feminine. Naked, before
Derrida, she is sometimes a female cat. The English translation
commits the sin Vicki Hearne denounces (along with placing “scare
quotes around animal names”) of using “it” rather than “he” or
“she” when referring to an animal (something English rather than
French can do to indicate the generic animal).32 But, here, it is

32. Vicki Hearne, Adam’s Task: Calling Animals By Name (New
precisely a question of the non-generic; there is no animal-as-such. Something about sexual difference and something about kinship are troubled when an animal enters the scene. Echoing a passage from *Politiques de L’Amitié*, Derrida says we must ask ourselves “ce qui arrive à la fraternité des frères quand un animal entre la scène” (29); (“what happens to the fraternity of brothers when an animal enters the scene” [“The Animal,” 381]). He notices that, in thinking through his zoo-auto-bio-bibliography, “ces animaux sont accueillis, . . . à l’ouverture de la différence sexuelle. Plus précisément des différences sexuelles” (59); (“animals are welcomed . . . on the threshold of sexual difference. More precisely of sexual differences” (404).

The pluralization of sexual differences queers this animal world on the way to an analysis of human masculine shame: here is a sex which is not one, a sexual difference that is not one either, but many, or more than one. More than one difference appears as well in the room, for the shame that shows up, stands up, heats up we might say with Derrida, when Derrida is in the room with the cat, is a third term:

C’est d’abord quand un autre se trouve dans la pièce, quand un tiers se trouve dans la chamber ou dans la salle de bains, à moins que le chat lui-même, quel que soit d’ailleurs son sexe, ne soit justement le premiers tiers . . . tout cela devient encore plus aigu si le tiers est une femme. Et le “je” qui vous parle ici

33. “La phratriarchie peut comprendre les cousins et les soeurs mais, nous le verrons, comprendre peut aussi vouloir dire neutraliser. Comprendre peut commander d’oublier, par exemple, avec la ‘meilleure intention du monde,’ que la soeur ne fournira jamais un exemple docile pour le concept de fraternité . . . . Que se passe-t-il quand, pour faire cas de la soeur, on fait de la femme une soeur? et de la soeur un cas du frère?” *Politiques de l’amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 13; (“the fratriarchy may include cousins and sisters but, as we will see, including may come to mean neutralizing. Including may dictate forgetting, for example, with ‘the best of all intentions,’ that the sister will never provide a docile example for the concept of fraternity . . . . What happens when, in taking up the case of the sister, the woman is made a sister? And a sister a case of the brother?”)* Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997), viii.

ose donc se poser, il signe sa présentation de soi à se présenter comme un homme, un vivant du sexe masculin même s'il le fait . . . gardant un sens aigu de la complexité instable . . . souffrant même qu’une autobiographie conséquente ne peut ne pas toucher à cette assurance du “je suis un homme,” “je suis une femme,” je suis une femme qui est aussi un homme.

Or ce moi, ce moi le mâle, croit avoir remarqué que la présence d’une femme dans la pièce allume dans le rapport au chat, au regard nu du chat qui me voit nu, et me voit nu le voir me voir nu, une sorte de feu brillant . . . c’est alors, outre la présence d’une femme, la présence d’une psyche dans la pièce. Nous ne savons plus combien nous sommes, alors, tous et toutes. (86)

The first is when another is in the room, when there is a third party in the bedroom or the bathroom, unless the cat itself, whatever its sex, be that third party. Allow me to make things still more clear: all that becomes all the more acute if the third party is a woman. And the “I” who is speaking to you here dares therefore to posit himself, he signs his self-presentation by presenting himself as a man, a living creature of the masculine sex, even if he does so . . . retaining an acute sense of the unstable complexity . . . even suspecting that an autobiography of any consequence cannot not touch on this assurance of saying “I am a man,” “I am a woman,” I am a man who is a woman.

Now this self, this male me, believes he has noted that the presence of a woman in the room heats things up in the relation to the cat, vis-à-vis the gaze of the naked cat that sees me naked, and sees me see it seeing me naked, like a shining fire . . . besides the presence of a woman, there is a mirror [psyche] in the room. We no longer know how many we are then, all males and females of us. (The Animal, 58)

The animal(s) in the room, the animal(s) in the “psyche” (or “cheval”) mirror, generate sexual differences from sexual difference, even as they institute sexual difference through what Derrida calls “hetero-narcissistic” erotic mirroring, a mirroring of the self as other, a mirror stage that defines the moment of desire and identification as a moment of pursuit of the other, se-duction, of “séduction chasseresse”
(88) (“seductive pursuit” [60]). In his wandering through non-specular animal desire, or rather the non-visual specularity of animalian mirroring (through sound and scent as well as look) that constitutes recognition of the other, an other of the “same” species, Derrida forges a “mirror stage,” which is also, as his play on the mirror as psyché is meant to remind us, a psychic formation for animals, and finds out what, in shame, seems peculiar to the male of the human species: the erection, the rhythmic tumescence and detumescence of a standing-up over which the human male has little control, and which he thus cannot dissimulate. This “general phenomenon of erection” is also, he argues, part of the process of hominization, of coming to stand upright on two legs as a difference from other animals (90; 61). There is something in this shame, then, that makes it difficult to meet an animal face-to-face:

It is in this place of face-to-face that the animal looks at me; that is where I have difficulty accepting that what one calls an animal looks at me, when it looks at me, naked. That this difficulty [mal] does not exclude the announcement of a certain enjoyment [jouissance] is another question still, but one will understand that it is also the same thing, that thing that combines within itself desire, jouissance, and anguish. (61)

34. Cf. Michael Warner, “Homo-Narcissism: or Heterosexuality,” in Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism, ed. Joseph Boone et al. (London: Routledge, 1990), 190-206. Derrida’s discussion of “hetero-narcissism” addresses, I think, Warner’s concern that male desire for the (male) other is most often scripted as narcissism, that gender difference is understood, in other words, to be difference tout court. Derrida’s notion of “hetero-narcissism” allows for the simultaneous play of desire and identification, sameness and difference, in meeting the gaze of the other.
Later on in the essay, when Derrida reminds us that the comparison of humans to animals has been a way of abjecting Jews and women through the absolute idealization of animals, on the one hand, and their absolute demonization, on the other (93; 64; see also 144; 104), he returns to the question of masculinity’s shame and the “mal” that is both difficulty and evil. There is a sacrificial scene here, a sacrificial logic that subtends phallic heteronormativity, and which Derrida has described elsewhere, especially in “‘Eating Well,’” as “phallogocentrism” and “carno-phallogocentrism”:

Le mal voulu, le mal fait à l’animal, l’insulte à l’animal seraient alors le fait du mâle, de l’homme en tant qu’homo, mais aussi en tant que le vir. Le mal de l’animal, c’est le mâle. Le mal vient à l’animal par le mâle. Il serait assez facile de montrer que cette violence faite à l’animal est sinon d’essence du moins à prédominance mâle et, comme la dominance même de la prédominance, guerrière, stratégique, chasseresse, viriloïde . . . c’est le mâle qui s’en prend à l’animal.” (144)

(Evil intended, harm done to the animal, insulting the animal would therefore be a fact of the male, of the human as homo, but also as vir. The animal’s problem [mal] is the male. Evil comes to the animal through the male.) It would be relatively simple to show that this violence done to the animal is, if not in essence, then at least predominantly male, and, like the very dominance of that predominance, warlike, strategic, stalking, viriloid . . . it is the male that goes after the animal. (104)

The circuitous route that this deconstruction of humanism takes, then, opens a path for queerness by following the ways “man,” in erecting himself into (pre)dominance over the animal, recognizes and disavows that his “I am” is first of all an “I am following [behind],” “I am after” the animal, and that the animal, the animot—i.e., passion, suffering, passivity, not-being-able-ness (“The

Animal,” 396)—is what is “disavowed, foreclosed, sacrificed, and humiliated” in himself on his way to becoming “human” (*The Animal*, 113).  

This is a new kind of male human animal who stands before “his” cat, discomfited by the face-to-face encounter, aware of the abyss in the gaze between them, but also aware of the subjectivity of the other face. In a moment that reaches for a revision of oedipal subject-formation (in its admittedly not very sustained critique of the Lacanian “mirror stage”) and, simultaneously, enacts the implications of a queer ethics of inter-subjectivity—queer in its cross-species, hetero-narcissistic erotic mirroring—Derrida asks:

*Et puis-je me montrer enfin nu au regard de ce qu’ils appellent du nom d’animal? Devrais-je me montrer nu quand cela me regarde, ce vivant qu’ils appellent du nom commun, général et singulier, de l’animal? Je réfléchis désormais la même question en y introduisant un miroir; j’importe une psyché dans la pièce. Là où quelque scène autobiographique s’aménage, il y faut une psyché, un miroir qui me réfléchisse nu de pied en cap. La mée question deviendrait alors: devrais-je me montrer me ce faisant me voir nu (donc réfléchir mon image dans un miroir) quand cela me regarde, ce vivant, ce chat qui peut être pris dans le même miroir? Y a-t-il du narcissisme animal?*

Mais ce chat ne peut-il aussi être, au fond de ses yeux, mon premier miroir? (76-77)

And can I finally show myself naked in the sight of what they call by the name of “animal”? Should I show myself naked when, concerning me, looking at me, is the living creature they call by the common, general, and singular name the animal? Henceforth I shall reflect (on) the same question by introducing a mirror. I import a full-length mirror [une psyché] into the scene. Wherever some autobiographical play is being enacted there has to be a psyché, a mirror that reflects me naked from head to toe. The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is, reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the same mirror? Is there animal narcissism? But cannot this cat also be, deep within her [sic] eyes, my primary mirror? (50-51)

The fullest queering, we could say, happens in a moment of mistranslation, a monolingualism of the other perhaps as well, a monolingual humanism (a humonolingualism?) that marks the cat who looks at Derrida. Marks her, to be sure, because Derrida elsewhere designates her as a female cat, “his” female cat, whereas the male cats have all pranced, strolled, or crept through the essay in a neutered English form, the neuter; but also because, in the Lacanian or object relations mirroring this scene recalls, the primary mirror is the (m)other. To make of Derrida a cat’s kitten (Alice’s too, perhaps), is indeed to queer kinship. But Derrida’s desire for “his” cat, his identification with her, does not necessarily belong to such a filial register; it is something other, a queer ontological abyssal relation, a relation to the feminine human and to a non-human other. And to find a mirror [psyché] in the other male (other) is also to queer the intersubjective eros of a hetero-narcissism-in-the-making. In all these cases, with all these sexes and sexual differences at play in a hall of mirrors, queer theory “is” “after” Derrida.