

*Articoli/2*

## ***From Post-Human to Post-Animal***

### **Posthumanism and the ‘Animal Turn’**

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The so-called ‘animal turn’ of the past couple of decades brought about a new focus on animals and animality that traverses the whole spectrum of the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Certainly part of a wider cultural phenomenon – the crisis of humanism in late twentieth century –, it has in turn influenced and transformed posthumanist thought itself, not only enabling it to probe the boundaries of the ‘human’, but also partially reorienting it towards questions of immanence, embodiment, affects, and providing a more marked ethical and political impulse. On the other hand, the encounter with posthumanism brought to the new discipline of Animal Studies the awareness of the limits of the traditional, still very humanist approaches to animal ethics, and of the necessity of an overcoming of the humanist paradigm, of a new theoretical and methodological approach.

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#### **1. The Animal Turn**

In the past few decades, it has become an academic fashion to name – or rather ‘brand’ – any new development in the humanities and the social sciences as a ‘turn’: from the ‘theological turn’ to the ‘speculative turn’ to the ‘empirical turn’, just to name a few. This fashion easily leads to what Richard Grusin (while presenting yet another ‘turn’) has called «turn fatigue», a «weariness [...] and wariness» towards an all too easy and ultimately superficial form of academic branding, finally running (or ‘turning’) idle<sup>1</sup>. An authentic turn should mark in fact a true change of direction, a qualitative and quantitative shift of attention, interest and concern towards a new critical paradigm. This appears to be the case for the so-called ‘animal turn’.

Unlike for most of the other ‘turns’, the origins of this phrase seem to be known: Philip Armstrong and Laurence Simmons report that it was coined in December 2003 by American anthropologist Sarah Franklin, who used it in

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<sup>1</sup> R. Grusin, *Introduction*, in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. by R. Grusin, Minneapolis 2015, p. ix.

conversation during the annual conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia<sup>2</sup>. The phrase was then popularized by historian Harriet Ritvo<sup>3</sup> and has entered academic parlance to name and explain a true flood of publications, conferences, syllabi and a general renewed interest in nonhuman animals and their relations to humans (and the Humanities) that challenge many a sacred cow of Western tradition. 'Scientific' and 'philosophic' interest in animals dates back of course at least to Aristotle (or even Pythagoras), but what changes in current debates – and therefore amounts to a critical 'turn' – are the «relationships between scholars and their subjects [... and the] understandings of the role of animals in the past and at present»<sup>4</sup>. This constitutes a change in *kind*, which «establishes a new research paradigm with its own distinct set of methods and theories»<sup>5</sup> and, according to Armstrong and Simmons, is comparable in significance to the 'linguistic turn' of mid-twentieth century<sup>6</sup>.

An analysis of the historical, cultural and philosophical causes of this turn goes beyond the scope of this article<sup>7</sup>. What interests me here are rather its links and connections with the wider cultural phenomenon of the crisis of traditional humanism and the consequent decentering of 'the human', which at the end of the twentieth century translated philosophically and academically into the umbrella term 'posthumanism'. In a sense, the animal turn is directly a consequence of this crisis, and Cary Wolfe is right when he states that «the 'animal question' is part of the larger question of posthumanism»<sup>8</sup>. The crisis of the human, Rosi Braidotti writes, opened an «ontological gap», and in this gap «other species [came] galloping in»:

Once the centrality of *anthropos* is challenged, a number of boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling down, in a cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspectives. Thus, if the crisis of Humanism inaugurates the posthuman by empowering the sexualized and racialized human 'others' to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of master-slave relations, the crisis of *anthropos* relinquishes the demonic forces of the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole, are called into play<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> P. Armstrong and L. Simmons, *Bestiary: An Introduction*, in *Knowing Animals*, ed. by L. Simmons and P. Armstrong, Leiden 2007, p. 1n1.

<sup>3</sup> H. Ritvo, *On the Animal Turn*, «Dedalus», CXXXVI, 2007, 4, pp. 118-122.

<sup>4</sup> Ivi, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> H. Pedersen, *Knowledge Production in the 'Animal Turn': Multiplying the Image of Thought, Empathy, and Justice*, in *Exploring the Animal Turn: Human-Animal Relations in Science, Society and Culture*, ed. by E. Andersson Cederholm et al., Lund 2014, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> P. Armstrong and L. Simmons, *Bestiary: An Introduction*, cit., p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> The literature on this is very rich; compact (and, necessarily, partial) explanations can be found for example in C. Wolfe, *Introduction*, in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. by C. Wolfe, Minneapolis 2003, pp. ix-xxiii; or M. Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, New York 2008; for a short overview of the animal turn in academia, see J. McDonell, *Literary Studies, The Animal Turn, and the Academy*, «Social Alternatives», XXXII, 2013, 4, pp. 6-14.

<sup>8</sup> C. Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, Minneapolis 2010, p. xxii.

<sup>9</sup> R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 67, 65-66.

It is precisely here that the paradigmatic 'turn' takes place: if, as Wolfe again notes, the animal has signified the repressed Other of the subject/identity/*logos*/ etc. throughout the history of philosophy, and if in certain fringes of twentieth-century Poststructuralism, Postmodernism and cultural studies it has been almost a vehicle or symptom for some other, deeper (and human) problematic (such as race, gender, class or even nationality), today instead it asserts itself on its own terms, as a philosophical and academic issue in its own right<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, however, posthumanism itself (or certain 'modes' of it) has been in turn influenced and transformed by the animal turn, so much so that Pramod Nayar can claim that posthumanist theory has drawn «inspiration [,] theoretical rigour, but also its politics» from Animal Studies<sup>11</sup>: not only have Animal Studies enabled posthumanism to probe the boundaries of the human and of its 'construction', but they have also (partially) reoriented it towards questions of immanence, affects, embodiment, etc., providing thereby also a more marked ethical and political impulse. The point I want to make in this article is thus that the relation between posthumanist theory and Animal Studies is one of reciprocal influence that led, in a sense, to the 'coming of age' of both schools of thought.

That the animal question has been, from the very beginning, an integral part of posthumanist theory, albeit in a minor and understated mode, can be gauged by scrutinizing Donna Haraway's thought. Indeed, a quick look at the development of her philosophy can help giving a feel for the transformative effects of the animal turn *within* posthumanism. The animal question was already important in *Primate Visions*, for example in the analysis of Harry Harlow's «sado-humanism»<sup>12</sup>; however, it is in *A Cyborg Manifesto* that it becomes a central axis of her revolutionary proposal. The first of the three «boundary breakdowns» she names as characterizing our posthuman time is, in fact, that between human and animal (the other two being those between organism and machine and between physical and non-physical):

The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks – language, tool use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need for such a separation [...]. The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signalling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> C. Wolfe, *Introduction*, cit., p. x; C. Wolfe, *Moving Forward, Kicking Back: The Animal Turn*, «Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies», II, 2011, 1, introduction to the issue on *The Animal Turn*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> P. K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, Cambridge 2014, p. 79 and ff.

<sup>12</sup> D. J. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, New York 1989, especially pp. 231-243.

<sup>13</sup> D. J. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, in Id., *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York 1991, pp. 151-152. The boundary is identified as a structure of domination in Western cul-

These claims were made well before the ‘animal turn’ or even the emergence of Animal Studies as a discipline, and did certainly influence the development of posthumanist thought; in a sense, Nayar argues, here Haraway «summarizes in advance the posthumanist project: of interrogating the regimes of classification [...] that consign the animal to a lesser form of life»<sup>14</sup>.

However, Haraway progressively distanced herself from certain trends of posthumanism, and from the term itself. In a famous 2006 interview, despite recognizing that «[a]ll kinds of interesting stuff is going on under the prefixes post- and trans-», she says she has stopped using the term ‘posthumanism’: it

is much too easily appropriated by the blissed-out, ‘Let’s all be posthumanists and find our next teleological evolutionary stage in some kind of transhumanist techno-enhancement’. Posthumanism is too easily appropriated to those kinds of projects for my taste. Lots of people doing posthumanist thinking, though, don’t do it that way. The reason I go to companion species is to get away from posthumanism<sup>15</sup>.

The development of certain currents of posthumanism towards (hyper)humanist techno-utopia appeared to Haraway «too restrictive», and therefore «misleading»<sup>16</sup>; this led her to tone down certain traits of her thought (the cyborg) and ‘go’ to companion species, that is, to focus more on the inter-species continuum. In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, she states in fact that «[b]y the end of the millennium, cyborgs could no longer do the work of a proper herding dog to gather up the threads needed for critical inquiry», and therefore she came «to see cyborgs as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species»<sup>17</sup>. Moving her focus from cyborgs to companion species entailed a reconsideration of the whole posthumanist project, so that in *When Species Meet* she finally states: «I am not a posthumanist; I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind», and opts rather for the term «nonhumanism»<sup>18</sup>.

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ture: «Certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self» (ivi, p. 177). This boundary breakdown is a recurrent topic also in her subsequent work; see for example the discussion of transgenic organisms in Id, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan@Meets\_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, New York 1997, pp. 55-69.

<sup>14</sup> P. K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, cit., p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> N. Gane, *When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done? Interview with Donna Haraway*, «Theory, Culture & Society», XXIII, 2006, 7-8, pp. 137, 140. She reiterates these statements in various works and interviews, not last the recent conversation with Cary Wolfe, *Companions in Conversation*, in D. J. Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*, with a preface by and a conversation with C. Wolfe, Minneapolis 2016, pp. 254, 261.

<sup>16</sup> D. J. Haraway in N. Gane, *When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?*, cit., p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> D. J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago 2003, pp. 4, 11.

<sup>18</sup> D. J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis 2008, pp. 19, 92. As an aside, we can note that other thinkers have moved away from the term ‘posthumanism’ towards ‘nonhumanism’.

Though Haraway cannot certainly be taken as 'representative' of posthumanism *tout court* (which moreover is but an umbrella term for many and often conflicting streams of thought<sup>19</sup>), the evolution of her thought does tell us something about a certain shift on emphasis and interest in this philosophical movement, a shift that has brought attention to a notion of the posthuman that acknowledges and emphasizes its embeddedness in a continuum of species co-evolution<sup>20</sup>.

## 2. The Counterlinguistic Turn

The first and most famous brand of critical 'turn' was coined by Richard Rorty in 1967 with his anthology *The Linguistic Turn*<sup>21</sup>. Rorty named a decisive reorientation of twentieth-century philosophy (and the humanities more in general) towards a focus on language and the linguistic 'construction' of reality, which in the second half of the century led, with Poststructuralism and deconstruction, to an overemphasis best exemplified by Jacques Derrida's most famous (and perhaps most misunderstood) thesis that «*il n'ya pas de hors texte*», there is no outside-text<sup>22</sup>.

According to Kari Weil, the animal turn contributes to what she calls the «counterlinguistic turn» of late twentieth century, an effort to go beyond this exclusive and constraining focus on language and open up to different approaches to reality, the Other, and the human itself<sup>23</sup>. Language has always been, in fact, the defining mark of human uniqueness and its lack has traditionally determined the inferiority and exclusion of the nonhuman other. The posthuman decentring of 'the human' means therefore also a decentring of language and of its exclusiveness. Of course ethologists and animal psychologists have since long demonstrated (the quite commonsensical point) that also

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not only for the former's techno-utopian accents, but also because the term itself, with its emphasis on historical development (the 'post-'), ultimately retains a teleological *form* that is still all too humanist; cf. for example R. Grusin, *Introduction*, cit., pp. ix-x.

<sup>19</sup> For a clear and compact presentation of the various posthumanist currents, see F. Ferrando, *Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations*, «Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics and the Arts», VIII, 2013, 2, pp. 26-32.

<sup>20</sup> Disputable is also her representativeness for the discipline of Animal Studies: many of her recent stances on dog training, discipline and animal testing, among other issues, have come under harsh criticism; see for example Zipporah Weisberg, *The Broken Promises of Monsters: Haraway, Animals and the Humanist Legacy*, «Journal for Critical Animal Studies», VII, 2009, 2, pp. 22-62. My point, however, is not to take her as representative for either posthumanism or Animal Studies, but to discern in the development of her thought an indicator of a much wider philosophical shift.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. R. Rorty (ed.), *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, Chicago 1967. The phrase 'linguistic turn' was however first introduced by Gustav Bergmann's review *Strawson's Ontology*, «The Journal of Philosophy», LVII, 1960, 19, pp. 601-622.

<sup>22</sup> J. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. by J. Mehlman and S. Weber, Evanston 1988, p. 144.

<sup>23</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, «Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies», XXI, 2010, 2, p. 12.

nonhuman animals possess 'languages', and since the Sixties and Seventies some forms of human language have also been taught to animals, as in the famous cases of the chimpanzee Washoe, the gorilla Koko, the bonobo Kanzi, or even the grey parrot Alex<sup>24</sup>. The point, however, is not to teach *human* language to nonhuman animals, which simply reinstates the humanist pattern and the centrality of language; as Derrida puts it, «[i]t would not be a matter of 'giving speech back' to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation»<sup>25</sup>.

The point is thus not to stop at language: if the linguistic turn insisted that we have no immediate and unmediated access to experience and that all representations are linguistically determined, then the counterlinguistic turn responds to a desire to escape what Fredric Jameson called the «prison-house of language»<sup>26</sup>, to acknowledge other ways of being, experiencing and knowing, and to hear and attend «what it may not be possible to say»<sup>27</sup>. The impulse comes of course from the general crisis of humanism and especially from feminist and postcolonial critiques, but the animal turn stretched these critiques to the limit by extending them to the realm of the nonhuman. The turn to the animal brings to the fore the necessity of bypassing language, of exiting the representational cage, in order to make sense of animals (and of human animality), and thus of going beyond the 'human' as defined by Western tradition.

This means, for Weil, also a (relative) turning away from deconstruction, or at least from its more orthodox fringes. Deconstruction, and especially the work of the late Derrida<sup>28</sup>, has been pivotal in revealing the false foundations of the concepts of 'human' and 'animal' and of their binary opposition, but, according to Weil, it remains ultimately prisoner of the representational cage and of an impossibility of real ethico-political engagement<sup>29</sup>. For the counterlinguistic turn, the main philosophical reference becomes rather the work of Deleuze and Guattari, with its insistence on immanence, affects and embodiment.

Indeed, the counterlinguistic turn also builds upon the 'return to the body' that marked much literary, historical and philosophical inquiry over the last few decades – a refocusing towards a corporeality and materiality forgotten or

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. R. A. Gardner, B. T. Gardner, T. E. Van Cantfort, *Teaching Sign Language to Chimpanzees*, New York 1989; F. Patterson and E. Linden, *The Education of Koko*, New York 1981; S. Savage-Rumbaugh and R. Lewin, *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind*, Hoboken 1994; I. Pepperberg, *Alex & Me: How a Scientist and a Parrot Discovered a Hidden World of Animal Intelligence and Formed a Deep Bond in the Process*, New York 2009.

<sup>25</sup> J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. by D. Wills, New York 2008, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> F. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton 1972.

<sup>27</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Here the obvious reference is *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, cit., but Derrida's interest in the question of the animal extends in reality from his early work up to his important last seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, trans. By G. Bennington, 2 vols., Chicago 2011.

<sup>29</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, cit., p. 13.

repudiated throughout most history of Western philosophy<sup>30</sup>. Originating again from feminist and postcolonial critiques (the female and the colonial 'others' were traditionally reduced to the body), this 'return' even affects Animal Studies: philosophical discussion in animal ethics revolved traditionally around utilitarian, reason- and rights-based approaches – which remain essentially humanist and anthropocentric; the return to the body, also marked by pivotal events such as the publication of J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, helped reorienting it towards what Anat Pick calls «creaturely thinking»<sup>31</sup>. The body, the *creatureliness*, with its vulnerability, exposure and fragility, not only constitutes the shared materiality revealing the commonality between human and nonhuman animals, but becomes also the vehicle for a new understanding, a new ethics and a new politics.

For posthumanist theory, this entails the reconsideration and final disavowal of the all-too-common (and all-too-humanist) fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy that characterize even a sober thought such as that of N. Katherine Hayles (not to mention the transhumanist reveries leading up to the 'mind uploading'<sup>32</sup>). Cary Wolfe singles out Hayles (as an example of a widespread trend) for her including the materiality of the body among the qualities of the liberal humanist subject to be deconstructed, and for insisting on a disembodied posthumanist transcendence that «privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life»<sup>33</sup>. The brand of posthumanism Wolfe asserts insists instead on «embodiment, embeddedness, and materiality»: it is not post-human in the sense of coming 'after' human embodiment has been transcended, and can even be said to come 'before' the human, insofar as it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being within a wider biologico-technological continuum<sup>34</sup>. Wolfe's position spells out the indebtedness of (certain) posthumanism to the animal turn: it is *also* because of a theoretical opening to nonhuman animals that the traditional language-centred, disembodied Cartesian body-mind dualism has been abandoned in favour of a reconsideration of the materiality of the body and its affects.

In fact, one specific concept of the Deleuzian/Guattarian vocabulary especially fits the counterlinguistic and counter-representational return to the body: affect. The philosophical debate arisen around this concept since the first decade of the twenty-first century has even produced yet another critical 'turn',

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<sup>30</sup> If it is not possible to give basic references to this widespread intellectual phenomenon, a historico-philosophical overview can be found in C. Collier, *Recovering the Body: A Philosophical Story*, Ottawa 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*, New York 2011, p. 7; cf. J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, Princeton 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. for example the website <<http://www.minduploading.org>>.

<sup>33</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, Chicago 1999, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> C. Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, cit., pp. xv-xvi, and also p. 120.

the so-called ‘affective turn’<sup>35</sup>, which gives a further spin to the posthumanist debate. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari used this Spinozan notion in order to deconstruct the traditional concepts of ‘body’ and ‘identity’ as a self-contained, self-centred and autonomous whole, and, importantly, made it a corollary of their theory of ‘becoming’, and in particular of ‘becoming animal’<sup>36</sup>. Replacing the liberal humanist subject with affects, intensities and flows of movement, they opened to a notion of experience and life that exceeds the limits and possibilities of language to account for it. Affect not only is not reducible to linguistic, symbolic or conceptual meanings, but is always function of relations and intensities moving between bodies, human and nonhuman alike. Affectivity deconstructs the liberal humanist subject both emphasizing the somatic and bodily nature of life experiences and dissolving the boundaries dividing the human from nonhuman animals and even inanimate objects<sup>37</sup>.

Other philosophical developments could be added to illustrate the counterlinguistic turn in the posthumanist debate, from Actor-Network Theory to New Materialism, from Speculative Realism to Object-Oriented Ontology; all these theoretical approaches obviously diverge and disagree on many points, but they all contribute to a turning away from an all-too humanist and exclusive focus on language. Among these, the animal turn has endowed the posthumanist debate with an emphasis on immanence, materiality and creatureliness, which immediately entails also an ethical stress and leads to yet a new ‘turn’.

### 3. The Ethical Turn

Weil suggests that the ‘counterlinguistic’ «effort to attend to the ineffable is itself an ethical act»<sup>38</sup>: turning to the body and its affects, its materiality and its exposure entails a pressing ethical charge, the moral demands of corporeality that, bypassing language and its humanist corollaries, must lead to new forms of response and responsibility. And ethics is certainly a domain to which the animal turn richly contributed within the posthumanist debate, so much so

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. P. Ticineto Clough and J. Halley (eds.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Durham 2007; P. Hoggett and S. Thompson (eds.), *Politics and the Emotions: The Affective Turn in Contemporary Political Studies*, London 2012.

<sup>36</sup> G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis 1987, especially pp. 232-309. Though widely used both in Animal Studies and in posthumanist literature, the notion of ‘becoming animal’ has also been harshly criticized: for example, Donna Haraway attacks Deleuze and Guattari because they «don’t give a flying damn about animals – critters are an excuse for their anti-oedipal project» (D. J. Haraway in N. Gane, *When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?*, cit., p. 143). More in general, though turning upside-down the metaphysical hierarchies, the concept of ‘becoming animal’ retains and reproduces all the characters that Western tradition attributed to the Animal, and thus remains within this tradition.

<sup>37</sup> For helpful overviews of philosophical Affect Theory see for example J. Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, Cambridge, MA 2008; M. Gregg and G. J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham 2010.

<sup>38</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, cit., p. 13.

that it can be possible to speak also of an 'ethical turn' in posthumanism, to be added to the already numerous 'ethical turns' that affected the most diverse disciplines in the Humanities and the social sciences over the last few decades. Of course, all different currents of the posthumanist universe include some form of ethico-political project; but the animal turn added a new emphasis on ethics and helped clarify and redefine the terms of the ethical debate, giving new meaning to notions like subjectivity, alterity, agency, etc.

Haraway's trajectory from cyborg to companion species can be taken again as a sort of indicator, since her *Companion Species Manifesto* opens precisely with a (more) marked ethical commitment to «significant otherness»<sup>39</sup>: a renewed emphasis on interspecies ethics is part of the reasons behind her move to companion species (however problematic and disputable her ethics may be). The emphasis on technology has in fact somehow downplayed the ethical side of the posthuman revolution. The various forms of posthumanist techno-utopia appear ethically conservative, if not outright naïf: they rarely venture beyond the constraints of traditional – and traditionally humanistic – ethical patterns and usually embrace a simplistic scientific determinism, whereby technological progress will bring with it the solution to all problems, including the ethical ones. Yet posthumanism contains *as such* a revolutionary potential, inasmuch as it entails, *as its foundation*, the deconstruction and redefinition of both the 'subject' and the 'other', or, to use a more specific terminology, the 'moral agent' and the 'moral patient'. The decentring of the 'human' intrinsically means a questioning of humanist ethics, of who (or what) counts as moral subject/agent and as moral patient, and what are the duties and responsibilities towards alterity. By bemusing and 'polluting' the traditional humanist subject and its attributes, posthumanism opened the way for a radical reconsideration of ethics.

To this fecund terrain, the animal turn contributes both an enlargement of the category of 'subjectivity' and a radicalization of that of 'alterity'. From the very beginning, animal ethics questioned the exclusivity of human subjectivity and argued for an extension of the category of 'subject' to some groups of nonhuman animals; but more importantly, the focus on animals shattered the humanist limits of alterity and of ethical consideration. If, as Weil argues, a true posthuman (or posthumanistic) ethics must concern itself with an «unknowable or 'incalculable' other»<sup>40</sup>, then it must concern itself with animals; and this because, Derrida would add, the animal represents «absolute alterity»<sup>41</sup>, it stands for what is really incalculable and unfathomable and unveils thereby the inescapable aporia at the heart of human knowledge and action. This reconfiguration of the basic ethical categories is not merely a quantitative enlargement, but entails and demands a *qualitative* change of the terms and modes of the ethical debate. And this is perhaps the most difficult challenge for a truly posthumanist thought.

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<sup>39</sup> D. J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, cit., p. 3

<sup>40</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, cit., p. 11.

In fact, ethics perforce investigates, systematizes and regulates *human* conduct, and cannot therefore escape some forms of anthropomorphism. The challenge for a posthumanist ethics is thus to cope and deal with these necessary and inescapable limits. Let us look at an example. In her analysis of ‘post-anthropocentrism’ and ‘life beyond the species’, Braidotti underlines the positive contribution of an emphasis on ‘empathy’ to a posthuman theory of subjectivity: building upon the work of primatologist and ethologist Frans de Waal<sup>42</sup>, she notes that this emphasis «reappraises communication as an evolutionary tool [...], identifies in emotions, rather than in reason, the key to consciousness, [...], and situates moral values as innate qualities»<sup>43</sup>. These points substantiate the argument for an ethical continuity between humans and (at least) the upper primates and thus for a more inclusive and post-anthropocentric ethics. However, this species egalitarianism ultimately ends up uncritically reinstating humanism and its values: whereas «asserting a vital bond between the humans and other species is both necessary and fine», anthropomorphizing animals so as to extend to them the principle of moral and legal equality both confirms the binary distinction human/animal and denies the specificity of animals altogether<sup>44</sup>. And yet, can a post-anthropocentric and posthumanist ethics work beyond or without some forms of empathy?

Anthropomorphism has recently experienced a substantial re-evaluation within the field of animal ethics. Already in the 1970s, John Berger noted that until the nineteenth century «anthropomorphism was integral to the relation between man and animal and was an expression of their proximity. Anthropomorphism was the residue of the continuous use of animal metaphor»<sup>45</sup>. It is only after the scientific revolution and the ‘scientific’ study of animals (and their concomitant disappearance from everyday life) that anthropomorphism appeared ‘unscientific’ and naïf. Today’s ‘ethical turn’ in Animal Studies comes to regard it (while re-naming it often as ‘critical anthropomorphism’) «not only as a problem but also as a potentially productive critical tool», in the sense that it opens the subject to be «touched» by the nonhuman other in imaginative and emotional ways that complicate and enrich the ethical debate<sup>46</sup>. A posthumanist ethics must overcome the limits of the all-too-rationalistic traditional ethics and open not only to new forms of subjectivity and alterity, but also to new ways and modes of relation and agency<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Braidotti cites in particular *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*, Cambridge, MA 1996; *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, Princeton 2006; and *The Age of Empathy: Nature’s Lessons for a Kinder Society*, New York 2009.

<sup>43</sup> R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>44</sup> Ivi, p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> J. Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (1977), in Id., *About Looking*, London 2009, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, cit., pp. 15-16.

<sup>47</sup> For some literature about ‘critical anthropomorphism’ see for example L. Datson and G. Mitman, *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, New York 2005; the entries *Anthropomorphism* (by A. C. Horowitz) and *Anthropomorphism: Critical Anthropomorphism* (by G. M. Burghardt), in *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare*, 2nd Edition, ed. by M. Bekoff, Westport 2009, vol. 1, respectively pp. 68-73 and 73-74; F. Karlsson, *Critical*

This point however shows how the task of going beyond humanism and its limits demands a constant attention and a continuous re-evaluation of the terms and modes of engagement, lest we ease down in facile acquisitions that remain human, all too human.

#### 4. The Posthuman Animal

The Janus-faced issue of anthropomorphism spells out one of the structural limits of every posthumanist proposal: a lingering (and perhaps unavoidable) (crypto-)humanism lurking behind or beneath the facade of a true overcoming. Much of the posthumanist project – in particular its techno-utopian fringes – is unable (or unwilling) to get rid of some sort of humanist or anthropocentric remainder. The ‘animal turn’ has certainly contributed to a further development of posthumanist thought against some of its most ingrained humanist resistances and towards a more materialist, embodied and antispecist commitment, so that it can be argued that with the ‘animal turn’ posthumanism too has entered a new phase. At the same time, however, Animal Studies have been in turn strongly modified by the encounter with posthumanism: an anti-anthropocentric focus on animals does not necessarily entail an overcoming of humanism; to the contrary, the traditional schools of thought advocating animal welfare/protection/liberation are unabashedly humanist, so that the merging with posthumanism has meant for animal studies, as it were, a sort of ‘coming of age’<sup>48</sup>.

Both the utilitarianism of Peter Singer and the rights theory of Tom Regan – the two main philosophies that, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, redefined and gave new impulse to the modern animal protection movement – propose in fact but a thoroughly humanist enlargement of the moral community, whereby the criteria for inclusion and exclusion remain those of the humanist tradition<sup>49</sup>. These philosophies are still founded on the traditional, humanist notion of subjectivity – which was precisely construed through the exclusion of animals. They necessarily reproduce, therefore, the same structure of exclusion, violence and sacrifice that characterized humanism, granting privileges to some groups while excluding others, as results evident from Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri’s *Great Ape Project*<sup>50</sup>. As already noted, animal ethics still struggles to wrench itself from a millennia-old tradition, and even the relatively new discipline of Animal Studies is at pain not to become but a further extension of traditional (and humanist) projects of emancipation<sup>51</sup>. Posthumanism brought to the animal protection movement the awareness of the limits of these approaches and of the

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*Anthropomorphism and Animal Ethics*, «Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics», XXV, 2012, 5, pp. 707-720.

<sup>48</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. P. Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*, 4th edition, New York 2009 (the 1st edition appeared in 1975); T. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley 1983.

<sup>50</sup> P. Singer and P. Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, London 1993.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. C. Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, cit., pp. 99-126.

necessity of a true overcoming of the humanist paradigm, of a new theoretical and methodological approach and of a new emancipatory project.

A true posthumanist reorientation of Animal Studies, and of the animal question more in general, would entail a thorough transformation, of which what we are witnessing today might be only the dawn. In this respect, Weil stresses an important point: «From the perspective of theory, animal studies may have emerged only in time for its existence to be outdated. Much like the 'women' in women's studies, the 'animal' in animal studies must be placed under erasure»<sup>52</sup>. And this because the 'animal' is downright a humanist construction, a negative, oppositional term, functional to the definition of the 'human' (or of 'Man'). «The animal does not exist», writes Felice Cimatti: it is an invention, the sum of what we do not recognize as human, the photographic negative of the definition of the human, and as such just a *word*<sup>53</sup>. That is precisely why Derrida coined the neologism *animot*, a collective noun in the singular, abstract and fictional, and nothing but a *mot*, a word<sup>54</sup>. A true posthuman or posthumanist animal would be therefore a *post-animal*, an overcoming of the animal itself in the deactivation of the metaphysical, binary disjunction which opposes it to the human. In this deactivation both terms would come under erasure, giving way to something else, truly free from the exclusionary logic of humanism.

Nayar seems to hint at something of the sort when he concludes his study defining posthumanism as «species cosmopolitanism»: though his vocabulary is still all too traditional, it does point towards a new landscape where the deactivation of metaphysical binaries opens up the space for subjectivities as «*always already nodes and intersections along a continuum, full of borrowed characteristics, genes and behaviours*»<sup>55</sup>. The current philosophical panorama is rich in new ontological, ethical and political projects all converging towards the vanishing point of a horizon 'after Man'; in particular, the philosophico-political focus on life (whether *zōē* or *bios*) already transcends the constraints of what Giorgio Agamben called the 'anthropological machine' of the West<sup>56</sup>, and places us at a point of no return. As Roberto Esposito writes,

we are at the threshold beyond which what is called 'man' enters into a different relationship with his own species – beyond which, indeed, the same species becomes the object and the subject of a biopolitics potentially different from what we know because it is in relation not only to human life, but to what is outside life, to its other, to its after<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> K. Weil, *A Report on the Animal Turn*, cit., p. 19.

<sup>53</sup> F. Cimatti, *Filosofia dell'animalità*, Roma-Bari 2013, pp. viii-xi.

<sup>54</sup> J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, cit., pp. 47-50 and passim.

<sup>55</sup> P. K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, cit., p. 152, emphasis in the original.

<sup>56</sup> G. Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. by K. Attell, Stanford 2004.

<sup>57</sup> R. Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. by T. Campbell, Minneapolis 2008, p. 109. The *zōē/bios* vocabulary has been widely adopted in the posthumanist debate, from Braidotti to Nayar to Wolfe. On Animal Studies and biopolitics see C. Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and*

At this threshold, where posthumanism meets the 'animal turn', one can wager with Foucault that the animal, together with 'man', will be erased, «like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea»<sup>58</sup>.

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*Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*, Chicago 2013; cf. also B. Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us About Politics*, Durham 2014.

<sup>58</sup> M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), London 1970, p. 422.