Kafka’s *Animots*: Challenging Anthropocentrism

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Abstract

This Master’s thesis examines the ways in which literature undoes the dividing line between Human and Animal that is at the core of the anthropocentric construction of human identity. More specifically, the aim of this project is to provide a reading of four of Kafka’s stories: “A Report to an Academy” (1917), “Investigations of a Dog” (1931), “Josephine, the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” (1924), and “A Crossbreed” (1931). My approach is rooted in the field of literary animal studies and aligned with poststructuralist and deconstructionist thinking about animals present in the work of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. I put forth the argument that the animal figures in these four short stories challenge human-centered thought by refusing to comply with common assumptions about the capabilities and identity of animals. The literary analysis focuses on three key elements of anthropocentric notions of species identity: visual encounters as moments of species awareness, language as a dominant criteria for human exceptionalism, and the body as a site of identity formation.
Les *Animots* de Kafka: contester l’anthropocentrisme

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Résumé

Ce mémoire de maîtrise examine les façons dont la littérature brouille la frontière homme-animal, qui est au cœur de la construction anthropocentrique de l’identité humaine. Plus précisément, ce projet vise à analyser les figures animales dans quatre nouvelles de Kafka : « Rapport pour une académie » (1917), « Les recherches d’un chien » (1931), « Joséphine la cantatrice ou le peuple des souris » (1924), et « Un croisement » (1931). Il s’inscrit dans le champ des études animales en s’inspirant des réflexions poststructuraliste et déconstructionniste à propos des animaux, notamment des travaux de Jacques Derrida, de Gilles Deleuze et de Félix Guattari. L’hypothèse principale est que les figures animales dans ces quatre nouvelles de Kafka révèlent les failles d’une pensée humanocentriste en s’éloignant des représentations classiques des animaux, autant en ce qui concerne leur identité que leurs capacités. L’analyse littéraire se concentre sur trois notions anthropocentriques principales quant à l’identité des espèces : le contact visuel comme moments de prise de conscience, le langage comme critère de l’exception humaine et le corps comme lieu de formation de l’identité.

Translated by Kiev Renaud
# Table of contents

Acknowledgements  iv  

Introduction  1  

1. Theoretical framework and literature review  7  
   1.1 Animals in Thought  7  
   1.2 Animals in Literature  21  

2. Gaze  32  

3. Language  56  

4. Body  82  

Conclusion  108  

Bibliography  111
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Introduction

“An animal looks at us and we are naked before it. Thinking, perhaps, begins here” (Derrida, 2008, 29).

This thesis project starts exactly at the point where thinking begins for Jacques Derrida: in the moment one is truly seen by an animal, stripped of anthropocentric presuppositions. From insects and mice to apes and dogs — various animals have left their traces in Franz Kafka’s work. However, most interpretations of Kafka’s bestiary traditionally do not consider this potential for an animal’s gaze to create an awareness of species identity and stop where Derrida calls for thought to begin. Following a humanist line of thought, these approaches treat literary animals as anthropomorphic tropes and metaphors, embedding them into a sociological, theological, or autobiographical context. In their analysis of Kafka, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari counter allegorical interpretations of his work, arguing that Kafka dismantles symbolic structures rather than enforcing them: “Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation” (22). This erasure of the symbolic destabilizes human-centred frameworks and gives animals a new status as subjects.

Scholars of animal studies, such as Kari Weil, point to a “demand to unthink or to destabilize our conceptual categories” (xvii). Approaches to literary theory emerging from this field foreground the role of animals within literary texts. These approaches foster an analysis of these animals with regard to their specific role as non-human beings, rejecting the idea that animals exclusively serve as a surface for the projection of human subjectivity.
In this thesis, I will provide an animal-centred reading of four of Kafka’s stories (“A Report to an Academy”, “Investigations of a Dog”, “Josephine, the Singer, or the Mouse Folk”, and “A Crossbreed”) that focuses on the construction of human identity along the dividing lines between Human and Animal and draws on the field of literary animal studies, poststructuralism, and deconstructionism. These stories illustrate the originality of Kafka’s textual representation of animals especially well because the narrators are either animals or humans who broach questions about species identity beyond commonly held notions about animality. I argue that Kafka’s literary animals challenge anthropocentrism by refusing to remain within the boundaries of the text, by creating ruptures and gaps in form and content, and by reappropriating elements of a human-centred vocabulary, which leads to new ways of approaching questions of species identity.

In anthropocentric frameworks, animals function as the ultimate inferior other, and as non-human creatures, they are denied traditional human capacities, such as language. I thus understand anthropocentrism as the definition of humanity in opposition to animality on the basis of human-centred categories, such as reason or language. This epistemology has shaped the human/animal relationship as well as notions of species identity. I argue that literature can serve as a space to challenge this definition, to renegotiate this relationship and to explore fluid forms of species identity.

My approach to literary analysis aligns with Margot Norris’ point about a specific kind of art that contributes to the critique of anthropocentrism:

But art is, of course, implicated in complex ways in the subject’s exchanges with the ‘other’: by functioning as a putative repository of meaning, by embodying authority, by distributing status and prestige to authors, audiences, and
representations, and so on. Biocentric thinking cannot, therefore, be accommodated by traditional art and will require modes that further frustrate communication, that negate their authority, that rupture representation and rebuff interpretation. (3)

Art can therefore play an important role in unveiling anthropocentrism by creating new forms that complicate the exchanges between a subject and the other. For Norris, literature represents an artform that fosters biocentric thinking. She particularly associates biocentrism with the movement of Modernism, breaking with traditional beliefs and modes of writing, at the turn of the 20th century. Kafka is part of this “biocentric tradition” because his depictions of the ‘other’ confront the reader with narrative forms that challenge anthropocentrism. Although Kafka does not emphasize the living conditions of animals outside the world of text or advocate for specific animal ethics, he “creates as the animal — not like the animal, in imitation of the animal — but with their animality speaking” (Norris, 1). Making room for other-than-human perspectives in his texts allows Kafka to experiment with form, content, and modes of writing that “frustrate communication, that negate their authority, that rupture representation and rebuff interpretation” (Norris, 3). As Walter Benjamin notes, “Kafka did not tire of picking up the forgotten from the animals”¹ (132), and it is due to this specific way of listening to or eavesdropping on animals as elements of the forgotten, such as our shared evolutionary past with animals, that the animals in his texts open up a space for biocentric thinking.

While allegorical readings of Kafka’s animals provide important insights within Kafka studies, a focus on non-human traces in his work that refuses to move into symbolism enriches and expands the field. The interdisciplinary nature of literary animal studies provides a framework for developing an approach that carefully considers questions of representation and literary form as well as aspects of identity with regard to our relationship as humans with other beings. While literary writing often makes use of anthropomorphism, which I define as a means to directly ascribe specific features, such as human speech or clothing, to animals in order to humanize them, it does not always displace or erase other creaturely characteristics. Although Kafka’s animals use human language, they have a voice outside anthropomorphic frameworks through additional forms of representing animal experience, such as silences or gestures. My reading of Kafka’s literary animals in this thesis focuses on three elements of the “animal-question” that decentre anthropocentric perspectives and make room for other-than-human forms of negotiating the human/animal relationship.

Firstly, I will discuss the visual encounters between different human and non-human creatures in Kafka’s writing. The scenes of these encounters illustrate the awareness of the alterity of another creature that is manifest in the gaze. Aspects of looking reveal how the animals in the stories negotiate their relationship with others and so suggest to the readers outside the world of the story ways of rethinking their own relationships. I argue that the depictions of different kinds of creaturely gaze within the stories destabilize anthropocentric notions of what it means to be human or animal.

Secondly, I aim to show how Kafka’s narrators expose the limits of human language as a mode of expression and representation. The human/animal divide is marked by the presumed inability of animals to express themselves through human
verbal speech, and the question of language remains at the core of our thinking about animals. In his animal-centred analysis of Kafka, Kári Driscoll highlights the historical context with regard to shifting perspectives about language and establishes a link between the discourse on language and representation around 1900 and the “animal-question”. Since language always served to set humans apart from animals, the “so-called ‘Sprachkrise,’ the pervasive crisis of faith in the ability of language to describe reality” (2014, 6) had an impact on the discussion of animality as well. Driscoll notes that this shift marked by the “language crisis” coincides with the writings of authors like Kafka, who alter the anthropocentric boundaries between Human and Animal by replacing symbolic meanings of animals with experiments in form and language in their texts.

Lastly, my readings will examine the different bodies and modes of perception with regard to questions of species identity. I analyze the ways in which the creaturely bodies depicted in these texts resist normative modes of bodily behavior, such as instinct-driven and mechanical reactions to stimuli. The animal bodies in these four stories function as surfaces for identity formation because they convey the complexities of animal experience that cannot be expressed through language.

In this master’s thesis, I establish an analytical framework that derives primarily from the literary texts under consideration, embedding them into the contemporary philosophical and literary discourse concerning animals. My comparative close readings of works by Kafka in which he experiments with diverse facets of creaturely identity in form and content map out the specificities of Kafka’s zoocentric vocabulary. The detailed

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2 However, some species, like chimpanzees, are capable of learning sign language to communicate with humans (see, for example, the research on sign language and chimpanzees by Allen R. and Beatrix T. Gardner).
discussion of this zoocentric vocabulary serves as an impetus for new ways of looking at the representation of the human/animal relationship in literature and promotes further investigations of traces of animality in texts outside the literary canon.
1. Theoretical framework and literature review

Once literary theory merges with animal studies, animals in literature are perceived as subjects, not objects. This shift is driven in part by a set of epistemological and ethical questions such as: How can philosophy challenge anthropocentric ways of thinking about animals? What are the consequences of extending the field of literary theory to non-human beings? How does literature inform philosophical ways of thinking about animals? How can this be applied to literary analysis? Which forms of representation emerge at the intersections of the human/animal divide? This chapter will provide the theoretical framework to address these questions as well as their relevance for literary analysis, first, by offering a brief overview of the status of animals within Western philosophy, followed by key elements of the work on animals by Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari; and second, by discussing the role of animals in literary analysis and providing a short review of the literature on Kafka’s bestiary within literary animal studies.

1.1 Animals in Thought

In Thinking through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction, Matthew Calarco (2015) highlights the key role of philosophers in drawing a line between animals and humans. He claims that “philosophy in the Western tradition has been one of the chief architects in constructing the traditional philosophical and ethical dogmas we have inherited concerning animals” (7). Animals played a central role in Western philosophy at least since the ancient Greeks, and the status assigned to non-human beings by philosophers has changed throughout history. Aristotle, for example, claims that animals lack language, logos, and rationality, which makes them inferior to humans. Although
Aristotle reduces the function of animals to serving humans, he acknowledges that animals as well as plants have a soul (Calarco, 2015, 8). In the 17th century, René Descartes further elaborates on the idea of human exceptionalism by referring to animals as automata — machine-like creatures without reason and lacking the ability to feel pain. In contrast to Aristotle, Descartes believes that the animal body lacks a mind that enables them to self-consciously reflect about themselves and the world. Therefore, he argues, killing animals and using them for scientific experiments is ethically justifiable (Hatfield, 404-405). However, as I will explain later in my discussion about the body, Descartes acknowledges our limited access to the world of animals. During the Enlightenment, animals remain a separate marginal group inferior to humans. Immanuel Kant, for example, aligns with Descartes’ point of view, and claims that animals do not have the ability for rational moral choice, which further justifies the power of humans, as the only living beings with this capacity, over all non-human beings (Calarco, 2015, 8-10).

Apart from some exceptions, such as Michel de Montaigne, these anthropocentric positions dominated philosophical thinking about animals for centuries. Since, the Enlightenment, as Michel Foucault (1984) has pointed out, “determined, at least in part, what we are, what we think, and what we do today” (32), it is not surprising that this “humanist heritage” (Calarco, 2015, 35) still exists in contemporary perspectives on animals. Despite this dominant perception of animals as inferior and negligible beings, more critical investigations of these dogmas emerge at the turn of the 20th century. German 20th-century philosopher Martin Heidegger, for example, turns to questions of animality. Although he situates animals within a hierarchy, distinguishing between matter or stone as “worldless”, animals as “poor in world”, and man as “world-forming”, it is important to note that Heidegger formulates a strong critique of human-centred thought. According to Calarco, Heidegger’s reflections on animals can be seen as one
of the starting points for a general displacement of the traditional humanist notion of animals, and the emergence of new ethical concerns about animals (Calarco, 2015, 1-10).

French philosopher, Jacques Derrida developed his reflections on “the question of the animal” by drawing on and critiquing Heidegger’s position. Of course, the moral status of animals as well as ethical questions about animal welfare were already raised earlier. Jeremy Bentham, for example, addressed the question of animal suffering and the issue of animal rights at the end of the 18th century. Continuing the discussion on the human/animal relationship, contemporary thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, Félix Guattari, or Gilles Deleuze, create new critical animal-centred concepts. Moreover, novel ways of including animals in our thinking have developed across multiple disciplines, such as philosophy, anthropology, political science, law, or medicine, forming the highly interdisciplinary field of animal studies. This has resulted in an extensive exploration of “the spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural worlds and the interactions humans have with them” (DeMello, 4).

In this wider context of animal studies, Calarco (2015) distinguishes between three major strands of “pro-animal thinking” in philosophy. The first approach calls for an ethical treatment of animals based on similarities between humans and animals in terms of identity. Animal studies philosophers of this group, such as Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and Paola Cavalieri, base their thinking on a “neo-darwinian ontology” (11), which allows them to show how humans and animals have specific traits in common, like, for example, cognition or sentience. In addition, the principal of “equal consideration of interest” (14) is at the core of this approach. This means that the interests of all sentient animals must be considered as equally important as human interests. To describe unequal treatment
based on affiliation to a certain species, Peter Singer coined the term “speciesism” modeled on terms like sexism and racism.

According to Calarco, a second line of pro-animal thinking in contemporary philosophy is centred around “an appreciation of the manifold differences that exist between and among human beings and animals” (28). Philosophers who align with this difference-based theory, like Derrida, for example, strongly critique humanism and its anthropocentric foundations. Difference theorists also pay close attention to encounters with the Other, and the modes of response emerging from these encounters in order to further understand the mechanisms of binary oppositions, such as the animal/human divide.

A third branch of pro-animal thinking can be found in the work of philosophers who “aim to think about human beings and animals in deeply relational terms” so that “new groupings and differences […] emerge, such that ‘the human’ is no longer the centre or chief point of reference” (56). Calarco calls these philosophers “indistinction” theorists. Despite an effort to eliminate difference between humans and animals by pointing out similarities, they argue that the identity approach reinforces inequalities and divisions, because some animals are automatically excluded from the ethical framework due to their lack of certain traits. Apart from this valuable criticism, indistinction theorists, such as Donna Haraway, Georgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, open up new spaces beyond the human/animal binary, and “uncover new kind of identities and differences” (56).

Drawing on Calarco’s insightful and clear categorization, I argue that “difference” and “indistinction” theorists offer valuable concepts to investigate the link between
animal studies and literary theory as well as to critically analyze Kafka’s bestiary from an animal studies perspective. Although identity-based thinking brought forward highly important points of critique in terms of the unethical treatment of animals, I will leave this path of thought aside because Kafka does not specifically address questions of animal rights. Despite this lack of interest in the material realities of animals, the multiple human and non-human forms of animality seem to have inspired him to experiment with language, and to explore how this agency can alter texts. Matthew T. Powell, for example, points out that “the grotesque world of Kafka’s animal stories indicates that there exists something outside of (or in addition to) our ‘normal’, ‘typical’, ‘wholesome’ world, that maybe there is an ‘other’” (131). I argue that Kafka experiments with animals in his writing to destabilize common notions of what it means to be human. This is why I will focus on the work of difference and indistinction theorists who aim to understand the “deep internal workings of anthropocentrism” (Calarco, 2015: 36). Their work represents a major paradigm shift in thinking about animals within contemporary theory, and it will therefore serve as an important framework for the literary analysis proposed in this thesis.

While Derrida offers a critique of the human/animal binary, he does not, in contrast to other thinkers in the field of animal studies, call for an erasure of this boundary. Instead, as mentioned above, his critique aims to expose the underlying premises of anthropocentric thought and to decenter human subjectivity by drawing attention to the “abyssal rupture” between humans and animals (Calarco, 2015, 31). He objects to the identity-based animal rights that transfer human capacities to certain groups of animals and instead shifts the focus from capacities and similarities to the various dynamics of the encounters between different beings, such as “our shared vulnerabilities, [and] our inabilities (impouvoirs)” (Weil, 21).
His main argument is that the line marking the human/animal divide is drawn between two single entities, namely Human and Animal, and that it is this assumption of “homogeneity” (Calarco, 2008: 119) that results in modes of thinking that do not do justice to the heterogeneous nature of all living beings. In deliberately choosing the formulation “the question of the animal”, Derrida critically refers to this perception of animals as a single category as the basis of humanism. By deconstructing anthropocentric concepts, Derrida exposes the foundations of human exceptionalism and develops an alternative line of thought that views animals and humans in a non-hierarchical way, acknowledging their differences. The following discussion of his position on animals will focus on three key ideas, which he extensively worked on towards the end of his life; namely: notions of responsivity in the human-animal encounter as a way to explain the functions of animal alterity, the term “animot” as a means to point to the multiple forms of non-human beings, and the term “autobiographical animal” as a reference to the construction of human identity through animality.

In a series of lectures at the Cerisy conference in 1997, Derrida reflects on and explains the multiple roles animals have played in his thinking. These lectures represent a deep investigation of philosophical thought about animals and mark an important paradigm shift within this field. Together with fragments of Derrida’s writing on this topic, the lectures were posthumously published as L'Animal que donc je suis (The Animal That Therefore I Am). In these texts, Derrida provides an extensive critique of the human/animal divide and the anthropocentric foundations of the Western philosophical tradition, drawing from the perspectives on animals by other philosophers, such as Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Benjamin, Lacan, and Levinas. He strongly calls into question the assumption at the core of metaphysical subjectivism that human perception and experience exclusively constitute reality:
It is not just a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institutions, technics, clothing, lying, pretense of pretense, covering tracks, gift laughter, crying, respect, etc. - the list is necessarily without limit, and the most powerful philosophical tradition in which we live has refused the ‘animal’ all of that). It also means asking whether what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the pure, rigorous, indivisible concept, as such, of that attribution. Thus, were we even to suppose — something I am not ready to concede — that the ‘animal’ was incapable of covering its tracks, by what right could one concede that power to the human, to the ‘subject of the signifier’? (135; italics in the original)

Humans claim their position of power and set themselves apart from other species by denying them specific capacities, such as language, mourning, lying or pretending. Derrida deconstructs these concepts that form human identity to emphasize and acknowledge the differences between humans and animals. He replaces the question of shared capabilities with a strong critique of the epistemological underpinnings that define these capacities. Man, he argues, can only claim a position of superiority on the basis of such concepts, which feed the “abyssal limit” (12) and mark the dividing line between him and “the animal”. In a Derridean framework, the question of whether or not animals are capable of leaving or erasing their traces, for example, becomes a matter of deconstructing the very concept of traces and their epistemological meaning. He argues that because a trace always erases itself, the idea of claiming power over a trace becomes obsolete:
It is inherent to a trace that it is always being erased and always capable of being erased [Il appartient à une trace de toujours s’effacer et de toujours pouvoir s’effacer]. But the fact that it is erased [qu’elle s’efface], that it can always be erased or erase itself, and this from the first instant of its inscription, through and beyond any repression, does not mean that someone, God, human, or animal, can be its master subject and possess the power to erase it. On the contrary. In this regard the human no more has the power to cover its tracks than does the so-called ‘animal’. (136; italics in the original)

By deconstructing concepts of presumed exclusively human capacities, such as the power to leave or erase a trace, Derrida exposes and dismantles the foundations of human exceptionalism. Thus, thinking starts at the encounter with animals, which is why he begins his analysis with a reflection about his cat staring at his naked body. Through aspects of looking and nakedness, he explores the underlying structures of the human/animal binary.

The alterity of the cat’s gaze serves as a starting point to uncover the mechanisms of the divide between humans and animals. The human concept of shame in relation to nudity points to a whole set of “properties of man” (5) as the foundation of human exceptionalism. Therefore, the gaze of an animal reveals the functions of the human/animal binary. For Derrida, this gaze points to “the abyssal limit of the human: the human or the ahuman, the ends of man” (12), and this further leads him to call for a change of perspective:

The discussion becomes interesting once, instead of asking whether or not there is a limit that produces discontinuity, one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but
more than one internally divided line; once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single indivisible. What are the edges of that limit that grows and multiplies by feeding on an abyss? (30f.)

Philosophical reflections about animals often centre on the human-animal divide as a discontinuity or rupture, neglecting key aspects of animality and humanity, he argues. These aspects only become visible in an awareness of an animal staring back and addressing the human with its gaze. Taking the gaze of his cat as a point of departure, he raises questions with regard to the consequences of this encounter:

What does this bottomless gaze offer to my sight [donne à voir]? What does it ‘say’ to me, demonstrating quite simply the naked truth of every gaze, when that truth allows me to see and be seen through the eyes of the other, in the seeing and not just seen eyes of the other? (12; italics in the original)

The “mute” creature communicates through its eyes, and Derrida tries to make sense of the cat’s gaze by asking what the cat “says” to him, therefore translating it into a form of language. Departing from these reflections on the different meanings of his cat’s gaze, Derrida further explores the notion of responding. While animals do react to humans, their actual response remains obscure. Thus, they represent an “existence that refuses to be conceptualized” (9). Derrida traces the dynamics of the response back to theological narratives. He draws on the example of the naming of animals in the book of Genesis where Adam is granted the power over all other living beings. In this order, Man, who has named himself and all other species, is at the top of the hierarchy, with animals beneath him. According to Derrida, this “anthropo-theomorphic reappropriation” (18) at the core of the human process of naming without being named marks an important point in the conceptualization of the human-animal relationship. In this moment of
reappropriation, humans deprive animals of any form of power. Consequently, animals do not have the power to manifest to humans their experience, which Derrida further describes as a “wound without a name: that of having been given a name” (19; italics in the original). In addition, this power over animals manifests itself in the constant referral to non-human beings in the singular (“the animal”), which further cements the boundary between humanity and animality.

For Derrida, this use of language exposes aspects of violence and animal suffering: “The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority, it is also a crime” (48). The category of “the animal” represents not only an erasure of the heterogeneous nature of animal life, but also of the animality of humans. In response to this violence, Derrida introduces the term “animot”, which is a wordplay on the French words animal (animal) and mot (word). This term further refers to the sound of the word animaux, the plural form of the word animal in French. Similar to the use of the formulation “the animal question”, this term serves to draw the reader’s attention to the limitations of referring to all animals in the singular; it is both a grammatical error— l’animot (singular article with the ‘plural’ noun) — and a conceptual paradox. Furthermore, Derrida explains that “animot” also points to the key role of language in creating and maintaining the boundary between humans and animals:

The suffix mot in l’animot should bring us back to the word, namely, to the word named a noun [nommé nom]. It opens onto the referential experience of the thing as such, as what it is in its being, and therefore to the stakes involved in always seeking to draw the limit, the unique and indivisible limit held to separate human from animal, namely, the word, the nominal language of the word, the voice that names and that names the thing as such, such as it appears in its being. (48)
The term “animot” captures Derrida’s endeavor to achieve 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 privation” (48). In this context, Calarco (2008) notes that “this has been one of Derrida’s central questions since his earliest work, namely, how to refer in language and concepts to that which precisely resists conceptualization” (100).

Derrida’s approach to animals calls for a radical change of thought, which the title of one of his lectures on animals, “The animal that therefore I am” (L’Animal que donc je suis), already suggests. This reference to Descartes (cogito ergo sum) breaks with the notion of thinking as the prerequisite for human existence and the definition of thought as a distinctive human feature. For Derrida, thinking does not begin with human cognition but with questioning the oppositional construction of humanity and animality. Furthermore, the title plays with the two meanings of the French verb “suivre”: to be or to follow. In reference to Levinas’ notion of the self emerging from the encounter with the other, Derrida explains that human identity is based on following “the animal” as the ultimate other. The human self (being) is constructed in opposition to this other. Since animals surround us (“The animal is there before me, there next to me, there in front of me — I am who is (following) after it. And also, there, since it is before me, it is behind me. It surrounds me”, 11), they have co-constituted our ways of thinking, and, therefore, are part of our (hi)story. Derrida follows the lines of thought of this omnipresence of animals and draws on the meaning of the word “autobiography” as relating to the writing of one’s story to refer to this essential role of animals. Derrida’s concept of the “autobiographical animal” reverses the idea of the self writing from a position of identity and authority, and undoes the structures that formed this self.
While Derrida’s framework serves to complicate the differences emerging at the dividing line between humans and animals, the reflections of Deleuze and Guattari are based on indistinction, opening up an additional line of thought to reconceptualize notions of animality. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari read animals, similar to Derrida, through acts of becoming other, which means “a refusal to enact the ideals and subjectivity that the dominant culture associates with being a full human subject and to enter into a relation with the various minor, or nondominant, modes of existence […]” (Calarco, 2015: 57). Animals are part of the “nondominant modes of existence”, excluded from human subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari propose a new theoretical structure for subjectivity through acts of becoming, which changes the status of animals. I will briefly explain this theoretical structure by focusing on two key concepts, namely the concept of the rhizome, discussed by Deleuze in Dialogues, and that of becoming-animal, introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus (ATP). I will then discuss how they integrate the concept of becoming-animal into their analysis of the works of Kafka in Kafka. Towards a Minor Literature (KTML).

The rhizome is an unstructured assemblage of infinite multiplicities, which neither represents a bottom-up nor top-down development. Instead, it describes a process with no end and no beginning. The idea of the rhizome also refers to a botanical concept of a plant with multiple roots, opposed modes of philosophical thinking that follow a hierarchical, branching tree structure. In the introduction to A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari summarize the principle characteristics of the rhizome as follows: “[…] unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states” (21). Thus, the rhizome serves as a point of connection for multiple forces of different or same nature. As “intensities” (10),
these forces intervene in different moments, forming rhizomatic structures. The heterogeneous, non-hierarchical, and open nature represents an “anti genealogy” (21), offering a valuable framework to critique Cartesian perspectives on animals. In contrast to anthropocentric hierarchies with humans at the top and animals as one subordinate group, the concept of the rhizome gives room to various kinds of becomings, affects, vectors.

Rejecting hierarchical structures, becoming does not describe imitation. Instead, becoming is a mutual process where different entities change and evolve at the same time in a new space. During this process of becoming, a deterritorialized space emerges. In Dialogues, Deleuze illustrates this process by giving the example of the relationship between a wasp and an orchid:

The orchid seems to form an image of the wasp, but in fact there is a becoming-wasp, a becoming-orchid of the wasp, a double capture since ‘that which’ each becomes changes no less than ‘the one which’ is becoming. The wasp becomes part of the reproductive apparatus of the orchid, at the same time that the orchid becomes a sexual organ for the wasp. A single and same becoming, a single block of becoming […]. In man, there exist instances of becoming-animal which do not consist of playing the dog or the cat, since the animal and the man only meet on the paths of a common, but dissymmetrical, deterritorialization (2-3).

Both entities, the wasp as well as the orchid, undergo the act of becoming, resulting in a one single block of becoming. Similar moments of becoming take place in the human/animal encounter. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to ask: what are the consequences of these “instances of becoming-animal” for the human/animal relationship?
In *A Thousand Plateaus* and in *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari explain the role of animals within this structure of acts of *becoming*. They describe the acts of *becoming-animal* as a way to “participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities where all forms come undone” (KTML, 13). All elements in this continuum can obtain new functions through acts of *becoming* “to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of non signifying signs” (KTML, 13). Consequently, these processes exceed the limitations of language and subjectivity. The subject and its language dissolve within acts of *becoming*, which further deconstructs traditional notions of humanity and animality:

For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not ‘really’ become an animal any more than the animal ‘really’ becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. (ATP, 238)

In this framework, the focus shifts from adapting to the other by imitation of behavior or similarity of capacities to engaging in multiple acts of *becoming other, becoming-animal*. This deconstructs the fixed meanings of Animal in opposition to Human, establishing “zones of indistinction where traditional binary distinctions between human beings and animals break down” (Calarco, 2015: 57-58). Within these new zones, humans lose their monopoly on subjectivity. Moreover, the subject is not bound to a single identity, such as Human or Animal, anymore, which gives rise to new forms of subjectivity. Applied to
literary texts, the concept of becoming can therefore serve as a valuable tool for an animal-centered literary analysis.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the ruptures of human subjectivity through acts of becoming become particularly visible within the works of Kafka. Strongly rejecting the idea of literary archetypes, their approach, which focuses on points of rupture and heterogeneity, differs from traditional allegorical interpretations of Kafka’s literary animals. Applying the concept of becoming to this context, Kafka’s literary animals “correspond solely to new levels, zones of liberated intensities where contents free themselves from their forms as well as from their expressions, from the signifier that formalized them” (KTML, 13). Therefore, the line between humans and animals in literature as symbolic projection disappears through the formation of different blocks of becoming, giving rise to new meanings that emerge from deterritorialized spaces.

The whistling of Josephine, the singing mouse in “Josephine the Singer, or the Mice Folk”, for example, illustrates this process of becoming. Through her whistling, Josephine destabilizes the meaning of music, and, as Deleuze and Guattari note, “in the becoming-mouse, it is a whistling that pulls the music and the meaning from the word” (KTML, 13). Additionally, Red Peter, the narrating ape in “A Report to an Academy”, exemplifies instances of deterritorialization and becoming. When he is captured, for example, he is deterritorialized by humans. However, he engages in different forms of becoming, using human language in the body of an ape to deterritorialize language as a feature of human identity. In this context, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “the deterritorialized animal force precipitates and intensifies the deterritorialization of the deterritorializing human force” (KTML, 14). Because Red Peter enters different zones of intensities, for example when he observes his human captors from his cage, or when he
adopts human forms of behaviour to get out of the cage, he places notions of human and animal identity in different contexts, which ultimately blurs anthropological lines of thought.

1.2 Animals in Literature

Derrida’s emphasis on following animals in philosophical and poetic thinking points to the contribution of animal-centred approaches to new conceptions of the relationships between species. Deleuze and Guattari make a similar point and turn to traces of animality in literary texts. Scholars of literary animal studies face the challenge of identifying and analyzing these traces without falling into the trap of viewing animals only as metaphors, and thus relating them back to humanist notions of identity while ignoring additional aspects of animality. The study of literature from an animal-centered perspective takes “the animal” seriously by raising essential questions: What role does literature and literary criticism play in the context of the discourse on the human/animal relationship? How is an animal “present” in the text? How does this textual presence of animals contribute to this discourse?

Animals and themes of animality, such as suffering and subjection, occupy an important place in literatures of various eras.³ Literary texts in which animality plays a prominent role, however, can have other functions as well. It is true that literature can reinforce the traditional hierarchy of the binary opposition between Human and Animal. Texts represent animals through writing, which is, as a tool of language, in itself a form

³See, for example, Anna Barcz’ concept of vulnerability in Animal Narratives and Culture or Laura Brown’s analysis of representations of the human/animal relationship in literature through the lens of historical events in Homeless Dogs & Melancholy Apes: Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination.
of representation to which only humans have access. Moreover, the capacity of language has been one of the key arguments for human exceptionalism. How to escape this “prison house of language” (Jameson) is a central question with regard to the representation of animals in literature. Experimenting with form is one way to show how language structures human perceptions of the relationship between species. Literature can open up important spaces for critical reflection on the identity of and the relationship between species not only by experimenting with language, but also by creating encounters between species, drawing on the power of the imagination. The works of literary scholars who investigate aspects of animality have brought forward important ways of reflecting on the human/animal relationship within the context of literature.

In their discussion of perspectives on animal issues in fiction, Kenneth Shapiro and Marion W. Copeland identify three different literary approaches. The first critiques diminishing and demeaning literary representations of animals and argues that literature has often been used to promote notions of human exceptionalism and reduce animals to inferior others. This approach often adopts the idea that animals have similar capabilities to humans, which aligns with Calarco’s definition of identity-based thinking.

The second form of literary criticism Shapiro and Copeland describe examines the modes of representation of “the animal ‘in itself’, both as an experiencing individual and as a species-typical way of living in the world” (3). Whereas the first approach focuses on deconstructing elements that shape representations of the human/animal divide, this perspective aims to analyze aspects of difference. Authors and thinkers of this tradition do not assign symbolic meaning to animals. Rather, their works question human-centred symbolism and consider animals as “narrators and protagonists reappropriating their animality amid an anthropocentric universe” (Norris, 1). This idea of animality as a part
of the creative writing process corresponds with Derrida’s “autobiographical animal” that points to the construction of the self in relation to one’s own animality. Furthermore, this illustrates that texts can address questions of animality without necessarily placing animals at the centre.

In addition, Shapiro and Copeland identify a third approach that embeds animals within the larger social context of “the universe of possible relationships — from the animal as forgotten resource for a consumer [...] to the animal as more or less equal partner in a relationship” (3). Thus, the multiple ways authors include aspects of animality in their writing can also contribute to ethical discussions about the status of animals outside the world of text. Moreover, animals as “figural and cultural representations”, “literary entities” (Parry, 2), “nonhuman tellers” (Herman, 1), or “makers” of texts (Moe, 11) can challenge readers to rethink and reflect on their assumptions about notions of the identity of animals. Ultimately, animals in texts can contribute not only to the critique of human-centered perspectives, but also to an ethical discourse about the material realities of nonhuman beings.

The general focal point of literary animal studies is to uncover this potential of art to create new forms of thinking about the human/animal relationship. Literary animal studies foster modes of interpretation which highlight the function of animals with respect to their “literariness” (McHugh, 490) in texts of various literary genres in order to reconceptualize the human/animal relationship as well as the literary canon. For Derrida, “poets and prophets” (14) provide such a “thinking concerning the animal [la pensée de l’animal]” (7; italics in the original), which “derives from poetry” (7). In this context, he combines the Greek words zōion (living being) and poiesis (to make) to produce the
neologism zoopoetics, referencing specifically Kafka’s literary animals, but without offering any additional explanation.

Today, zoopoetics is a key term within literary animal studies used to describe approaches that focus on the relation between texts and animals. While literary animal studies treat the “animal-question” more broadly, for example, by referring back to the material reality of and the scientific knowledge about animals, zoopoetics bring to the fore the specificities of literary language and form. More specifically, zoopoetic thinking emerges at sites of resistance where animals refuse to be contained by systems of human representation. Consequently, zoopoetic readings also entail a self-critical reflection of their own limitations and a strong critique of the anthropocentric foundations of literary theory in general.

In their introduction to What Is Zoopoetics? – Texts, Bodies, Entanglement, Kári Driscoll and Eva Hoffmann identify “the entanglements of bodies and text”, and “the intersection of ‘poetic thinking’ and ‘animal thinking’ [Derrida]” (3) as the main characteristics of zoopoetics. Because this complex relationship can be viewed from various angles, the term zoopoetics has multiple meanings. Anne Simon’s answers to the question “What is Zoopoetics?” (“Qu’est-ce que la Zoopoétique?”, interview with Nadia Taïbi) provide an excellent overview of the key elements of zoopoetics. Similar to Norris, Simon first points out that “the animal” in literature has been largely interpreted as some kind of spokesperson (“en quelque sorte un porte-voix”, 116) for the human. These traditional interpretations confirm the central role of humans as powerful creators of symbols by assigning only symbolic meanings to literary animals. By highlighting aspects of representation, form, rhetoric, and style in relation to literary animals, zoopoetics offers a perspective which is attentive to animal otherness as well as to their similarities
with humans. For Simon, the potential of literature for investigating questions of animality and bringing animals to the forefront lies in the poetic use of language. She notes that literature can free animals from their position as mute creatures (“[…] la littérature peut donner à entendre ces êtres réputés muets que sont les animaux”, 120).

Similarly, Aaron M. Moe emphasizes how animals serve as agents in lyrical texts. In *Zoo poetics, Animals and the Making of Poetry*, he assigns animals an active role in the context of poetry and defines *zoo poetics* as “the process of discovering innovative breakthroughs in form through an attentiveness to another species’ bodily poiesis” (10). Moe’s focus is the way animals, and their gestures, in particular, are part of the creative process of poets, highlighting aspects of literary form. To this end, he identifies two focal points of *zoo poetics*:

First, zoo poetics focuses on the process by which animals are makers. They make texts. They gesture. They vocalize. […] The second focus of zoo poetics emerges out of the first. It exposes how the gestures of animals and the vocalizations embedded in those gestures have shaped the making of human poetry. (11)

Moe’s *zoo poetic* approach strongly emphasizes the contribution of animals and their “bodily poiesis” to poetry, which he further defines as a literary genre that depends primarily on gestures. His approach thus grants animals consciousness and intentionality. However, in the context of his *zoo poetic* literary analysis, this agency remains a form of textual animal agency:

Concerning human poiesis, I contend that the poets explored here do not project agency upon the animals that they engaged. Rather, the experience of engaging
an animal in all of his or her agency provokes new ways-of-being in language and in relationship to the given animal — new ways of gesturing. (21-22)

Thus, the engagement with animals as agents inspires the writer to integrate forms of this agency, such as gestures, into his or her work, which further shapes the literary text. The animal outside the world of text remains in the background.

Simon, however, notes that literature can reach back to the animal outside the text by raising the complex question of empathy. She argues that it is essential to recover this aspect of animality in literary texts (”[…] Le meilleur moyen de restituer les modes d’être animaux pour la littérature n’est donc pas d’essayer de plaquer des représentations […] mais d’évoquer comment l’animal échappe à l’human. On retrouve la question complexe de l’empathie: comment faire pour se mettre dans la peau d’un autre?” 121). Her argument is that literature can evoke how animals escape human perspectives while also inviting the readers to place themselves in the ‘skin’ of the animal other. In contrast to Derrida, Simon is interested not only in shared differences but also similarities (”Je pense au contraire qu’il est intéressant de rendre compte de l’altérité et de la proximité conjointes des animaux,” 116).

While Moe limits the role of literary animals to poetry, Simon views animal-centered thinking in a larger context and explains that zoopoetics can reconfigure the history of literary canons. 4 New critical readings of Kafka’s bestiary illustrate this potential

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4 In addition, it is important to note that zoopoetic approaches form a rather new field, which has often been under critique for shifting its focus to aspects seen as less relevant. Simon, for example, mentions the resistance she had to face as a literary animal studies scholar. The fact that she focused on a prestigious author, such as Marcel Proust, helped her justify the importance of zoopoetic approaches in literary studies. Proust, she explains, served as a Trojan horse
of zoopoetic thinking. In classical scholarship on Kafka, animals are primarily interpreted as symbols or masks which point to aspects outside the text. In Franz Kafka. An Interpretation of his Works (1967), Herbert Tauber, for example, links animals in Kafka’s works to the author’s biography. According to Tauber, Kafka’s literary animals symbolize a human “ego robbed of power” (218). In Die Funktion der Tierfiguren im Werke Franz Kafkas (1969), Karl-Heinz Fingerhut analyzes animals as surfaces for the projection of Kafka’s inner state. While such readings contribute important perspectives to the theoretical discussion of canonical texts, they risk reconfirming the anthropocentric foundation of the literary canons in question. In the course of the “animal turn” (Ritvo) in the humanities and social sciences, there has been an increasing number of new publications by literary scholars on non-human beings in Kafka’s literary universe. In contrast to human-centred pre-animal turn readings, these interpretations place Kafka within “a new generation of animal poets” (Driscoll, 2015, 214) at the turn of the century who pay attention to animals outside the symbolic realm.

In the Anglophone context, for example, Kafka’s Creatures: Animals Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings, published by Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri, is an important collection of texts which aims to “make evident the manner in which Kafka’s writing […] facilitates reflection about human and animal nature, challenging us to look again, and to reconsider our all too often unquestioned assumptions about human uniqueness, superiority, and righteousness” (14). This collection provides detailed readings of different aspects of animality in Kafka’s texts, such as “degrees of hybridity” or “creational consciousness” (see Margot Norris’ article: “Kafka’s Hybrids: Thinking Animals and because the work on the literary animals of prominent authors partly helped the field of zoopoetics gain more recognition. This further paved the way for new discoveries of other, or forgotten, literary animals.
Mirrored Humans”). In Kafka’s Nonhuman Form: Troubling the Boundaries of the Kafkaesque, Ted Geier focuses on questions of form and animality and analyzes how “Kafka anticipated Animal Studies’ critiques of anthropocentrism but also worked through this concept in attempts to express the nonhuman despite human forms of expression and thought” (1). In Kafkas Tiere: Fährten, Bahnen und Wege der Sprache, Jochen Ther mann, explores the role of animals in the context of the linguistic functions at the core of the transgressions of the human/animal divide in Kafka’s writing. In addition, the dissertations of Kari Driscoll (Toward a Poetics of Animality: Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Pirandello, Kafka), and Eva Hofmann (Queer Kinships and Curious Creatures. Animal Poetics in Literary Modernism) as well as their most recent publication What is Zoopoetics? Texts, Bodies, Entanglement represent important contributions to the discourse on Kafka’s animals.

In the German context, the collection of articles, published by Harald Neumeyer and Wilko Steffens and presented in the context of a conference titled “Kafkas Tiere” (Kafka’s animals) in Erlangen (Germany) in 2014, further illustrates the emergence of new perspectives on Kafka with regard to literary animal studies in Germany. This collection entails detailed studies of the role of animality in Kafka’s texts from multiple theoretical angles, such as evolutionary theory, cognitive psychology, or communication theory. Joela Jacobs, for example, provides a reading of “Investigations of a Dog” which foregrounds how the canine perspective in this story addresses linguistic-philosophical as well as epistemological issues. Helene Dick’s contribution to the collection focuses on Derrida’s deconstructionism and Agamben’s concept of the anthropological machine as modes to interpret “A Report to an Academy”. My literary analysis of four of Kafka’s short stories proposed in this thesis contributes to this zoocentric branch of Kafka studies.
In each of the stories analyzed in this thesis, Kafka portrays different notions of species identity. His literary animals place fixed notions of what it means to be part of a species under scrutiny. The hybrid creature at the centre of “A Crossbreed”, for example, not only blurs the line between different kinds of animals (lamb, kitten, or dog), but also between humans and animals (“Had this cat, along with the soul of the lamb, the ambitions of a human being?” 427). The dog in “Investigations of a Dog” reflects on “dogdom” and his place within the canine community, raising philosophical questions of identity (“For what is there actually except our own species?”). Similarly, Red Peter in “A Report to an Academy” deconstructs fixed notions of identity in his report. As a “student of humankind” (256) and an ape with human capacities, such as language, Red Peter reflects on what it means to be human, animal, or in-between these species. Furthermore, the narrator’s depiction of the mice folk and Josephine’s unique role in this community in “Josephine, the Singer or the Mouse Folk” contributes to fluid notions of identity.

My analysis aims to show that it matters to which species the literary animals in Kafka’s writing belong, and that such an animal-focused approach contributes to a broad understanding of the complexities with regard to the various facets of the human/animal relationship. I argue that Kafka’s specific way of creating literary animals allows him to play with content, language, and form, and, in the end, to destabilize the hierarchy of Human and Animal. My reading will evaluate where Kafka’s literary animals participate in the anthropocentric ideology of the human/animal divide and where they resist or deconstruct it. I will show how Kafka challenges human exceptionalism and questions anthropocentric definitions of human versus animal identity by creating narrators who

examine various forms of identity. To this end, I will discuss three elements in my literary analysis, which are at the core of the discourse on the human/animal divide: the meaning of visual encounters between species, the role of language as a key feature of human exceptionalism, and the function of the body in the context of identity formation.

My literary analysis starts with aspects of looking because humans primarily perceive the world visually, which has shaped their notion of animality in important ways. Moving from the gaze to questions about language will then allow me to discuss the different modes of expression and representation that occur in the context of the visual encounters discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike language, the body has been less prioritized in the anthropocentric discussion of species identity because as a shared feature of all creatures, the body blurs the dividing line between Human and Animal rather than enforcing it. I will therefore end with a discussion of corporeality as a feature of indistinction as well as difference, and I will analyze the various kinds of creaturely bodies depicted in the stories under consideration. Each chapter will examine how literature can provide an imaginary experience of what it is like to be an other.
2. Gaze

In *About Looking*, John Berger notes that “animals first entered the imagination as messengers and promises” (4). He gives the example of cattle that, before being domesticated, were believed to possess magical powers. Berger further explains that the history of the human/animal relationship is marked by a polarity with animals being “subjected and worshipped, bred and sacrificed” (7). If Berger focuses on the act of looking to discuss the relationship between animals and humans, it is in part because visual encounters between humans and animals play an important role in the discourse on animals. Sight is, after all, the way in which humans primarily perceive the world. Interpretations of these visual encounters are related to broader historical discourses, and, as Philip Armstrong points out, “the human experience of discomfiture before the gaze of other animals has a long genealogy” (187).

For centuries people believed that eyes, including those of non-human beings, could develop certain magical powers enabling them to physically control objects (Armstrong). Some animals occupied a position of power due to their threatening and powerful eyes, which enabled them to turn humans into the objects of their gaze; wolves for example were ascribed a “preternatural ocular power” (180). Scientific theories of vision emerged from the Enlightenment focus on empirical evidence, which resulted in a shift in the understanding of the animal gaze. As Armstrong notes, this led to “the removal of visual agency from nonhuman animals and its sole investiture in the human mind, which alone possessed the capacity to apprehend optical geometry” (182). Once a mysterious feature, an animal’s eyes instead became an object of science. The focus shifted from superstitious beliefs about animals to scientific studies of animal anatomy. Consequently, the animal gaze lost its power, and humans placed themselves over
animals on the grounds of their unique capacities. Berger describes a similar loss of power in the animal gaze, which fostered the “marginalization of animals” (15), but for different reasons, such as the dualist philosophy of René Descartes in the 17th century. Relying on the laws of mechanics and physics, Descartes postulated that animals lacked a soul and so were closer to machines than living beings with visual powers (see Hatfield, 417).

Cartesian dualism further cemented the inferior status of animals as objects. Derrida makes a similar argument when he notes that philosophers, such as Descartes, “have taken no account of the fact that what they call ‘animal’ could look at them, and address them from down there, from a wholly other origin” (13). Aspects of looking reveal important elements of the dynamics between humans and animals, and as Weil notes: “To consider that animals look and look at us is to imagine that animals think (about us), which changes what it means to be human” (28). Similarly, Marcus Bullock contextualizes this understanding of the animal gaze and refers to two different forms of looking: observing animals as “assemblages of data” (105) and seeing them in the sense of “‘knowing’ all that the faculty of the sight tells us about what actually meets the eye” (105). This second form of seeing leads us to “go to war with our faculties to keep from seeing more than mere observation permits” (105). Visual encounters in which humans become and see themselves as the object of the animal gaze are crucial for animal-centered thinking. For Berger “man becomes aware of himself returning the look” (5), and for Derrida thinking begins with animals gazing at us. This further raises the question of how the animal gaze can de-anthropomorphize human thinking and notions of identity. What are the consequences of this animal gaze that is directed at us as humans?
According to Berger, animals are “both like and unlike” (4) humans and they do not adapt their gaze when encountering humans. However, as sentient beings, animals resemble humans, who, therefore, recognize a familiarity in their gaze. This further results in a specific human awareness of being the object of the animal gaze:

The animal scrutinizes him [=man] across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension. [...] The man too is looking across a similar, but not identical, abyss of non-comprehension. And this is so wherever he looks. He is always looking across ignorance and fear. And so, when he is being seen by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him. His recognition of this is what makes the look of the animal familiar. (5)

Under the scrutiny of the animal, man is decentralized and becomes aware of his position as object of the animal’s gaze. This awareness of being looked at by animals instead of looking at them disappeared, Berger argues, when animals became “the objects of our ever-extending knowledge” (16) grounded in scientific theory. In the context of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism, animals were further pushed to the margins; the rising popularity of zoos as sites where animals are reduced to objects of the human gaze represents one example of this process of marginalization. Berger concludes that no animal, including domestic animals, can escape this human objectifying gaze and that “the fact that they can observe us has lost all significance” (14). However, critics of Berger’s conclusion point out that “the second half of the twentieth century saw [...] a resurgence in the desire for connection with ‘nature’, and especially with animals”, and that “the gaze that proves most unsettling in postmodernity often derives from the very animals he [Berger] considered incapable of possessing one…” (Armstrong, 190), namely domestic animals. Derrida’s starting point for reflection is, for example, the gaze of his cat.
In contrast to Berger, Derrida views the animal gaze not only as an important means for understanding how man constructed his identity through the alterity of animals, but also as a site of potential deconstruction of the human/animal binary by “complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply” (29). Visual encounters between humans and animals, therefore, have the potential to complicate the boundaries of the human/animal divide. In other words, the animal gaze in the contemporary world has not been completely stripped of its power as Berger claims. For Derrida, the gaze of the animal directed at us opens up a space that allows for a moment of exchange, granting animals subjectivity and the power to look. This further makes room for a variety of responses in the form of different kinds of abilities and vulnerabilities, which raises important questions about the human/animal relationship. For example, how do animals respond when they direct their gaze at humans? What capabilities do they have in this regard? What are the underlying power dynamics and the consequences of this gaze?

Literature has the potential to create encounters with animals by drawing on the imagination, revealing different capabilities — different forms of animal responsiveness, which can further blur the boundaries set by human-centered thought. In light of Kafka’s texts, we might ask: How does the author integrate these aspects of looking into his writing? Which forms of visual encounters exist in his texts? What kinds of responses are given by his literary animals? My analysis will consider various aspects of looking that rupture fixed notions of species indentity, often playing an integral part in each narrator’s reflection and appearing in all of the four stories under consideration.
In the context of the animal gaze, it is important to note first that in all four of Kafka’s stories stages are sites of entertainment and performance where one becomes the centre of attention under the gaze of an other. In “A Crossbreed”, the kitten-lamb takes some kind of stage during the “visiting hour” on Sunday mornings, becoming “a great source of entertainment” (426). In “A Report to an Academy”, the reader can imagine Red Peter speaking to his audience from a podium on a stage. In addition, Red Peter himself describes scenes of performing animals he has observed in variety theatres. Similarly, the dog narrator in “Investigations of a Dog” observes other dogs that seem to dance on a stage, describing them as “seven great musical artists” (281). And, of course, there is the singing mouse Josephine in “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk”, whom the reader can imagine performing on a stage, enjoying everyone’s attention. However, this gaze in the context of performance and entertainment is one-sided as it does not require an exchange. Instead, it is a visual encounter characterized by an observing public that does not always include humans. In my literary analysis, I will evaluate how these instances of performance become self-critical acts, which reveal different facets of the human/animal relationship. Additionally, I will draw on Berger’s reflections about domestication and animals as “co-opted” and “transformed into spectacle” (15-16) to analyze the role of performance in regard to questions about this kind of gaze.

Secondly, some of Kafka’s literary animals engage in a more intimate gaze as a form of exchange. The kitten-lamb in “A Crossbreed” looks into the eyes of the human narrator, who responds with a nod of his head as an attempt at communication, which creates a sense of intimacy. In addition, the kitten-lamb engages in a visual encounter with other animals, and although the animals in this scene look into each other’s eyes, this gaze does not create a “scene of recognition”, but an acceptance of “their reciprocal
existence as divine fact” (426). Another scene of alienation rather than intimacy takes place at the end of “A Report to an Academy” when Red Peter explains that he is unable to look into the chimpanzee’s eyes because she has “the insane look of the bewildered half-broken” (259). Similarly, the dog-narrator in “Investigations of a Dog” is irritated by the gaze of other dogs because it causes him to feel “helpless embarrassment and fear” (278). In “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk”, moments of intimacy are created through Josephine’s music. However, her audience “respectfully makes room for her” when she measures them “with cold eyes” (375), which illustrates the general power of the gaze, whether it is a one-sided or part of a more intimate kind of looking. In my comparison of these scenes, I will draw on Derrida’s notion of pretense and explain how the responses of Kafka’s literary animals to these visual encounters point to different notions of recognition and understanding of the other.

The different kinds of looking described above offer important points of departure for reflecting on the human/animal relationship. Josephine, for example, uses her gaze instead of language as a way to claim authority over the other mice, which is an integral part of her identity. Like the dog, she is a member of the mouse community while at the same time taking on an isolated position at the margins of this community. She establishes an identity that is fluid and therefore questions anthropocentric assumptions about animal identity. I argue that the scenes of visual encounters in Kafka’s stories show the powerful role of the gaze with regard to identity formation as it can create proximity as well as distance.

The literary animals in the stories all belong to different species, and their capabilities to react to the observing gaze of their audience in the context of entertainment and performance vary. Thus, species affiliation matters and has different
effects in each story, which illustrates once more the functions of these textual animals as something other than mere symbols — as creatures who are worthy of the reader’s attention in and of themselves. Emphasizing the multiplicity of species while at the same time acknowledging animals as individual creatures leads to a broad conception of animal subjectivity that makes room for decentered notions of identity.

The impossibility of placing the animal in “A Crossbreed” within a single species has important implications for the human/animal relationship depicted in this story. The human narrator portrays the animal he inherited from his father as a hybrid creature with traits of a lamb, a kitten, and a dog. Moreover, he describes the animal in different settings, which further emphasizes its hybrid nature. Firstly, it is a domestic animal that is “lying on the window still in the sun” (426) or jumping on an armchair beside its owner to “plant its front legs on my [his] shoulder” (427). Secondly, these descriptions in the context of the house are complemented by outdoor scenes: “… out in the meadow it rushes about like mad and is scarcely to be caught. […] On moonlight nights its favorite promenade is along the eaves. […] Beside the hen coop it can lie for hours in ambush, but it has never yet seized an opportunity for murder” (426). Lastly, the crossbreed is presented in the context of entertainment: “Naturally it is a great source of entertainment for children. Sunday morning is the visiting hour. I sit with the little beast on my knees, and the children of the whole neighborhood stand around me” (426). Thus, this creature not only belongs to more than one species, it is also described as a domestic, wild, and entertainment animal, which makes it the ultimate “rebel” against any one concept (“rebelle à tout concept” Derrida, 9). Its hybridity has different effects on the humans who observe it. The narrator tries to establish some form of communication with the crossbreed, the children curiously ask questions about it, and the readers outside the
world of the story are confronted with a creature who challenges fixed notions of
animality.

The one-sided zoological gaze of the children and their questions during the
“visiting hour” expose the human reliance on markers of the dividing line between
species, such as origin, ownership, or name:

Then the strangest questions are asked, which no human being could answer:
Why there is only one such animal, why I rather than anybody else should own it,
whether there was ever an animal like it before and what would happen if it died,
whether it feels lonely, why it has no children, what it is called, etc. (426)

The visitors’ questions illustrate the anger and confusion caused by the identity of the
crossbreed, which resists human ideas of what it means to be an animal. The narrator
finds these inquiries bizarre and is rather indifferent to them (“I never trouble to answer,
but confine myself without further explanation to exhibiting my possession”, 426). This
scene of confusion stages human-centred concepts that place all species within fixed
hierarchical structures, such as clear lines of affiliation, or human ownership of animals.
These reactions to the crossbreed’s “performance” show how fluid notions of animal
identity can rupture human concepts of animality.

Red Peter, the narrator in “A Report to an Academy” further complicates
anthropocentric conceptions of animal identity. As a hybrid animal figure, he moves in-
between species. Similar to the kitten-lamb, he has features and capabilities of two
species, namely ape and human. Once an ape on the Gold Coast, he has learned to
master human language and behavior in order to escape captivity. Still in the body of an
ape, a species that traditionally challenges human exceptionalism due to its kinship with
humans, but expressing himself eloquently in the human language, he speaks about his life to a group of academy members. His experiences during his life among animals as well as humans enable him to take on different positions in the context of the gaze. Even if, as Kari Weil notes, these experiences as an animal were no longer available to Red Peter once he entered the world of humans through language (14), they made him aware of the multiple facets of the visual encounters between humans and animals. His fluid identity as ape-man allows him to navigate between the world of men and the world of animals, transgressing these boundaries.

Red Peter becomes the object of the human gaze in multiple ways. For example, he recalls the moments in captivity when he was exposed to the look of his captors in a cage, similar to a zoo-animal. In addition, the audience looks at him while he delivers his speech. Outside of the text, the gaze of the readers is directed at Red Peter as the literary animal figure at the core of the story. However, he subverts his object status by returning the human gaze in the story. This underlying power dynamic of the visual encounters throughout the story, combined with the ape-man’s hybrid identity, provides a framework for critiquing oppositional binaries between species. In contrast to the crossbreed, Red Peter takes on an active role and delivers a speech which uses satire to resist the gaze of an observing public, and thus undoes the presumed traditional role of trained animals as displayed objects and sources of entertainment. During his speech, which is characterized by reason and logic, Red Peter appears in control of the direction of the audience’s gaze, resisting the hierarchy between Human and Animal because he does not comply with the presupposed role of the trained animal as source of entertainment. While the marginalized animals in this hierarchy, such as zoo animals, look “sideways” or “scan mechanically” (Berger, 28), Red Peter looks back and returns the
human gaze. The speech itself, as the performance of a trained animal figure, stages and uncovers the flaws of human exceptionalism.

In his speech, Red Peter mentions the role of apes as popular attractions in zoos, theatres, or other sites of entertainment, echoing Berger’s arguments about the marginalization of animals. He notes that as a caged animal he faced two options: he could either become an attraction in zoological gardens, which Berger describes as “sites of enforced marginalization” (26) or perform on variety stages. Red Peter chooses the stage instead of the zoo because “the Zoological Gardens means only a new cage; once there, you are done for” (258). He understands the human concept of the zoo in the Western industrialized world and its purpose “to offer visitors the opportunity of looking at animals”, which “have been immunized to encounter” (Berger, 28). As “artistic performer” (257) and public speaker, who is able to share his experiences as ape-man with humans in the form of language, he forces his audience as well as the readers to engage in new forms of looking at and, more importantly, of being looked at by an animal.

To this end, he constantly blurs the lines drawn by human exceptionalism. In his description of human trapeze artists, for example, he reverses the role of humans watching animals perform:

In variety theatres I have often watched, before my turn came on, a couple of acrobats performing on trapezes high in the roof. They swung themselves, they rocked to and fro, they sprang into the air, they floated into each other’s arms, one hung by the hair from the teeth of the other. ‘And that too is human freedom,’ I thought, ‘self-controlled movement.’ What a mockery of holy Mother
Nature! Were the apes to see such a spectacle, no theatre walls could stand the shock of their laughter. (253)

This example of the trapeze artists allows Red Peter to “translate” his other-than-human concept of freedom for his human audience. The first part of his depiction of the acrobats does not include any features of traditional human exceptionalism, such as reason or language. Instead, Red Peter describes the acrobats through the lens of a zoological gaze. This description focuses on their bodies, and not on classical distinctive human features, such as the mind. Using the context of the spectacle, Red Peter counters the zoological gaze and turns humans into the objects of his hybrid gaze. In addition, this gaze, combined with the idea of apes observing the human acrobats, points to the dividing line between Man and Animal and detects the idea of freedom as “self-controlled movement” as an element of human exceptionalism. By adding the animals’ perspective and by putting the concept of human freedom into the context of entertainment, Red Peter deconstructs and makes fun of this divide. From the vantage point of apes, he explains, the idea of human freedom represented by these acrobats seems ridiculous. If apes were granted the position of the observer, he argues, humans would serve as a source of entertainment because freedom, as he explains multiple times, has a different meaning in simian terms.

While the scenes of performing animals in “The Crossbreed” and “A Report to an Academy” entail instances of visual encounters between humans and animals, the human gaze is not present in the narratives of the literary animals in “Investigations of a Dog” and “Josephine, the Singer or the Mouse Folk”. Despite their status as outsiders, similar to Red Peter and the kitten-lamb, the world of the narrating dog and Josephine revolves around their own species. Although these animals are the object of the gaze of the
reader, humans remain absent inside the world of the story, which opens the text up for additional possibilities to critique fixed human concepts of what it means to be part of a certain species. In her reading of “Investigations of a Dog”, Joela Jacobs (2015) highlights this aspect of the absence of humans in the text, explaining that the lack of human referent in the narrator’s canine world is often interpreted as a limited conception of the world on the part of the dog. Instead of filling in this presumed gap with anthropological explanations of the dog’s limitations, Jacobs proposes a “canidocentric perspective” (“canidozentrische Perspective’, 298) that displaces the human readers. In this framework, she concludes, humans are unable to make sense of the dog’s world due to their self-evident anthropocentric worldview. Consequently, this decentering function of the dog also changes the dynamic of the observing gaze. Instead of observing dogs from a human perspective, the readers look at them through the eyes of the dog-narrator, which further destabilizes the text.

Similar to Red Peter, the dog-narrator reflects on his life and takes on the position of the observer several times. Although he belongs to one single species, his identity oscillates between different oppositions. He is a member of the dog community, but at the same time he strongly holds the position of an individual and marginalized subject apart from his own species. On the one hand, he describes himself as a member of “the canine community, sharing in all its preoccupations, a dog among dogs” (278). On the other hand, he notes that he is “so very different from the rest of [his] species” (279). He speaks of “[his] distant isolation” but explains that he has not “lost sight of [his] people” (278). Therefore, he exposes a divide between himself and the rest of the canine community. From this dual position he observes the world around him and reflects on what it means to be a dog.
Moreover, the dog belongs to a species that humans traditionally keep as pets, which, according to Berger, represents a “modern innovation” (14). In this context, Berger further argues, “the pet is either sterilised or sexually isolated, extremely limited in its exercise, deprived of almost all other animal contact, and fed with artificial foods” (14). Although humans generally play only a marginalized if any role at all for the dog in Kafka’s story and the sphere of the human household is not part of his descriptions, his inner conflict and his desire to get to the bottom of things (e.g.: the origin of food) can be viewed as a reaction to this status of the domesticated animal. Furthermore, as Jacobs points out, the dog stages human capacities, such as reasoning, or narrating, and raises language-philosophical as well as epistemological questions, which challenges the concept of human superiority and portrays humans as human animals⁶ (see Jacobs, 2015, 295/296). In addition to these skills, the dog performs an observing scientific gaze that is, from an anthropocentric point of view, reserved for humans, which further questions the hierarchy of the human/animal relationship.

This aspect becomes evident when the dog observes other members of his species in the context of spectacle. Although he does not address the function of animals as sources of entertainment as directly as Red Peter does, he draws a nuanced picture of different kinds of dog behavior and responses to an observing gaze. In the description of his encounter with “seven great musical artists” (313), a group of dogs engaging in a musical performance, as a very young dog, he reflects on the behavior of dogs as performing animals. Recalling the memory of this encounter, he describes the unusual behavior of these dogs:

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⁶This term is used to decenter the role of humans and to place them on the same spectrum as non-human animals.
For how were they conducting themselves? Because of all the music I had not noticed it before, but they had flung away all shame, the wretched creatures were doing the very thing which is both most ridiculous and indecent in our eyes; they were walking on their hind legs. Fie on them! They were uncovering their nakedness, blatantly making a show of their nakedness: they were doing that as though it were a meritorious act, and when, obeying their better instincts for a moment, they happened to let their front paws fall, they were literally appalled as if at an error, as if Nature were an error, hastily raised their legs again, and their eyes seemed to be begging for forgiveness for having been forced to cease momentarily from their abomination. Was the world standing on its head? Where could I be? What could have happened? (283-284)

This scene illustrates important aspects of the narrator’s definition of dogdom, which he establishes in opposition to the behavior of the performing dogs. He is terribly shocked by the nakedness of the seven dogs, who imitate human behavior, and the fact that they do not seem to feel ashamed. The animal-narrator reframes the human concepts of nudity and shame. He perceives the dogs as naked because they are lifting their front paws from the ground. To him, as well as to other dogs (“in our eyes”), walking on two legs is “ridiculous and indecent”, and breaks with the rules of natural canine instincts. Drawing on Derrida’s reflections on “the list of ‘what is proper to man’” (5), this scene illustrates how the dog-narrator defines what is proper to the canine race. The idea of nakedness within this conception of dogdom conflicts with the traditional role of the animal within anthropocentric thought, described by Derrida, as a being who is not aware of being naked:

The animal, therefore, is not naked because it is naked. It doesn’t feel its own nudity. There is no nudity ‘in nature’. There is only the sentiment, the affect, the
(conscious or unconscious) experience of existing in nakedness. Because it is naked, without existing in nakedness, the animal neither feels nor sees itself naked. And therefore it isn’t naked. At least that is thought. (5)

Breaking with this conception of nudity related to culture rather than nature, the dog-narrator formulates his own concept of “canine nakedness”. Although the human behavior of walking upright is attributed to the seven dogs at first, the narrator’s outrage and criticism ruptures with this anthropocentrism. His reconceptualization of nudity illustrates that the dog-narrator does not function as an anthropomorphic figure in this context, because, in contrast to the human conception of nudity, his definition of this concept is not related to clothing. Instead, canine nudity refers to posture.

The scene shows how the dog’s perspective opens up multiple possibilities to critique human exceptionalism. On the one hand, it could be argued that he reproduces and performs this ideology in the form of a canine exceptionalism, applying a similar vocabulary to set himself apart from the musical dogs. On the other hand, given the dog’s reaction to this encounter, the scene stages the human ideology of the observed animal through the lens of the dog’s conception of the world. From this perspective, the dog’s performance of human exceptionalism possibly represents a way to reveal its problems.

Josephine, the performing mouse in “Josephine, the Singer or the Mouse Folk”, takes on a position which is similar to the dog. Even though she lives within the mouse community, the narrating mouse describes her as different, as setting herself apart from the other mice with her unusual musical performances. The narrator defines Josephine’s piping as her distinctive feature and a form of art while simultaneously diminishing her special status as singer:
After all, it is only a kind of piping that she produces. If you post yourself quite far away from her and listen, or, still better, put your judgment to the test, whenever she happens to be singing along with others, by trying to identify her voice, you will undoubtedly distinguish nothing but a quite ordinary piping tone, which at most differs a little from the others through being delicate or weak. Yet if you sit down before her, it is not merely a piping; to comprehend her art it is necessary not only to hear but to see her. Even if hers were only our usual workaday piping, there is first of all this peculiarity to consider, that here is someone making a ceremonial performance out of doing the usual thing. (361)

Since music plays a prominent role in this story, visual encounters always contain auditive components. The narrator explains that it is crucial to watch Josephine piping, because the tones she produces are not any different from the sounds of other mice. Throughout the story, Josephine is depicted as a performer and the object of the observing gaze of the other mice. However, she does not submit herself to this gaze and wields power over the mouse folk. The reason for this special status remains enigmatic. As the narrator notes, her influence is “the real riddle which needs solving” (361). The readers first and foremost depend on the mediating gaze of the narrating mouse. Similar to the dog in “Investigations”, this narrative perspective, together with the absence of a human gaze, challenges human concepts. In the case of Josephine, it is the performance of a kind of music that cannot be fully conceptualized by humans that undoes the supposedly human capacity of singing and therefore questions human superiority. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, “Josephine’s art consists in the fact that, not knowing more than the other mice how to sing, she perhaps enacts a deterritorialization of ‘the usual piping’ and liberates it from ‘the cares of daily life.’ In short, sound doesn’t show up here as a form of expression, but rather as an unformed material of expression, that will act on the other
The narrator constantly undoes and reframes the meaning of this music. Seen through the lens of the narrating mouse, Josephine, as one of what Berger calls “the animals of the mind” (15), cannot be “co-opted into the family or into the spectacle” (15) because the human idea of singing and performing in front of an audience as a social practice is not simply “projected on to the animal kingdom” (15). Instead, Josephine escapes these categories due to the elusiveness of her art.

The instances of performance in all four stories illustrate how each of these literary animals destabilizes human-centered thinking by offering different responses to an observing gaze. Additionally, all of the main animal characters engage in more intimate visual encounters. As in the case of the observing gaze, each animal responds differently in this context. When the crossbreed and the human narrator look into each other’s eyes, for example, the readers are confronted with a different notion of recognition and understanding than in Red Peter’s visual exchange with a chimpanzee. Josephine’s way of meeting the eyes of other mice is different from the dog’s behavior in the context of such an encounter. Therefore, these more intimate moments of eye contact point to the limits of human concepts by complicating and multiplying them, which further establishes difference in the relationship within and between species.

The most intimate visual exchange between a human and an animal takes places in “A Crossbreed”. Although the descriptions of the kitten-lamb under the gaze of the human narrator dominate the text, the crossbreed’s “wild and flickering” (426) eyes destabilize this observing position. The narrator, fascinated by the crossbreed’s behavior, becomes aware of this animal gaze, which he perceives to be directed at him. The narrator’s shift from the one-sided position of the observer to a more dynamic encounter illustrates how he becomes aware of the crossbreed’s ways of responding:
Sometimes it jumps up on the armchair beside me, plants its front legs on my shoulder, and put its muzzle to my ear. It is as if it were saying something to me, and as a matter of fact it turns its head afterwards and gazes to my face to see the impression its communication has made. And to oblige it I behave as if I had understood and nod. Then it jumps to the floor and dances about with joy. (427)

The narrator finds himself under the gaze of the kitten-lamb. He interprets this gaze as the kitten-lamb’s attempt to communicate with him. Although this scene is described through the eyes of a human narrator, whose way of interpreting what he sees is rooted in anthropocentrism, the narrator’s perspective allows for a reciprocal gaze, because he becomes aware of and acknowledges the kitten-lamb’s gaze directed at him. In addition, he notes that “it [the kitten-lamb] sometimes gazes at [him] with a look of human understanding, challenging [him]” (427). Through its “look of human understanding”, the animal leaves the object position traditionally assigned to non-human beings, and turns the narrator into the subject of its gaze.

From these encounters emerge different meanings of understanding the other. On the one hand, the human-narrator interprets the look of the kitten-lamb as a call for a reaction and behaves “as if” he understands. On the other hand, he projects his concept of understanding onto the kitten-lamb when he describes its “look of human understanding”. Derrida’s reflections on the notion of pretense further shed light onto the different kinds of capabilities that come into play on both sides.
Derrida refutes Lacan’s distinction between human pretense ("tromperie", 127) as a conscious form of deception or lying, and the limited capacity of animals to pretend strategically ("feinte", 127), but not to the same extent as humans:

According to Lacan it is that type of lie, that deceit, and that pretense in the second degree of which the animal would be incapable, whereas the ‘subject of the signifier’, within the human order, would possess such a power and, better still, would emerge as subject, instituting itself and coming to itself as subject by virtue of this power, a second-degree reflexive power, a power that is conscious of deceiving by pretending to pretend. (128)

For Derrida this distinction becomes unstable if one takes into account that any form of pretense already implies an awareness of the other. Given this inclusion of the other in the action of pretending, whether consciously or strategically, “the distinction between lie and pretense becomes precarious” (133). Thus, Derrida deconstructs the presumed distinctive human feature of second-degree reflexive pretense, arguing that “every seemingly simple pretense could be a pretense and every pretense could actually be a simple pretense” (Oliver, 188). Consequently, the human narrator as well as the kitten-lamb perform acts of pretense. The narrator pretends to understand, responding with a nod in order to please the creature in front of him. He takes into account what kind of gesture the kitten-lamb would perceive as a form of recognition. Furthermore, he interprets the animal’s movement that follows his gesture as a joyful dance. However, considering Derrida’s notion of pretense, the kitten-lamb’s “dance” could also be read as pretense, which would further imply a misinterpretation on the part of the narrator. Consequently, the “look of human understanding” points to the hybridity of the crossbreed and its power to complicate the dividing line. As Eva Hoffmann explains in her reading of “A Crossbreed”: 
Rather than a moment of mutual recognition, in which the human establishes itself as a ‘cultural body’; distinctively different from its animal other and which determined the long tradition of animal glances in the history of art and literature […], this hybrid looks at the human with human eyes. […] Rather than recognizing one’s own identity in the animal Other, this hybrid’s gaze exposes an uncanny familiarity and exposes the manifold and complex structures of borders between animal and human […]. (115).

Moreover, this hybridity breaks down the symbolic order with respect to the relationships between animals as well. When visitors bring other animals, such as cats or lambs, to keep his animal company, the narrator observes how these animals look at each other:

But against all their hopes there was no scene of recognition. The animals gazed calmly at each other with their animal eyes, and obviously accepted their reciprocal existence as a divine fact. (426)

The narrator expects the animals to recognize a familiarity in each other’s gaze, but in place of a “scene of recognition”, the animals exchange a form of mutual acceptance of their existence. In this scene, the animals remain passive, whereas the visual encounter between the crossbreed and its owner leads to more active responses, such as specific body movements. Despite the narrator’s attempt to communicate with the kitten-lamb, and to further understand its behaviour, the animal gaze remains “uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret” (Derrida, 8;12) to him. The crossbreed seems to experience the look of the other animals in a similar way because it does not recognize any familiarity in their gaze. Yet there remains a reciprocal acceptance of the other. Neither the narrator nor the other animals fully comprehend each other, demonstrating a similar space of incomprehension. At the same time, the scene of the
animals gazing at each other and the narrator’s description of this encounter in the context of the divine points to a multiplication of differences and the limitations of human access to animal experience. In this regard, the scene can be read as an example of the impermeability of an absolute alterity.

Similar to this scene in “A Crossbreed”, Red Peter describes a moment of exchanging a gaze with another animal in which he seems to recognize the animal within himself:

When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it. (259)

The hybrid status of Red Peter complicates his relationship to the animal other. The fact that he attends cultural events, such as scientific receptions, while at the same time maintaining his sexuality as an ape, illustrates how his identity oscillates between ape and man. He finds himself at the intersections of human and animal, facing the multiple abysses between species, which become particularly visible when he describes the gaze of the chimpanzee. Through this visual encounter, and the awareness of the animal’s suffering, the human in Red Peter engages in a becoming-animal, which is followed by a becoming-human when the animal gaze becomes unbearable. On the one hand, he recognizes his own animality in the eyes of the chimpanzee. Because of his hybrid position, he is able to perceive this gaze differently, and to see an expression of suffering in the eyes of the “bewildered half-broken animal” (259). On the other hand, his ability to respond to this suffering is limited and does not align with the human idea of freedom.
This lack of “responsivity” (Derrida) points to the witnessing of animal suffering and the limitations of human language in this regard (which I will discuss in further depth in the chapter on language). Red Peter’s report can be read as his way of responding to the animal’s suffering within these constraints. In his report, he creates an additional space that is separate from the self of the trained ape-man and that allows him to distance himself not only from his human audience, but also from a collective simian subject because he can draw on and create connections between a variety of different experiences across the human/animal boundary.

While Red Peter cannot endure the chimpanzee’s gaze because he sees what “no one else sees” (259), namely the brokenness in the animal’s eyes as an expression of suffering, the crossbreed seems to meet the eyes of other animals with a neutral look of acceptance. This encounter takes on a less human and more “divine” (426) form, which the narrator describes as mutual acceptance rather than recognition. However, the narrator applies a human vocabulary to the world of these animals. This is also illustrated in his reference to the slaughtering of animals at the end. In this context, the relationship between the narrator and the kitten-lamb can be read as a form of mis-recognition. However, he/she does not name the animal and only refers to it as “animal” or “beast”. This further indicates a power dynamic which is different from the hierarchy of the human/animal binary. Consequently, it can also be argued that the narrator and the crossbreed do not encounter each other from a space of fixed species categories where Man is capable of identifying and naming all creatures. Instead, the narrator wonders if the crossbreed has “the ambitions of a human being” (468). Thus, the kitten-lamb opens up a hybrid space that is marked by difference as well as similarity.
The dog-narrator’s relationship to the dog-community is characterized by a similar opposition between proximity and distance. On the one hand, he feels uncomfortable when he faces other dogs. Like Red Peter who cannot bear the look of the chimpanzee, the dog-narrator feels distant from other animals. On the other hand, his encounter with a “strange hound” (312) at the end of the story entails moments of verbal exchange and singing. These different levels of recognition and “responsivity” to the gaze of the other emphasize difference and challenge species binaries.

Furthermore, the dog-narrator’s ambiguous relationship to other members of his species entails a kind of looking, which is similar to Derrida’s visual encounter with his cat. Although Derrida and his cat belong to two different species, whereas the dog remains within his species, both encounters are characterized by a general malaise. The narrating dog explains that he “sensed some discrepancy, some little maladjustment, causing a slight feeling of discomfort” in regard to his life as “a dog among dogs” (278). This feeling of discomfort, he continues, particularly emerges in the context of visual encounters with other dogs:

[…] the mere look of some fellow dog of my own circle that I was fond of, the mere look of him, as if I had just caught it for the first time, would fill me with helpless embarrassment and fear, even with despair. (278)

For the narrator, the encounter with the animal gaze provokes negative feelings. When he meets the gaze of other dogs, he becomes aware of himself as an individual, facing the gap between himself and the rest of the dog community, which gives rise to further reflections on his identity. This echoes Derrida’s description of the visual encounter with his cat:
[...] at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment. (4)

In both scenarios the animal gaze raises questions of identity, challenging fixed assumptions about what it means to be part of a species. In addition, it is important to note that Kafka’s narrator uses the word “Blick” and not “Anblick”. While the latter indicates that the gaze of the other dogs is directed at the narrator, the former gives room for a second layer of meaning, namely that the narrator looks at his fellow dogs and vice versa. This ambiguity enables Kafka to destabilize language as a human tool for understanding the other and to expose its multiple openings. I argue that Kafka anticipated elements of the function of language, described by Derrida, to break down the object/subject order by revealing the constructedness of such an order. I will elaborate on this point in the next chapter.

In each story, animals take on various positions in the context of the gaze, which shapes their identity by complicating and, at the same time, contesting species lines. This part of my analysis shows that the visual encounters depicted in these stories oscillate between intimacy and alienation, and that, particularly in the case of “A Crossbreed” and “A Report to an Academy”, creaturely hybridity exposes the human/animal divide. The different forms of animal responsiveness in each story place the subject on a fluid spectrum of species identity that combines binary oppositions, such as individuality and collectivity. In the next chapter, I will explore the different forms of communication that are part of the responses offered by the animals in the stories.
3. Language

Humans primarily depend on linguistic systems for communication, and since animals cannot fully participate in processes of meaning making that solely depend on human language, they are defined as “mute” creatures and placed beneath humans in the anthropocentric order. However, defining language as one tool among other forms of meaning making and relating to others decenters the role of humans. In this chapter, I therefore propose a distinction between language as a human-centred tool and communication as a broader category, which includes other-than-human forms of meaning making and relating to other beings. The linguistic turn of the early 20th century and the Sprachkrise constitute important events in this context because they set off new reflections on the relation between language and processes of meaning making. Language was defined as a means to construct reality, mediating human experience, which gave rise to important questions about ways to access the reality of animals, supposedly placed outside of language.

In the 1960s and 1970s, experiments to teach language to animals increased. The research by Sue Savage-Rumbaugh7, for example, challenged the distinction between animals and humans on the grounds of language. In her work with bonobos, she showed that these animals were able to acquire the linguistic and cognitive skills similar to that of human toddlers. This sparked further interest in the cognitive abilities of animals and the possibilities of communication between humans and animals. Research on animal communication fostered new concerns for the non-human across different disciplines. In this regard, the study of meaning-making processes of animals represents an important point of reference. Zoosemiotics analyzes how animals construct and make sense of the

world in relation to others or their environment (Martinelli, 1). Thomas Albert Sebeok, who coined this term in the 1960s, argued that all life forms are semiotic, which counters the anthropocentric argument of language as *differentia specifica*:

The process of message exchanges, or semiosis, is an indispensable characteristic of all terrestrial life forms. It is this capacity for containing, replicating, and expressing messages, of extracting their signification, that, in fact, distinguishes them more from the nonliving - except for human agents, such as computers or robots, that can be programmed to simulate communication — than any other traits often cited. (Sebeok, 22)

If animals participate in semiosis, communication as the coding and decoding of signs cannot be defined as a uniquely human capacity. This broader definition of semiosis makes room for other-than human forms of communication.

George A. Kennedy’s concept of “rhetorical energy” is another example of a theoretical framework that opens up the narrow anthropocentric concept of language to explore these other systems of communication. In “A Hoot in the Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric”, Kennedy (1992) emphasizes the role of animal communication with regard to rhetoric. He argues that animals make use of “a complex code of signs” (6) to communicate and that, “rhetoric is manifest in all animal life and existed long before the evolution of human beings” (4). Although humans and animals are limited in regard to understanding each other’s systems of communication, the argument put forth by Kennedy is that rhetoric can function as a tool to bridge the language gap:

We can, however, by observation learn to understand animal rhetoric and many animals can understand some features of human rhetoric that they share with us,
such as gestures or sounds that express anger or friendliness or commands. We share a ‘deep’ universal rhetoric. (6)

In contrast to rhetoric as a human technique for persuasive speaking or writing, Kennedy defines it as a matter of energy, expressed through physical actions or signs, which allows for a broader understanding of communication beyond linguistics. Kennedy (1998) uses the behavior of red deer stags during rutting season as an example to explain his concept of rhetoric in relation to animal communication:

More often, one is ‘persuaded’ to retreat, leaving his opponent free to mate with the females. The encounter takes the form of a contest in which each stag tries to out-roar the other […] The rhetoric of the stags is a display of raw and physiological energy conveyed by the simplest possible techniques and thus illustrates my contention that rhetoric, in essence, can be viewed as a form of energy that results from reaction to a situation and is transmitted by a code. (13-14)

For Kennedy, animals as well as humans have the ability to communicate through signs. While this concept of rhetorical energy takes into account the different ways animals respond to their environment, it remains grounded in anthropocentric assumptions with regard to animal consciousness and intentionality:

What is in doubt is the extent of their intentionality and consciousness of sending and receiving messages and the resulting question of whether some animals have a sense of self and of mental individuality. (6)

Zoosemiotics offers an important critique of intentionality as one of the distinctive features of human exceptionalism:
What seems to create the misunderstanding, in a common-sensical definition of ‘intention’, is that, in human interaction, we witness the awareness and then the verbalization of the intention: we are aware that we want something and we can say it. This is a process that is often confused with intentionality itself, which — in turn — could be nothing else (or nothing more) than the main characteristic of the sign: referring to something else than themselves. (Dennett qtd, in Martinelli, 2)

Within the framework of zoosemiotics, intentionality does not refer to the act of expressing intention verbally. Instead, it is the ability to refer to something outside the self, which further decenters the role of humans since animals can refer to their environment.

In her comparison of animal studies to other critical political and cultural approaches, Weil questions the rootedness of academic disciplines in linguistic systems:

Unlike in women’s studies or ethnic studies, however, those who constitute the objects of animal studies cannot speak for themselves, or at least they cannot speak any other languages that the academy recognizes as necessary for such self-representation. Must they then be forever condemned to the status of objects? (4)

Although animal studies shares with these fields a demand for the recognition and representation of a formerly marginalized group as subjects and not objects, the voice of animals is limited because language remains the prevailing form of expression. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands emphasizes the linguistic bias inherent in human representations of animals:
The drive toward coherent human representations of human/animal conversation is at least partially authoritarian because all such representations fail to represent the language of the animal, because they fail to acknowledge the language produced from human/animal interaction, and because they deny the impact of the nonhuman actor on the human. Human language about nonhuman nature can never be complete, only by acknowledging its limits is the space opened for otherworldly conversations. (185)

Taking the question of animal representation seriously requires an awareness of the power structures between humans and animals, the limits of human language, and other-than-human forms of communication that emerge from encounters between different beings. Although Mortimer-Sandilands argues that representations of the relationship between humans and animals remain incomplete due to language, she sees a possibility for a different mode of representation, one which opens up a space for the non-human by acknowledging the flaws of human language. Weil formulates a similar critique of language as a system of authority, drawing on the feminist critique of the patriarchal nature of language:

The dilemma is a familiar one to feminist theorists who in the past, faced their own pronouncements that language is not only unstable but also patriarchal (and thus foreign to the expression of women’s desires), nevertheless encouraged forms of writing that would point toward or imagine an ‘elsewhere’ outside of language. (17)
Similar to Hélène Cixous’ concept of écriture féminine as a form of writing that breaks open the authority of the masculine from within language, zoopoetics refers to a use of language that undermines anthropocentrism. In order to reclaim a space for animals in texts, a zoopoetic approach makes room for possibilities of communication beyond the anthropocentric model of written and verbal human language as the dominating tool of expression.

Whereas Derrida deconstructs language, Weil speaks of a “counter-linguistic turn” (11) that is characterized by the “desire to know that there are beings or objects with ways of knowing and being that resist our flawed systems of language” (12). My literary analysis aims to show how Kafka explores zoopoetic modes of expression in his writing by letting language point back to its constraints and brings the reader closer to other-than-human perceptions of the world. Derrida’s deconstructionist approach to language will serve as an important point of reference in this regard.

While Kennedy uses a vocabulary grounded in a human mode of thinking, Derrida undoes this vocabulary by creating new concepts to describe differences. In contrast to Kennedy, he does not specifically investigate shared features of humans and animals. Instead, Derrida complicates the question of language and draws attention to multiple ways of responding as a form of communication. To him, “the said question of the said animal in its entirety comes down to knowing not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what respond means” (8). Although anthropocentric thinking acknowledges the ability of “the animal” to react to stimuli, non-human beings are denied this possibility of a response as a reciprocal form of communication. For Derrida,

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responding as opposed to merely reacting entails multiple possibilities, such as pretending, lying, and covering or erasing one’s traces.

The question will shortly be very much that of the response, and no doubt I shall try to imply that one cannot treat the supposed animality of the animal without treating the question of response, and what responding means. And what being erased means. As we shall see, even those who, from Descartes to Lacan, have conceded to the animal some aptitude for signs and for communication have always denied it the power to respond — to pretend, to lie, to cover its tracks or erase its own traces. (32-33)

The anthropocentric definition of “the animal” on the grounds of language as a unique property of Man denied animals these forms of response. Although “the animal” was granted the capacity to track itself and react to signs, it was denied the “power to transform those traces into verbal language, to call itself by means of discursive questions and responses” (50). The power to pretend or to lie requires the ability to relate to oneself, but in an anthropocentric framework this auto-deixis is specifically inherent in human language. For Derrida, self-referentiality is not necessarily linked to language. Instead, auto-deixis can take on different forms:

Let me repeat it, every living creature, and thus every animal to the extent that it is living, has recognized in it this power to move spontaneously, to feel itself and to relate to itself. […] But what is in dispute — and it is here that the functioning and the structure of the “I” count so much, even where the word I is lacking — is the power to make reference to the self in deictic or autodeictic terms, the capability at least virtually to turn a finger toward oneself in order to say ‘this is I’. […] Nor is it certain that this auto-deicity doesn’t take on highly developed,
differentiated, and complex forms in a large number of social phenomena that can be observed in the animot. Who can deny that phenomena of narcissistic exhibition in seduction or sexual combat, the ‘follow me who is (following) you’ deployed in colors, music, adornments, parades, or erections of all sorts derive from such auto-deixis? (95)

Thus, animal responses do not depend on notions of intentionality or consciousness. Instead, Derrida understands response in terms of the relationality of the self to an other. In this framework, the question of whether or not animals can speak turns into an investigation of other-than-human forms of communication, which renders possible “a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and the word otherwise and as something other than privation” (Derrida, 48). Consequently, animals are no longer defined as lacking language skills. Instead, language becomes part of a network of multiple possibilities of communication and expression, such as gestures, body language, facial expressions, or movements.

While Kennedy’s discussion expands the human concept of rhetoric to include animal actions and behaviour, Derrida’s notion of response deconstructs human epistemologies and emphasizes aspects of self-referentiality. In an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy⁹, Derrida explains this potential for redefining the concept of language:

Of course, if one defines language in such a way it is reserved for what we call man, what is there to say? But if one reinscribes language in a network of

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possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. (116)

Based on this understanding of language, animals obtain a subject status in representational spaces, such as literary texts. Yet their conception of the world is not based on language, the major system of human representation. Despite our scientific knowledge about the material realities of animals, some elements of animal identity and behavior remain inaccessible to humans and challenge epistemological frameworks. Given this paradox, I argue that literary texts give access to animal experience in mapping their resistance to linguistic representation and pointing to the limitations of language. In my readings of Kafka’s animals, I therefore aim to expose these maps of resistance and to show how animals make readers aware of the shortcomings of human language.

I will provide a comparative close reading of specific scenes of animal communication that illustrate how the narrators in each story negotiate their relationship with others. Josephine’s piping, for example, serves as a form of communication and allows the narrator to portray not only Josephine as an individual, but also the mouse community as a collective. Piping, as the narrator explains, is “our people’s daily speech” (370) and Josephine has “the power of song” (360). However, the communicative power of Josephine’s piping varies since “she is singing to deaf ears” (363) at times. She transmits rhetorical energy through her performances because, similar to the roaring deer in Kennedy’s example, she engages in an act of ‘persuasion’, in this case convincing the other mice of the uniqueness of her art. Josephine’s singing can also be inscribed in a network of animal responses because her song differs radically from the humanist concept of music as a uniquely human capacity in a cultural context.
In addition, I will address the role of form with regard to language as a tool for representation, arguing that Kafka’s specific use of autobiography creates blank spaces for fluid forms of species identity. Except for “The Crossbreed”, each story represents an “animal autobiography” (Herman, 1), in which “a nonhuman teller provides an account of situations and events in which he or she has, over the course of the life story leading up to the current moment of narration, participated as an experiencing self” (Herman, 1). In particular, the dog-narrator and Red Peter give such an account in their reflections about their lives. While Josephine’s story is told by another mouse, the narrator is also an “experiencing self” who carefully observes and provides a detailed description of Josephine and the mouse community. Created by a human author, these animal narratives mediate encounters with animals and incorporate elements that move beyond human frameworks. Red Peter, the dog, and the mouse narrator speak to and share their stories not only with the human readers outside of the text, they also engage and communicate with other beings within their narrative. Consequently, these three stories “broach questions about genre, truth status and the structure as well as the politics of narrative representation” (Herman, 2).

In light of Derrida’s definition of the autobiography as “the writing of the self as living” (47), it is interesting to consider Red Peter and the canine narrator as using language to share their stories of “living” as a “self”. From this perspective, the autobiographical form opens up the text for animal identity despite its original anthropocentric form. The different autobiographies of these animals are shaped by various aspects, such as Red Peter’s memory loss of his simian past or the dog’s feeling

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10 With the exception of the human narrator in “A Crossbreed”, who does not adopt an animal perspective. However, the crossbreed destabilizes the narrator’s anthropocentric presuppositions, which ruptures human frameworks.
of alienation from the dog community. In sharing their autobiographies, these literary animals explore species identity. However, some elements of this identity can only be partly expressed in written human language, which challenges readers to pay attention to other-than-human modes of expression and to rethink anthropocentric concepts of human versus animal identity. The texts address this issue of linguistic representation and point back to their own limitations, either through the narrator’s reflections, or by creating ruptures and gaps in form and content.

Red Peter’s speech in particular entails such spaces that challenge anthropocentric frameworks. The figure of the ape-man allows Kafka to experiment with language and form and to play with the autobiographical genre. As Doreen Densky discusses in her precise analysis of five drafts of Red Peter’s story, Kafka went through various stages during the writing process. Densky argues that “the thematic metamorphosis from ape to human is accompanied by an equally important formal, narrative transformation, which is akin to the poetological structure of literary production, representation, and reception” (2). The narrative structure of the fragments varies, which points to the aspects addressed by Densky.11 The fragmentary form and the use of different narrative strategies, combined with the different constellations of the characters within the world of text, illustrates Kafka’s attempts to bring the reader closer to the experience of his ape-man and to explore the complexity of animal-centred perspectives.

11 In the first fragment, which is part of Kafka’s notebooks, a first-person narrator meets Red Peter’s trainer and they speak about him. Red Peter himself is not part of this narrative and appears only in the following fragment, which consists of a dialogue between the narrator of the first fragment and Red Peter. Kafka wrote these two fragments before the best-known version of Red Peter’s story, which was published as “A Report to an Academy”. The last very short fragment is a letter from Red Peter’s former teacher who, as he mentioned in his speech, “was almost himself turned into an ape” and “taken away to a mental hospital” (258).
In his report, Red Peter repeatedly mentions the importance of language for his progress as a trained animal. At the beginning of his speech, he immediately expresses his regret that he will not be able to meet the Academy’s expectations with regard to his account of his former life as an ape because “my [his] memory of the past has closed the door against me [him] more and more” (250). In his opening remarks, he reflects on his hybrid status between the “world of men” and his “origins” or the world of apes:

I could have returned at first, had human beings allowed it, through an archway as wide as the span of heaven over the earth, but as I spurred myself on in my forced career, the opening narrowed and shrank behind me; I felt more comfortable in the world of men and fitted in better; the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken; today it is only a gentle puff of air that plays around my heels; and the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I came once myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and will power sufficed to get back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to crawl through. To put it plainly, much as I like expressing myself in images, to put it plainly: your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike. (250)

Human language enabled Red Peter to enter the world of men, and thus, to achieve his “forced career”. With his linguistic progress, the “strong wind” of his animal-past lost its power. What remains today is a very small “opening in the distance”, which does not allow him to look back at his past the same way. The image of painfully scraping his skin to get back to his animal roots emphasizes the impossibility of accessing ape-experience
to the same extent he did as a “mute” animal. This impossibility is grounded in the constraints of human language. In her reading of the story, Weil explains that the representation of the self through language as a crucial idea of the Enlightenment, denying animals the ability to refer to themselves, is at the core of the text:

Such ruling out of the animal is also at the crux of Kafka’s ‘A Report to an Academy.’ The story can be read as an allegory of our entry into modernity through enlightenment and the concomitant loss of animality.\(^2\) (12)

Red Peter’s report broaches the issue of language as the dominating tool for humans to make sense of the world but reverses the progress narrative of the Enlightenment.

To expose the constraints of language as a narrative tool for Red Peter’s account of his life, Red Peter directly comments on the report as a textual genre and its limitations. He speaks about his captivity and the process of learning how to be human, trying to include the animal as well as the human perspective. Nevertheless, he is unable to speak about parts of his identity from the simian point of view, which further results in a divided self, as Weil explains:

Language […] splits the self between an experiential self and a speaking self who is never in the same place or time as the self that is to be represented. Although he is compelled to speak, his speech inevitably fails, becoming what might be read as traumatic symptom. (7)

\(^2\) Although my aim is to propose an animal-centred reading that opposes the idea of textual animals as place-holders for biographical, theological or other human-centred concepts, Weil’s allegorical interpretation does not dis- or replace the animal as traditional symbolic readings suggest. Instead, she links the allegorical function of Red Peter’s story back to historical and epistemological aspects of the human/animal relationship in order to critique anthropocentrism.
The speaking self gives a report about past experiences, which can be only partly accessed through language. What remains inaccessible is the trauma of the experiencing self, namely the captured and speechless ape. While Red Peter speaks about this ambiguity between the past and the present, he notes that “everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike” (250). Thus, humans and animals share this tickling as a form of desire to refer back to one’s own prelinguistic past. At the same time, Red Peter reminds his human audience of their own animality that originates from a shared evolutionary past.

This idea of reaching back to something that has been forgotten is a central theme in Red Peter’s speech and further evokes questions of the representational function of language:

Of course, what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it, but although I cannot reach back to the truth of the old ape life, there is no doubt that it lies somewhere in the direction I have indicated. (253)

Although the human vocabulary can hardly represent or uncover his feelings as an ape, he notes that there exists a “truth of the old ape life” (253) hidden somewhere. Drawing on Derrida’s concept of the trace, this remark can be read as an expression of the erasure of animal traces through language. Red Peter’s experiences as an ape lie outside of language, and since humans deny animals the power to erase their traces, he is unable to share them. However, the traces of animal animality manifest themselves in different ways. The gaze of the chimpanzee at the end of the story, for example, exposes such a trace of silenced animal suffering. In noting that he is unable to bear the “insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal” (259), Red Peter confronts his audience with a suffering
that becomes visible through the gaze and is not verbalized. In this scene, language fails to give access to animal experience. Instead, the non-verbal visual exchange between Red Peter and the chimpanzee points to an abyss.

The descriptions of the first moments of Red Peter’s capture illustrate especially well this limited access to animal suffering in human terms. Although he remembers that he was “hopelessly sobbing, painfully hunting for fleas, apathetically licking a coconut, beating [his] skull against the locker” (252) he immediately clarifies that this description is only a representation of his feelings as an ape based on human language and therefore a misrepresentation. Furthermore, Red Peter’s scars as the traces of animal suffering become a means to represent what lies outside of language. By dropping his pants to show these marks on his body to humans, Red Peter expresses what he cannot verbalize, namely the traumatic experience of being shot. Instead, he communicates with his wounded animal body (this will be elaborated further in the discussion of Red Peter’s wounds in the next chapter on the body).

In contrast to Red Peter, who speaks about the limitations of representing animal experience through human language, the mouse-narrator in “Josephine” shares his experience through the descriptions of music and its multiple meanings for Josephine and the broader community. Like Red Peter’s report, the story of Josephine involves questions of representation, and the narrator clarifies at the beginning of his account that “anyone who has not heard her [Josephine] does not know the power of song” (360). The text does not give access to this auditive experience and constantly refers to the impossibility of representing Josephine’s singing, which shapes the identity of the mouse community.
Despite this limitation, the descriptions of Josephine’s performances point to other-than-human forms of communication. They illustrate how she negotiates her relationship with the other mice and the varied and contradictory meanings of her art. In this regard, the narrative blurs the line between speech and music, which allows for a representational framework that resists and challenges linguistic boundaries. This perspective of “nonhuman agents” (Herman, 1) forces readers to reconceptualize their notions of communication, music, and sound, breaking down the dichotomy of piping and singing and questioning the anthropocentric view of music. Driscoll (2017) points out the implications of opposing forces within the text with regard to these questions:

The text thus revolves around not only the ambiguous distinction between singing and whistling, speaking and falling silent, but ultimately also the question of narrative authority: in a sense, the text stages a conflict between the figure of the voice and the function of the narrative voice. (4)

As Driscoll notes, the narrative confronts the readers with two different overlapping voices, namely the narrating voice and Josephine’s singing voice, which creates additional tension in the text. The narrator portrays the mouse community in human terms, whereas Josephine embodies an alternative form of communication that resists this translation of animal experience. As a result, it becomes unclear who is ‘speaking’ for the other and the text points back at its narrative structure.

While the narrating mouse gives an account of Josephine’s role within the community, using human language, Josephine’s artistic expression dominates the text, displaying the boundaries of human language. Her performances give her a voice and enable her to communicate with the mouse folk. They serve as a tool for communication and help her to maintain a powerful role in the community. Although her piping is part
of the linguistic tool of the mouse folk, it “comes almost like a message from the whole people to each individual” (367). The piping connects the mouse community, but cannot be further conceptualized in human terms by the narrator. It is generally described as the daily form of communication for the mice, the “characteristic expression of [their] life” (361), and a “thoughtless habit” (362). At the same time, Josephine’s piping sets her apart from the other mice. On the one hand it is “nothing out of the ordinary” (361) and, on the other hand, it is “set free from the fetters of daily life” (370). As a form of singing, Josephine’s piping also constitutes her “power of song” (360) and the “priceless weapon of her song” (374). Thus, the text does not allow for a fixed meaning of piping as opposed to singing, and the narrator further complicates these concepts:

Is it in fact singing at all? Although we are unmusical we have a tradition of singing; in the old days our people did sing; this is mentioned in legends and some songs have actually survived, which, it is true, no one can now sing. Thus we have an inkling of what singing is, and Josephine’s art does not really correspond to it. So is it singing at all? Is it not perhaps just a piping? (361)

Gerhard Neumann describes this feature in Kafka’s writing as “gliding paradox” (“gleitendes Paradox”). Music is turned into such a paradox because the meaning of Josephine’s vocal expression is constantly being undone and reframed. Margot Norris refers to this logic of deconstruction as well and defines “the site of animal being” as a “negative site of narration” (382). For her, Kafka “systematically de-anthropomorphizes language by emptying rhetoric of its metaphorical residue” (382).13 As the narrator notes, she “says very little anyhow, she is silent among the chatterers, but it flashes from her

13 Norris’ understanding of rhetoric differs from Kennedy’s because she speaks of it as an element of literary writing rather than as an energy shared across species. The descriptions of Josephine’s performances and her behaviour nevertheless also illustrate the reframing of rhetoric in Kafka’s text that Norris describes.
eyes, on her closed lips — few among us can keep their lips closed, but she can — it is plainly legible” (366). In contrast to the narrating mouse, Josephine does not communicate through language, and she does not speak to claim her position of power. Instead, she communicates with her eyes and lips, engaging in acts of performance that oscillate between sound and silence, which further complicates the meaning of music:

[…] her audience never pipes, it sits in mouselike stillness; as if we had become partakers in the peace we long for, from which our own piping at the very least holds us back, we make no sound. Is it her singing that enchants us or is it not rather the solemn stillness enclosing her frail little voice? (362)

Silence and song are no longer in opposition; instead, they constitute the unique character of Josephine’s art.

Moreover, Josephine is able to make “a ceremonial performance out of doing the usual thing” (361) in combining her singing with specific bodily expressions, which function similarly to the elements of rhetorical energy within animal communication described by Kennedy:

So there she stands, the delicate creature, shaken by vibrations especially below her breastbone, so that one feels anxious for her, it is as if she concentrated all her strength on her song, as if from everything in her that does not directly subserve her singing all strength has been withdrawn, almost all power of life, as if she were laid bare, abandoned, committed merely to the care of good angels, as if she is so wholly withdrawn and living only in her song a cold breath blowing upon her might kill her. (363)
On the one hand, Josephine’s song is described as a vivid energetic force that runs through her body. When she is singing her body shakes and she displays a physiological energy. Rather than using language to ‘persuade’ the other mice of her superior piping skills, she transmits her message through her particular rhetoric. On the other hand, her song turns into a negative force that drains all energy from Josephine, who becomes powerful as well as weak and vulnerable when she sings. Consequently, her music combines another pair of opposing forces in addition to sound and silence, namely life and death. These paradoxical elements of Josephine’s fluid identity challenge human-centred modes of thinking.

Furthermore, Josephine tries to maintain a position of power among the other mice, who communicate with her through their applause, by integrating even the smallest noises into her song. The powerful and lively force of her rhetorical power unfolds when she reacts to the above-mentioned disturbances. This aspect of her rhetoric manifests itself, for example, in her facial expression when other mice put the “purity of her song” in danger by questioning her artistic talent:

I was once present when someone, as of course often happens, drew her attention to the folk piping everywhere going on, making modest reference to it, yet for Josephine that was more than enough. A smile so sarcastic and arrogant as she then assumed I have never seen; she, who in appearance is delicacy itself, conspicuously so even among our people who are prolific in such feminine types, seemed at that moment actually vulgar. (362)

Josephine’s rhetoric constitutes not only her peculiar relationship with the other mice, but also her dominating presence in the text. In this scene, verbal language is replaced with Josephine’s smile as an expression of rhetorical energy. Josephine’s silence makes
room for non-linguistic forms of expression. She further makes use of the rhetorical energy of her song as a vivid site to command respect from the community, especially when something or someone interrupts her performances:

That is what she is like always, every trifle, every casual incident, every nuisance, a creaking in the parquet, a grinding of teeth, a failure in the lighting incites her to heighten the effectiveness of her song; she believes anyhow that she is singing to deaf ears; there is no lack of enthusiasm or applause, but she has long learned not to expect real understanding, as she conceives it. So all disturbance is very welcome to her; whatever intervenes from outside to hinder the purity of her song, to be overcome with a slight effort, even with no effort at all, merely by confronting it, can help to awaken the masses, to teach them not perhaps understanding but awed respect. (363)

Although her singing as a form of communication does not establish “real understanding”, she successfully gains the respect of the community. In this regard, Josephine’s position is similar to the dog-narrator’s relationship with the canine community. Both are alienated from their species, yet they are being treated with respect. While the dog contents himself with his isolated position as investigator, Josephine bears an air of authority. However, her role within the mouse folk oscillates between the authority expressed through the rhetorical energy of her performance as a vivid element and the weakening power of her song that drains all this energy from her. Rhetorical energy is thus both positive — “a form of energy that results from reaction to a situation and is transmitted by a code” (Kennedy, 1998, 14) — and negative in this story.
Similar oppositional forces can be found in “Investigations”. Like Josephine’s song, the “creative gift for music with which the canine race alone is endowed” (281) is described as a combination of sound and silence. The narrator is captured by the music of other dogs he encounters, but at the same time he is fascinated by their silence: “Besides, although what struck me most deeply at first about these dogs was their music, their silence seemed to me still more significant” (315). The canine music remains enigmatic and resists the narrator’s human vocabulary, which highlights once more that the readers are confronted with a “canine music” that differs radically from their understanding of the concept of music in human terms.

Like the mystery around Josephine, the dog’s narrative raises doubts as to the reliability of human frameworks to represent animal experience. The critique of human language in “Investigations” emerges from the narrative structure as well as the content of the story. Apart from autobiographical elements, like the childhood memory, the text adopts additional narrative forms, such as stream of consciousness and dialogue. The narrative does not follow a coherent structure and lacks a conclusion. However, as Jacobs (2018) notes in her reading of the story, “instead of depicting canine expression according to the idea that animals exist in an unreflective present, most of the canine narrator’s thoughts represent an effort to make sense of a range of past and present experiences in eloquent musings” (70). The multiple narrative forms allow for the dog’s perspective to unfold on more than one level at a time. The reader experiences the animal voice in different communicative settings, which undoes the problematic projection of simple anthropomorphism as the direct transfer of human characteristics onto animals and gives access to other-than-human perspectives.
The descriptions of the narrator’s encounters with other dogs, in particular, point to non-linguistic forms of communication. When the narrator observes the musical dogs, his attempts to connect with them fail: “[…] and so through all the din of the music I shouted out my questions loudly and challengingly. But they — incredible! Incredible! — they never replied, behaved as if I were not there” (283). The narrator remains in the position of the observer, and the scene is dominated by the music and bodily expressions of the dogs. Consequently, as my previous discussion of this scene in the context of the animal gaze showed, communication takes place through aspects of looking rather than speaking. While the musical dogs ignore the narrator, the “strange hound” (312), who finds the narrator powerless in the forest during a hunt, verbally responds to the dog’s questions:

"Who are you?" I asked. "I’m a hunter," he replied. "And why won’t you let me lie here?" I asked. "You disturb me," he said. "I can’t hunt while you’re here." "Try," I said, "perhaps you’ll be able to hunt after all." "No," he said, "I’m sorry, but you must go." "Don’t hunt for this one day!" I implored him. "No," he said, "I must hunt." "I must go; you must hunt," I said, "nothing but musts. Can you explain to me why we must?" "No," he replied, "but there’s nothing that needs to be explained, these are natural, self-evident things." "Not quite so self-evident as all that," I said, "you’re sorry that you must drive me away, and yet you do it." "That’s so," he replied. "That’s so," I echoed him crossly, "that isn’t an answer. Which sacrifice would you rather make: to give up your hunting, or give up driving me away?" "To give up my hunting," he said without hesitation. "There!" said I, "don’t you see that you’re contradicting yourself?" "How am I contradicting myself?" he replied. "My dear little dog, can it be that you really don’t understand that I must? Don’t you understand the most self-evident fact?" I made no answer,
for I noticed — and new life ran through me, life such as terror gives — I noticed from almost invisible indications, which perhaps nobody but myself could have noticed, that in the depths of his chest the hound was preparing to upraise a song. "You're going to sing," I said. "Yes," he replied gravely, "I'm going to sing, soon, but not yet." "You're beginning already," I said. "No," he said, "not yet. But be prepared." "I can hear it already, though you deny it," I said, trembling. He was silent, and then I thought I saw something such as no dog before me had ever seen, at least there is no slightest hint of it in our tradition, and I hastily bowed my head in infinite fear and shame in the pool of blood lying before me. I thought I saw that the hound was already singing without knowing it, nay, more, that the melody, separated from him, was floating on the air in accordance with its own laws, and, as though he had no part in it, was moving toward me, toward me alone. (313-314)

The beginning of the dialogue already points to the larger context of identity, a central theme of the dog’s narrative that revolves around the question of what it means to be a dog. The narrating dog challenges the hound’s canine identity that is based on hunting, as “the most self-evident fact”, by asking for the reason behind this obligation to hunt. Both dogs talk at cross purposes and their conversation abruptly ends with the hunting dog’s song. Language, and more specifically dialogue, does not lead to a clearer understanding of the other, the other’s experience or identity.

The seven musical dogs also trigger a moment of crisis for the narrator because his understanding of appropriate canine communication stands in sharp contrast to the dogs’ behavior. Thus, the scene represents a “moment of epistemological and ontological doubt” (Jacobs, 2018, 71). The dogs act against the rules of “canine meeting
behavior” (Jacobs, 2018, 71), which challenges the narrator’s notion of dog identity and leads to miscommunication. For example, the dogs’ posture renders canine greeting rituals impossible, such as the “trade in scent-based information” (Jacobs, 2018, 71). Instead of letting the narrator smell them, these dogs encounter others visually because of their upright position. Disturbed and left speechless by this unexpected behavior and overwhelmed by the dogs’ music, the narrator surrenders to the power of their song:

    Oh, the music these dogs made almost drove me out of my senses! I could not move a step farther, I no longer wanted to instruct them; they could go on raising their front legs, committing sin and seducing others to the sin of silently regarding them [...] I made myself still more insignificant than I was, I whimpered, and if the dogs had asked me now what I thought of their performance, probably I would have had not a word to say against it. (284)

The narrator’s reaction to this encounter is essential to the general critique of language within the story because, similar to the music of mice, the narrator’s whimpering cannot be fully conceptualized in human terms. Despite scientific explanations of canine behavior which enable us to ‘read’ this whimpering to a certain extent as a sign of uneasiness, we cannot fully grasp the dog’s reaction. Therefore, as Jacobs (2018) emphasizes, “the anthropocentric fiction of the narration is destabilized from within, highlighting the limits of human language and epistemology” (73). The musical dogs and the hunting dog challenge linguistic boundaries because they resist the narrator’s attempt to make sense of the world. Thus, the text not only creates epistemological doubt in the world outside the text, but also for the narrator who is part of the world of dogs.
In both scenes, features traditionally defined as uniquely human qualities, such as reason or language, become part of a “cynocentric perspective” or “canidozentrische Perspective” (Jacobs, 2015: 298). As Jacobs (2018) notes, “the text turns the anthropocentric framework into a cynocentric yet anthropomorphized one, in which inarticulate species are trained by eloquent dogs” (71). As a result of this animal-centred perspective, human exceptionalism is reframed and turned upside down. Although the dog narrator applies the theory of human exceptionalism to his species by creating a binary opposition between dogs and other creatures, he is not adhering to the common anthropomorphic projection of human characteristics onto animals. As a speaking “philosopher dog” (Ziolkowski, 122) who is not fully integrated into the canine community and who establishes his own set of “canine qualities”, he does not embody a transfer of human capacities onto animals. Instead, he refuses to remain within the boundaries of simple anthropomorphism and reframes elements of projected human qualities, such as upright walking or musical performance.

Apart from the creature in “A Crossbreed”, all literary animals discussed in the close readings of this chapter share the anthropomorphic element of language, and each text refers back to this feature in different ways. This part of my literary analysis focused on the possibilities of the text to give access to the various features of animal identity beyond the limitations of human language. The language skills of the ape-man and the dog represent an obstacle to their ability to access their own animality, or to communicate with members of their own species. My analysis illustrates how these limitations create blank spaces for other-than human forms of interaction in terms of the content of the stories as well as their narrative structure. Kafka’s use of the autobiographical genre foregrounds the autodeictic ability of animals. This auto-deixis becomes part of a representational framework that does not always fully adhere to the
linguistic boundaries of the text, as the example of the traces of silenced animal suffering in Red Peter’s narrative or the oppositional elements of Josephine’s music show. In addition to the scenes of animal communication analyzed in this chapter, bodies can reveal further non-linguistic frameworks as they function as expressive tools for animal experience and identity. The next chapter will elaborate this point and discuss how multiple concepts of bodies, in relation to language as part of the mind, have shaped human notions of animality.
4. The Body

Questions with regard to the body as a shared feature between all species, outside of the realm of language, emerge with the “counter-linguistic turn” (Weil, 11). A focus on bodies allows for a broader understanding of different and less human-centred perceptions of the world. Yet in the anthropocentric discourse, definitions of “the animal body” are often based on Cartesian aspects, such as conditioned behaviour and instinct, which reinforces the hierarchy of human exceptionalism. In this hierarchy, the bodies of animals are merged into one single category. Similar to the use of the term “the animal” to refer to all animal species, as pointed out by Derrida, definitions of “the animal body” in anthropocentric frameworks do not take into account other-than-human bodily forms and their variety across different species. The shift in focus from the body as an element of the human/animal binary to the multiplicity of bodily forms across species lines breaks with these frameworks. Although language dominates our thinking about animals and remains the main tool to conceptualize bodies, the body points to elements that resist these concepts, like traumatic experiences. This resistance creates blank spaces that give rise to concepts of species identity that destabilize language. This chapter provides an overview of this shift in perspective and addresses the issue of conceptualizing animal bodies in more detail, followed by a zoocentric analysis of the different kinds of bodies and their function in Kafka’s short stories.

Firstly, I will discuss the effects of dualism’s anthropocentrism that values the mind above all else and reduces the body — human and animal — to a set of mechanics. Secondly, I will draw on the work on animal behavior by Jakob von Uexküll to illustrate the shift from human-centred notions of “the animal body” to a broader understanding of bodies and their various capabilities. Thirdly, I will discuss poststructuralist decentralized notions of the body in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who
emphasize the importance of affects within Uexküll’s ethological studies. In particular, the concept of becoming-animal introduced in A Thousand Plateaus and the idea of the “head without a face” as a manifestation of our shared embodiment with animals developed by Deleuze in Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation will provide a new vocabulary to describe different corporeal forms. Furthermore, decentered readings of bodies will bring me back to questions of animal agency. Building on this theoretical framework, I will formulate my understanding of animal bodies in the context of literature to analyze their functions in Kafka’s texts.

In the Cartesian worldview, “mute” animals are seen as passive creatures, mechanical bodies bound to their instincts, in opposition to humans as active subjects, capable of rational thought. But Descartes is not the only philosopher to have examined the mind-body problem. Tim Crane and Sarah Patterson identify three different branches of thought in their history of the mind-body problem: the Aristotelian, Cartesian, and scientific materialist paradigms. Animals have been assigned different roles in each of these paradigms. According to Aristotle’s concept of hylomorphism, the soul (form) and the body (matter) constitute one entity. In this framework, all living beings, including plants, have a soul. However, these souls are different in nature and part of a divine hierarchical order. Aristotle argues that the human rational soul is superior to the sensitive soul of animals or the vegetative soul of plants.14

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14 This idea of a metaphysical order of the universe was further developed in the medieval theological concept of the scala nature or Great Chain of Being. (see, for example: Lovejoy, Arthur. The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea. London: Taylor and Francis, 2017.)
Descartes breaks with Aristotle’s concept of unity and defines the mind and the body as two separate substances. Mental phenomena (res cogitans), such as intentionality, function independently from material substances (res extensa). Despite Descartes’ description of animal bodies as automata and their bodily behavior as a mechanical process, new approaches\(^{15}\) draw attention to the details of Cartesian thought with regard to animal beings, which offer a less radical notion of animality. In Descartes’ response to Henry More’s critique, for example, a more nuanced view of animals emerges:

No reason indeed moved us to this belief save that seeing that numerous parts of the animal body are not different from ours in external configuration and motion, and believing that in us there is but a single principle of motion, namely, the soul, which same substance moves the body and cogitates, we doubted not that just such a soul might be found in animals. However, after I had given heed that there are two different principles of our movements to be distinguished — viz., one which is plainly mechanical and corporeal, which depends upon the sole force of the animal spirits and the configuration of the various parts of the body, and which may be called the corporeal soul; the other incorporeal, that is to say, mind, or in other words, that soul which I defined as thinking substance [...] — I sought quite diligently whether animal movements arise from these two principles, or simply from one. When I had clearly perceived that all movement could originate from the one principal, that is to say, the corporeal and mechanical one, then I held for certain and proven that we can in no way demonstrate any rational soul in brutes. [...] However, although I hold for certain that it cannot be proven that any

cogitation exists in brutes, I do not thereby judge that the absence of thought can be demonstrated, since the human mind can never penetrate into the inmost recesses of the animal being. (qtd. in Cohen, 52)

This passage shows that Descartes acknowledges the similarities between the external features of human and animal bodies as well as the limitations of the human mind to fully gain access to the world of animals. However, arguments of human superiority based on rational thought are at the heart of Cartesian philosophy. This is because humans are capable of both conscious and intentional movements and mechanical bodily movements, whereas animals, since it cannot be proven otherwise, only move mechanically, lacking an incorporeal soul. To support this argument, Descartes identifies linguistic skills as a significant indicator for cognition:

[…] and although all most easily make known to us by voice or other bodily movements their natural impulses, such as wrath, fear, hunger, and the like, notwithstanding never yet has it been observed that any brute animal became so perfected as to employ true language, that is to say to indicate either by voice or signs that which could be accounted for solely by cogitation and not by natural impulse. For language is the one certain indication of latent cogitation in a body, and all men use it, even the most stupid and mentally deranged, and those deprived of their tongue and vocal organs, whereas on the other hand not a single brute speaks, and consequently this we may take for the true difference between man and beast. (qtd. in Cohen, 53)

For Descartes, the bodily movements of animals are based on their instincts, whereas the movement of human bodies is complemented by additional ways of meaning making that depend on cognition, such as language. To summarize, Descartes views “man” as
possessing both substances, body and mind, interacting through reason and language, whereas “beast” has only a body, controlled by “natural impulses”.

The main logical flaw of this dualist conception lies in the connection of the immaterial to the material. How can interaction between body and mind take place in the material world, if the latter is defined as a non-physical substance? The third set of concepts Crane and Patterson identify addresses this blind spot and focuses on the material manifestations of consciousness:

[…] dualism faces the problem of how a non-physical mind can interact with the physical world; materialism (or physicalism) solves this problem by identifying the mind with something physical. But having made this identification, physicalists need to explain how something purely physical can have a conscious point of view on the world, how it can have subjectivity. The mind-body problem for materialists is the problem of explaining the place of consciousness in the material world. (8)

Breaking with the dualistic mind-body concept, materialists claim that everything is matter. In this framework, body and mind are one physical entity, and mental functions of the body are explained neurologically and through observations of behavior. Even though the scientific-materialist paradigm can be reductionist at times, it makes room for animals because it combines corporeality with aspects of perception. Jakob von Uexküll’s work on animals and their environment in the 1930s was an important step in this direction.

In contrast to Descartes, who explains animal behavior as a mechanical process, Uexküll focuses on the inner world of animals as subjects, studying their behavior to get a better understanding of their perception of the world. In the introduction to his seminal
publication *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*, he notes the following: “We no longer regard animals as mere objects, but as subjects whose essential activity consists of perceiving and acting” (6). According to Uexküll, “everything a subject perceives belongs to its *perception world* [Merkwelt], and everything it produces, to its *effect world* [Wirkwelt].” (42) Perception and the production of effects constitute one single unit, which he calls *Umwelt* (environment). The environment or *Seifenblase* (soap bubble) of a subject contains all the relevant qualities of its surrounding world. In his ethological studies, Uexküll expands this notion of *Umwelt* to the world of animals, using the behavior of ticks as an example to explain the key principles of animal environments:

The tick hangs inert on the tip of a branch in a forest clearing. Its position allows it to fall onto mammal running past. From its entire environment, no stimulus penetrates the tick. But here comes a mammal, which the tick needs for the production of offspring. And now something miraculous happens. [...] From the enormous world surrounding the tick, three stimuli glow like signal lights in the darkness and serve as directional signs that lead the tick surely to its target. [...] As one can see, the fundamental aspects of the structure of the environments that are valid for all animals can be derived from the example of the tick. But the tick has one more remarkable capability that allows us a greater insight into environments. [...] In order to increase the probability that its prey will pass by, the tick must be capable of living a long time without nourishment. And the tick is capable of this to an unusual degree. [...] We shall therefore assume that the tick is, during its waiting period, in a state similar to sleep, which also interrupts our human time for hours. [...] Time, which frames all events, seemed to us the

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only objectively consistent factor, compared to the variegated changes of its contents, but now we see that the subject controls the time of its environment. (51-52)

This illustrates the complexity of animal organisms. The tick acts in relation to its environment and reacts to the three “effect marks” of light, smell, and temperature that form its Umwelt. In addition, the tick possesses agency in the sense that it can adapt its body to the waiting period before the right “effect marks” occur in the correct order. In showing how animals perceive and interact with their surroundings, Uexküll’s ethological research decenters the roles of human subjectivity, intentionality; and consciousness at the core of exceptionalism. For instance, the concept of time as a significant anthropocentric benchmark for consistency gains a new meaning in the Umwelt of the tick because it engages with its surroundings as an active subject. The tick moves in relation to the bodies of its prey passing by and only falls off the tree when these bodies provide the right “effect marks”.

In his discussion of animal agency and instinct, Aaron M. Moe refers to such decisive moments as “kairotic”; a term that derives from the name of the Greek god Kairos whose presence at the Olympiad symbolized an athlete’s awareness of the right movement at the right time. Moe uses this example to point out that humans as well as animals have instincts, and that instinctual is often replaced with the term intuition when refering to human behavior. He proposes the term “instinctual intuition” to “blur the human and animal species” and makes the argument that the wisdom to act within the kairotic moment — even if it lies more closely to ‘instinct’ than to ‘reason’ — involves agency.” (19) Thus, he argues that animals and humans share intuitive patterns of behavior, which gives them agency. Although Moe formulates this argument to counter the anthropocentric idea that animals lack agency because of their instinct-driven
behavior, his vocabulary is still deeply grounded in humanist oppositions, such as instinct and reason. Uexküll moves away from this human-centred vocabulary because he focuses on the active role of animals in relation to their Umwelt and shows how humanist concepts gain new meaning in these other-than-human worlds of perception. This important shift in perspective from “natural impulses” (Descartes) to “perceptual worlds” paved the way for new ways of thinking about animal bodies.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari include the example of the tick in their explanations of becoming-animal, emphasizing the role of affects across bodies: “Von Uexküll, in defining animal worlds, looks for the active and passive affects of which the animal is capable in the individuated assemblage of which it is a part” (ATP, 257). As a result, they define ethology as the study of affects and formulate an understanding of the body in relation to its surroundings:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (ATP, 257)

Therefore, the notion of the body is no longer restricted to isolated capabilities. Instead, bodies are always in transition, changing in relation to their environment. This emphasis on how a body affects and is affected in the context of its environment blurs the lines of the human/animal divide because bodies across all species can affect each other. Affects, are further defined as becomings, and “the reality of a becoming-animal [is], that it is affect in itself” (ATP, 259). Engaging in processes of becoming, bodies constantly move in an environment of multiple affects and compose new bodies that resist normative
forms. Deleuze and Guattari give the example of differences among horses and explain that if a body is defined by affects, “a racehorse is more different from a workhorse than a workhorse is from an ox” (257). Consequently, bodies are not defined along fixed species lines, but always in relation to other bodies. Through acts of becoming, the body escapes binary oppositions. In this regard, humans and animals are placed on a continuum as corporeal and therefore vulnerable creatures.

Awareness of the vulnerability that manifests itself in becoming arises, according to Deleuze, through the power of works of art: “Singing, composing, painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash these becomings” (ATP, 272). He uses the strong imagery of Francis Bacon’s paintings to highlight the role of the exposed body as a reminder of shared creaturely corporeality. Although his example comes from the visual arts, my reading of the body in the context of literature draws on Deleuze’s vocabulary, because fictional texts, too, can create strong images of corporeality, as I will show with the example of “the knife of the butcher” (427) in “A Crossbreed”. Furthermore, I argue that literary animal bodies can represent sites of resistance, where the constraints imposed on such bodies become visible. In bringing us closer to other-than-human worlds of perception and corporeality, literary texts draw our attention to the multiple power

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17 In his analysis of paintings by Francis Bacon, Deleuze (2004) defines the body as a site of indistinction. He emphasizes aspects of human animality and argues that “meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility” (21). Our exposed meaty bodies are therefore as vulnerable as animal bodies. Drawing on the example of Bacon’s art, he distinguishes between the head as part of the material figurative body and the face as “a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head” (19). To him, the head reveals the “animal spirit of man” because it represents “a spirit in bodily form, a corporeal and vital breath, an animal spirit” (19). In exposing “the head without a face” (19), Bacon’s paintings constitute “a zone of indiscernibility or undecidability between man and animal” (20). Deleuze sees our embodiment as a reminder of our own animality. Engaging in multiple acts of becoming results in an awareness of this shared feature.
structures that affect creatures “across species lines” (McHugh). Moreover, “literary animal agents” point to the impact of these constraints on human reading practices, as Susan McHugh explains in noting that “serving as a flash point for the ways in which literature gives voice to all kinds of nonhuman becomings, textual animals locate biopolitical knowledges as following acts of reading” (488). Animal bodies in literary texts can expose these “biopolitical knowledges” by embodying traces of repressed and forgotten elements, such as human animality.

For Driscoll and Hoffmann, the importance of animal bodies within Kafka’s writing is linked to the ways in which he uses language:

For Kafka, an unavoidable effect of this auscultation of the forgotten is the reanimalization of language. The Western, carnophilalogocentric tradition has consistently sought to disembodify language, to transcend the physical, animal part of the human. [...] Kafka’s ‘vast zoopoetics’ [Derrida], then is also a poetics of the body, of the sudden reminder of one’s own corporeality, and hence of one’s own animality. (3)

Thus, the poetic depiction of bodies in Kafka’s writing reveals the function of language as a disembodying, human tool of representation. But Kafka’s zoopoetic bodies also function as surfaces for identity formation. In “unleashing” different becomings, such as the becoming-ape of Red Peter or the becoming-human of the kitten-lamb, Kafka’s animals take on multiple bodily forms as they negotiate their role in relation to the world that surrounds them. The reader is confronted with different kinds of bodies, such as the

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18 This reading is particularly informed by Michel Foucault’s concept of biopower as “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, 140).
dog’s fasting body, the kitten-lamb’s hybrid body, Red Peter’s wounded body, and Josephine’s energetic and vulnerable body, which resist normative standards, challenge anthropocentric ideologies of human identity, and open up spaces of indistinction.

Kafka depicts these bodies in a variety of contexts and exposes different layers of creaturely identities. Challenging anthropocentric notions of animality, the stories recount moments that destabilize the image of the purely instinct-driven beast. Although the dog-narrator, for example, cannot suppress “the unavoidable irrational watering of the ground” (306), he resists the need to eat and commits to a “voluntarily period of fasting” (307). Similarly, Red Peter’s bodily behavior is always depicted in relation to other bodies and his environment. He acts against biological responses, for example when he drinks out of a liquor bottle, to the point that his ape nature “flees” out of him. Moreover, he enters the world of humans through speech, but remains in his animal body; his hybridity thus challenges the binary opposition between animals as mechanical and humans as rational or intentional. This opposition is further undone by acts of becoming and different elements of indistinction, which function as reminders of a shared corporeality across the human/animal divide. The fleas jumping from Red Peter’s fur to the skin of the men on the ship can be read as such an element of indistinction. The tears in “A Crossbreed”, whose origin remains unclear, similarly blur the dividing line and emphasize features of shared embodiment between species. Furthermore, the descriptions of bodies in the context of music point to the ways in which bodies affect and are being affected by each other. In “Josephine” as well as in “Investigations” sound has a powerful impact on bodies. While affecting and controlling other bodies with her song, Josephine is also weakened by the power of her own music. Similarly, the dog-narrator’s body is weakened by the powerful musical forces of the seven dogs and the
hunting dog. Yet he is able to affect the bodies around him by choosing behavioural patterns that contradict normative canine behaviour.

To develop new forms of thinking about bodies at the crossings of the human/animal divide, each of the four narrators brings the reader closer to an other-than-human perception of the world. In the following analysis, I will discuss how this decentered understanding of bodies shapes the relationships between and the species identities of Kafka’s creatures.

In “A Crossbreed”, the human narrator’s attempts to better understand the world of the kitten-lamb point to possible “zones of indiscernibility” where “we become animal so that the animal also becomes something else” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, 109). This process is particularly manifest in the hybrid body of the crossbreed. In the anthropocentric order, the animal is, as a cat, the domestic animal par excellence. As a lamb, the role of this animal shifts from living with humans as their companion to providing them with meat as a food source. In addition, the lamb represents an important animal of sacrifice in a theological context, which attributes a divine feature to the crossbreed’s body. The narrator makes note of each of these facets and relates them to his own identity, blurring species lines:

It remains faithful to the family that brought it up. In that there is certainly no extraordinary mark of fidelity, but merely the true instinct of an animal which, though it has countless step-relations in the world, has perhaps not a single blood relation, and to which consequently the protection it has found with us is sacred. (426/427)
The narrator’s perception of this animal is dominated by a human-centred notion of animality, as his/her comment on “the true instinct of an animal” shows, yet he subverts this vocabulary by attributing other roles to the creature. As a “legacy from his father” (426), the narrator owns the kitten-lamb, which attributes an object-status to it. At the same time, this human-centred meaning of the animal’s role is renegotiated by the reference to an heirloom (“Erbstück”). Moreover, by explaining that the crossbreed is “faithful” to his “family,” the narrator reframes the human notion of family as a human collectivity based on ancestry. He redefines family membership as a necessity for protection. In the end, the kitten-lamb leads the narrator to reflect on new forms of collectivities across species lines, but he is still partly employing a humanist vocabulary. This uncertainty can be read as a way of using anthropocentric language, while at the same time subverting it by exposing the reader to different relations between creaturely bodies that rupture the very same concepts this vocabulary describes.

Movements and gestures of the animal’s body play an important role in this context:

Once when, as may happen to anyone, I could see no way out of my business problems and all that they involved, and was ready to let everything go, and in this mood was lying in my rocking chair in my room, the beast on my knees, I happened to glance down and saw tears dropping from its huge whiskers. Were they mine, or were they the animal’s? Had this cat, along with the soul of a lamb, the ambitions of a human being? (427)

The tears point to corporeality as a shared feature of all living beings. The line between “Lammesseele” (“the soul of a lamb”) and “Menschenehrgeiz” (“the ambitions of a human being”) becomes indiscernible in a moment of crisis and vulnerability. The origin
of the tears remains unclear, which emphasizes the role of the body as a reminder of fluid species identities.

Despite these moments of collectivity and shared vulnerability, the story comes back to the anthropocentric power hierarchy between human and animal:

Perhaps the knife of the butcher would be a release for this animal; but as it is a legacy I must deny it that. So it must wait until the breath voluntarily leaves its body, even though it sometimes gazes at me with a look of human understanding, challenging me to do the thing of which both of us are thinking.¹⁹ (427)

This reflection on the kitten-lamb in the context of slaughter relates the animal body to the consumption of meat. The narrator becomes aware of his power as a human over other creatures and considers killing an animal as a way of releasing it from this hierarchy, which further implies a paradoxical recognition of animal suffering. The juxtaposition of the kitten-lamb as a family member and the thought of killing this animal illustrates how the narrator is caught between species lines that emerge from states of exposure, vulnerability, and suffering. Red Peter reflects on these shared features as well, but unlike the owner of the crossbreed he is able to draw on the remaining traces of his memories as an ape, which brings the readers closer to other-than-human forms of perceiving the human/animal relationship.

¹⁹ Here the translation by Edwin and Willa Muir (1983) varies from the version of Stanley Corngold (2007) and it is particularly interesting how the expression “verständiges Tun” is translated as “to do the thing which both of us are thinking” (Muir, 427) and “demanding that I do the reasonable thing” (Corngold, 126).
At the beginning of his speech, Red Peter reminds the audience of the collective evolutionary past of apes and humans: “[…] your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me.” (250) His ape-body functions as an additional reminder of this element of shared species identity. The combination of human language and animal body opens up a third space in which Red Peter distances himself from the collective subject of the ape community as well as the academic community. Consequently, his hybrid identity undoes fixed notions of subjectivity. This allows him to adopt a perspective that resists human forms of meaning making and patterns of bodily behavior. The descriptions from this “third space perspective” of his time in captivity and the different stages of his learning process from an animal living in the wild to trained ape-man rupture Cartesian dividing lines. He realizes early on that leaving his ape nature behind is necessary for survival:

All the time facing that locker — I should certainly have perished. Yet as far as Hagenbeck was concerned, the place for apes was in front of a locker — well then, I had to stop being an ape. A fine, clear train of thought, which I must have constructed somehow with my belly, since apes think with their bellies. (253)

After his capture, he learns how to position his body in relation to the world of men and to exercise specific movements that affect his body in new ways, such as shaking hands, “mastering his repulsion” (256) to drink out of a bottle of liquor, and smoking a pipe. Moreover, he refers to these strategies as a way of thinking with his belly. The assumption that “apes think with their bellies” and not with their brains implies that apes lack cognition as a neurological feature of the body, as if Red Peter was drawing on the human-centred perspective of his audience. However, his statement about bellies and ape-thinking can be read as a moment of irony because he exposes the ethical flaws of the anthropocentric order throughout his speech.
Depictions of bodies in the context of violence illustrate the relation between corporeality and vulnerability. Red Peter confronts his audience with the effects of traumatic experience on the body, when he recalls his capture or exposes his wounds in front of journalists. He makes the reader aware of his body as flesh when he describes how he was shot in the cheek and below the hip. These shots are still visible on his body in the form of scars and limping. By describing this scene of his animal body under attack, he creates a strong image of the fragility of the body as exposed flesh. If he gives a rather objective description of the cage when he speaks about his captivity, it is because human language does not allow him to recall and express the suffering of this traumatic experience, such as the pain of the bars cutting into his flesh. However, he recounts not only the confinement of space, but also the subjection of his body:

After these two shots I came to myself — and this is where my own memories gradually begin — between decks in the Hagenbeck steamer, inside a cage. It was not a four-sided barred cage; it was only a three-sided cage nailed to a locker; the locker made the fourth side of it. The whole construction was too low for me to stand up in and too narrow to sit down in. So I had to squat with my knees bent and trembling all the time, and also, since probably for a time I wished to see no one, and to stay in the dark, my face was turned toward the locker while the bars of the cage cut into my flesh behind. Such a method of confining wild beasts is supposed to have its advantages during the first days of captivity, and out of my own experiences I cannot deny that from the human point of view this is really the case. (252)

Although he does not use the word pain, his description includes signs of physical and psychological pain conveyed through his body, such as the trembling of his legs or facing
the wall in the dark. He reflects on the advantages and disadvantages of human methods for keeping animals in captivity and concludes that this method of locking up animals is very effective from a human perspective. Again, the reader notes the use of irony that is clearly meant to subvert this hierarchical perspective.

Under the conditions of his captivity, Red Peter gradually learns to understand how humans think. As an ape-man, who “managed to reach the cultural level of an average European” (258), he is able to contrast his memories of finding a “way out” with human thinking:

As I look back now, it seems to me I must have had at least an inkling that I had to find a way out or die, but that my way out could not be reached through flight. I cannot tell now whether escape was possible. [...] I could certainly have managed by degrees to bite through the lock of my cage. I did not do it. [...] or supposing I had actually succeeded in sneaking out as far as the deck and leaping overboard, I should have rocked for a little on the deep sea and then been drowned. Desperate remedies. I did not think it out in this human way, but under the influence of my surroundings I acted as if I had thought it out. (254/255)

In acting “as if” and therefore pretending to be something-other-than-ape, he adapts his bodily behavior, such as drinking out of a bottle and rubbing his belly, to his environment. His body is in constant transition (for example, he loses his ability to speak right after shouting his first “Hello” and gains it back later) and it is this movement in relation to other bodies that opens up the possibility of “a way out” for Red Peter. In human terms escaping or finding “a way out” refers to the idea of freedom as “self-controlled movement”, as he notes in his description of human trapeze artists. Opposing
this notion of spatial freedom, Red Peter’s “way out” consists of engaging in different becomings.

Red Peter’s acts of becoming are not simple imitations of behavior, but movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that dissolve fixed forms of human or simian identity. By wearing pants, for example, he deterritorializes his animal body to become part of the human concept of nudity, but by dropping his pants and exposing his fur in front of the journalists without feeling ashamed he reterritorializes it. The covering of his animal body despite the fact that, as Derrida points out, the concepts of nudity and shame are unknown to animals, signalizes that being human is a matter of performance in opposition to an other:

I read an article recently by one of the ten thousand windbags who vent themselves concerning me in the newspapers, saying: my ape nature is not yet quite under control; the proof being that when visitors come to see me, I have a predilection for taking down my trousers to show them where the shot went in. The hand which wrote that should have its fingers shot away one by one. As for me, I can take my trousers down before anyone if I like; you would find nothing but a well-groomed fur and the scar made — let me be particular in the choice of a word for this particular purpose, to avoid misunderstanding — the scar made by a wanton shot. Everything is open and aboveboard; there is nothing to conceal; when the plain truth is in question, great minds discard the niceties of refinement. But if the writer of the article were to take down his trousers before a visitor, that would be quite another story, and I will let it stand to his credit that he does not do it. In return, let him leave me alone with his delicacy! (251/252)
This part of Red Peter’s report exposes nudity and shame as human constructs. Moreover, his scars point to the vulnerability of bodies and serve as another reminder of the body as a site of shared embodiment. His remark that “everything is open and aboveboard” and that “there is nothing to conceal” in the context of the exposure of his wounded body relates particularly well to Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of a “continuum of intensities where all forms come undone” (Deleuze & Guattari, ML, 13). In this continuum, bodies are not placed within a hierarchical structure based on their capabilities. Instead, these structures dissolve in a space of mutually affecting bodies.

In addition, Red Peter’s descriptions of the men on the ship function as a reminder of human animality. As “good creatures”, who “always had something in their mouth to spit” and who “hardly spoke but only grunted to each other” (254), they represent a contrast to the Enlightenment ideal of Man as a cultured creature who has risen above his inner instinct-driven beast. Red Peter also mentions that he and the men on the ship spat at each other’s faces and that “the only difference was that I [he] licked my [his] face and they did not” (255). As a bodily gesture of both species, this shared act of spitting can be read as another example of the shared corporeality between Man and animal. At the same time, Red Peter reverses the assumptions about practices of hygiene: it is the ape-man who cleans the spit from his face and not the sailors. Once again, Kafka highlights the ways in which kinds of behaviour are used to establish human/animal and culture/nature oppositions.

Both stories, “A Crossbreed” and “A Report to an Academy”, show how humans and animals negotiate their relationship in the anthropocentric order. The human-narrator recognizes vulnerability as a shared feature between him and the kitten-lamb but at the same time, he becomes aware of his limited access to the animal’s perception.
of the world. Red Peter addresses similar issues, but, unlike the narrator in “A Crossbreed”, he does so from a “third space perspective”, which enables him to expose different layers of human and ape identity.

The animal-narrators in “Investigations” and “Josephine” reflect on questions of species identity as well. Although humans are absent from their narratives, they draw the reader’s attention to other-than-human ways of making sense of the world. As sites of resistance, the bodies of the dog-narrator and Josephine oppose human notions of animal instinct and behavior, which is particularly apparent in the context of music.

The bodies of the seven musical dogs in “Investigations” are subjected to a force that remains unknown to the narrator who describes this scene of bodily subjection from an observing position:

But now from my hiding hole I saw, on looking more closely, that it was not so much coolness as the most extreme tension that characterized their performance; these limbs apparently so sure in their movements quivered at every step with a perpetual apprehensive twitching; as if rigid with despair the dogs kept their eyes fixed on one another, and their tongues, whenever the tension weakened for a moment, hung wearily from their jowls. It could not be fear of failure that agitated them so deeply; dogs that could dare and achieve such things had no need to fear that. Then why were they afraid? Who then forced them to do what they were doing? (282/283)

The dog evokes animal suffering as part of this musical performance when describing the twitching and trembling of bodies. He wonders about the origin of and the reasons behind this behavior, but his investigations do not provide answers. Instead, they present
readers with a decentering perspective on the presence or absence of affecting bodies. Moreover, in asking who instead of what forced the dogs to act this way, the dog-narrator opens up the possibility for the reader to reflect on human domination over other species. Consequently, the readers of “Investigations” are confronted with a narrative that evokes human (mis)treatment of animals and provides thought-provoking impulses to renegotiate the human/animal relationship.

The bodily expressions during Josephine’s musical performances illustrate the conflicting nature of her identity as a powerful as well as weak creature. Despite her dominant position within the community and the energy that derives from her song, the narrator describes her as a vulnerable, child-like, and “frail creature, needing protection” (365). She compensates this weakness with her song, which, at the same time, demands all her physical strength: “Josephine exerts herself, a mere nothing in voice, a mere nothing in execution, she asserts herself and gets across to us; it does us good to think of that.” (367) Her music enables her to claim a position of power because it is crucial to the identity of the mouse folk: “Josephine’s thin piping amidst grave decisions is almost like our people’s precarious existence amidst the tumult of a hostile world” (367). For the narrator, Josephine’s piping therefore embodies what it means to be a mouse. During her performances, she uses her whole body, presenting herself as the “savior of our [the] people” (366). Furthermore, she tries to resist the paternalism of the mouse folk through her singing and posture: “[...] she rises up and stretches her neck and tries to see over the heads of her flock like a shepherd before a thunderstorm” (366). Thus, her song is “a priceless weapon” (374) that allows her to express the identity she chooses for herself, namely as strong guardian and as sensitive and vulnerable artist.
However, Josephine’s song is also a life-threatening force because it weakens her body. Her performances drain her of all energy: “[…] as if while she is so wholly withdrawn and living only in her song a cold breath blowing upon her might kill her” (363). Moreover, the gathering of the people as a result of her singing exposes the mouse folk to danger:

[…] ‘how else could you explain the great audiences, especially when danger is most imminent, which have even often enough hindered proper precautions being taken in time to avert danger.’ Now, this last statement is unfortunately true, but can hardly be counted as one of Josephine’s titles of fame, especially considering that when such large gatherings have been unexpectedly flushed by the enemy and many of our people left lying for dead […] (370/371)

Although Josephine’s music puts herself as well as the entire mouse community at risk, it also represents a vital element of mouse identity, and her performances combine the two opposing elements of death and life. In addressing the possible “flushing out” of her “people”\(^\text{20}\), the narrator confronts the reader with the vulnerability of the body as a feature of shared species identity. Although humans are not named in the story, this imagery of dead bodies breaks down the binary between man and animal. At the same time, the narrator’s reference to “the enemy” evokes the animal/human hierarchy as it may very well be humans who seek to “flush out” the mice. Another possible interpretation is that the piping attracts the attention of cats who are often used by humans to eliminate mice. In either case, the story does not identify the agent of violence and so leaves open these multiple species interrelations.

\(^{20}\) “mancher der unserigen” (292) in the original German version (1994)
The role of music as a force that negatively affects the body is also present in “Investigations”:

[…] when the music started again, robbed me of my wits, whirled me around in its circles as if I myself were one of the musicians instead of being only their victim, cast me hither and thither, no matter how much I begged for mercy, and rescued me finally from its own violence by driving me into a labyrinth of wooden bars which rose around that place, though I had not noticed it before, but which now firmly caught me, kept my head pressed to the ground, and though the music still resounded in the open space behind me, gave me a little time to get my breath back. (282)

For a short moment, the dog’s body is subjected to a musical force like the seven performing dogs. A repressive and violent force, music acts upon the narrator’s body like an embodied agent would, throwing him around and keeping his head to the ground. To some extent, music is being deterritorialized and reterritorialized in a kind of becoming-animal. For example, the narrator also describes music as a tool for obtaining food, and therefore providing the body with energy: “two chief methods of procuring food; namely the actual preparation of the ground, and secondly the auxiliary perfecting processes of incantation, dance, and song” (303). While the “preparation of the ground”, referring to urination, represents instinctive animal behavior, the “processes of incantation” break with the Cartesian idea of the instinct-driven beast.

The dog’s fasting further contrasts this notion of animality and places subjectivity at the heart of the narrator’s canine identity:
I wished to prove that when I retreated before the food it was not the ground that attracted it at a slant, but I who drew it after me. This first experiment, it is true, I could not carry any farther; to see the food before one and experiment in a scientific spirit at the same time — one cannot keep that up indefinitely. But I decided to do something else; I resolved to fast completely as long as I could stand it, and at the same time avoid all sight of food, all temptation. (306)

In contrast to the scene of the musical dogs, the dog is not affected and acted upon by a powerful force, such as music, in this context. Instead, he resists the need to eat in order to show that dogs play an active role “drawing” their food after themselves. The dog comes to the conclusion that “voluntary fasting” is “the highest effort among us [the canine species]” (309). Fasting not only enables him to isolate his own body from the affects of other bodies, it is also part of the urge to better understand and question the formation of canine identity; the central theme of his narrative. Moreover, he describes this quest for a “canine truth” in relation to the body:

The hardest bones, containing the richest marrow, can be conquered only by a united crunching of all the teeth of all dogs. That of course is only a figure of speech and exaggerated; if all teeth were but ready they would not need even to bite, the bones would crack themselves and the marrow would be freely accessible to the feeblest of dogs. If I remain faithful to this metaphor, then the goal of my aims, my questions, my inquiries, appears monstrous, it is true. For I want to compel all dogs thus to assemble together, I want the bones to crack open under the pressure of their collective preparedness, and then I want to dismiss them to the ordinary life that they love, while all by myself, quite alone, I lap up the marrow. That sounds monstrous, almost as if I wanted to feed on the
marrow, not merely of a bone, but of the whole canine race itself. But it is only a metaphor. The marrow that I am discussing here is no food; on the contrary, it is a poison. (291)

The narrator’s description of this marrow as a kind of remedy as well as a poison, aligns with the concept of the *pharmakon* — a substance that combines these two opposing elements. According to Derrida:

> The *pharmakon* would be a substance [...] if we didn’t have eventually to come to recognize it as anti substance itself: that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, non essence, nonsubstance; granting philosophy by that very fact the inexhaustible adversity [literally, ‘othersidedness’] of what constitutes it and the infinite absence of what dissolves it. (1981, 70)

Read as a *pharmakon*, the marrow in the story functions as another “negative site of narration” (Norris), where canine identity is constantly being undone and reframed. In addition, the metaphor of bones that need to be cracked in order to expose the “richest marrow” can be read as a description of the hierarchical structure of an anthropocentric order in which animal bodies are denied agency. As part of the body as well as food source, the marrow evokes a stark image of animality in the context of carnivorism and the notion of the instinct-driven animal as predator or prey. In this way, the narrator reminds the reader of the ways in which animality is constructed in the context of predation and a hierarchical order that is based on the consumption of meat.
Red Peter creates strong imagery of flesh and vulnerability, but not around the theme of eating or animal predation like the dog narrator in “Investigations.” Instead, he describes a corporeal experience that highlights the trauma of keeping animals captive:

I was pinned down. Had I been nailed down, my right to free movement would not have been lessened. Why so? Scratch your flesh raw between your toes, but you won’t find the answer. Press yourself against the bar behind you till it nearly cuts you in two, you won’t find the answer. (253)

Red Peter takes his audience back to the scene of his first moments in captivity when the bars of the cage cut into his flesh and he was unable to turn around. By using the term “flesh,” he does not distinguish between human or ape body, and so creates the space of indistinction, where shared animality resides according to Deleuze and Guattari. At the same time, Red Peter uses the imperative, telling the audience to experience this pain for themselves, which shuts down the possibility of expressing his own pain verbally and points to the impossibility of language to convey traumatic experiences.

In his depictions of bodies that affect each other in multiple ways, Kafka uses elements of an anthropocentric language to reframe bodies in scenes where they can gain new meanings and break down animal/human hierarchies. In this regard, the reappropriation of anthropocentric vocabulary in the context of bodies and the scenes of vulnerable flesh remind the readers of their own “biopolitical knowledges” (McHugh). Introducing the readers to the body as a non-linguistic space, the texts relay different creaturely perspectives as a way of negotiating the human/animal relationship beyond humanist frameworks, while at the same time confirming and contradicting anthropocentric notions of animality.
Conclusion

According to Gillian Beer, the fact that literature has to make use of written language to include animals is “the central paradox for literature concerning itself with animals” (313). In her discussion of the possibilities of interpretation between humans and animals, she asks: “How is it possible to be true to animal experience, even if that were the wish, if your medium of description is written human language? Will empathy be possible? Is it not more honest to avoid claiming understanding?” (313) While it is important to critically reflect on the constraints of human language, I argue that literature can foster a more empathic human/animal relationship by bringing readers closer to the realities of other species.

As a fictional space, literature has the potential to combine forms of representing an other that are familiar to humans, such as autobiographical form, with new elements, such as animal responses that disrupt familiar concepts. In integrating creaturely responses, like silences or gestures, these texts create encounters between species that reach beyond humanist frameworks. Because literature is ambiguous and offers multiple readings, it can give rise to nuanced reflections on species identity that pave the way for further discussions about broader questions, such as animal ethics.

Consequently, scholars of literary theory contribute to the decentering of humans as the master subjects in following traces of animality within literary writing. My analysis of Kafka’s animots shows that literary texts can create a space for animals within the medium of written human language, in which readers become aware of the underlying structures of anthropocentrism. This further lays the foundation for new conceptions of the relationship between species and reflections on animal ethics. Although the stories
analyzed in this thesis do not discuss animal welfare or promote political activism, they offer a possible change of perspective to the reader by creating ruptures and blank spaces. This new perspective on Kafka’s animals can further destabilize the reader’s ideas about what it means to be human or animal.

Critics of this role of animals as starting points for broader philosophical reflections on the formation of humanity in relation to animality claim that such a perspective may run the risk of losing sight of the living conditions of animals outside the world of text. Donna Harraway’s remarks about Derrida’s reflections on the encounter with his cat illustrate this point of critique. Although he does not “fall into the trap of making the subaltern speak” (20), Haraway notes Derrida’s lack of interest for additional aspects of his cat:

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 intimately. (20)

Derrida provides a thorough analysis of the cat’s gaze and its implications for the human/animal relationship. Nevertheless, he does not consider scientific or biological aspects of the animal in front of him. However, Derrida establishes a new vocabulary to discuss the material realities of animals. In exposing the violent underpinnings of the language used to address “the animal question” and introducing new concepts to deconstruct human-centred terminologies, he calls for a change of thought that further offers decentred perspectives with regard to animal ethics. Kafka contributes to such alternative modes of thinking about animals in a similar way.
My close readings outline how Kafka’s *animots* provide a new set of terms for thinking about animals. This vocabulary emerges from the literary depictions of creatures who belong to different species, their unique modes of perception as vulnerable bodily creatures, and moments of species awareness. My readings of Kafka in relation to questions of the gaze, language, and bodies contribute to further discussions of literary animals in other texts by Kafka, such as his letters or diary entries, as well as comparative studies of other authors who breach questions of species identity. This master’s thesis therefore aims to inspire future critical zoopoetic analysis of different sets of a zoocentric vocabulary present in Kafka’s textual spaces in order to ultimately foster possibilities for empathy and a deeper understanding of different kinds of animal experience.
Bibliography

Primary Literature


Secondary Literature


