

**Animality and Alterity  
Species Discourse and the Limits of ‘the Human’ in Contemporary  
South African Art**

**Ruth Adele Lipschitz**

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**Goldsmiths  
University of London  
Department of Visual Cultures**

## Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed *R Lipschitz* Date 28-03-2015

Ruth Adele Lipschitz

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## Abstract

This thesis examines how the language of species pressures the construction of ‘the human’ in post-apartheid democracy in selected recent works by South African artists Nandipha Mntambo, Jane Alexander, Elizabeth Gunter and Steven Cohen. It responds to Achille Mbembe’s call for a “self-writing” that not only answers the historical and contemporary violence of animalisation, but opens onto an “ethics of mutuality.” However, while Mbembe’s “self-writing” criticises the Western model of the subject, it does not disturb what Jacques Derrida describes as its “sacrificial” or “carnophallogocentric” structure. My argument explores the ways in which these artworks trouble this structure through the ambiguous return of its constitutive sites of exclusion. The theoretical framework is informed by Derrida’s “metonymy of ‘eating well,’” Mbembe’s critique of necropolitical violence, Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection and Donna Haraway’s readings of inappropriate/d, interspecies relationality. The argument foregrounds the limitrophic complication of the political, psychoanalytic and ethical limits between self and other, human and nonhuman, edible and inedible bodies, and literal and figurative ingestions. In so doing, it marks alterity as the opening to a non-anthropocentric and relational subjectivity.

Chapter one deals with Mntambo’s re-articulation of black woman-human-animal and introduces the figure of the inappropriate/d subject as heterogeneous at the origin. Chapter two analyses the foreigner-as-animal in Jane Alexander’s uncanny *animot* and explores the hauntological and non-ethical opening to ethics that inhabits the constitutive violence of ‘eating well.’ Chapter three examines two drawings by Elizabeth Gunter and considers the how we touch the dead and are touched by them. Framing the thesis is a discussion of Steven Cohen’s performance piece, *Dance with Nothing but Heart*, which is used to position both the sacrificial logic of the subject as well as an ethics of mourning that writes the self-in-relation as the trace of the inappropriate/d.

## Contents

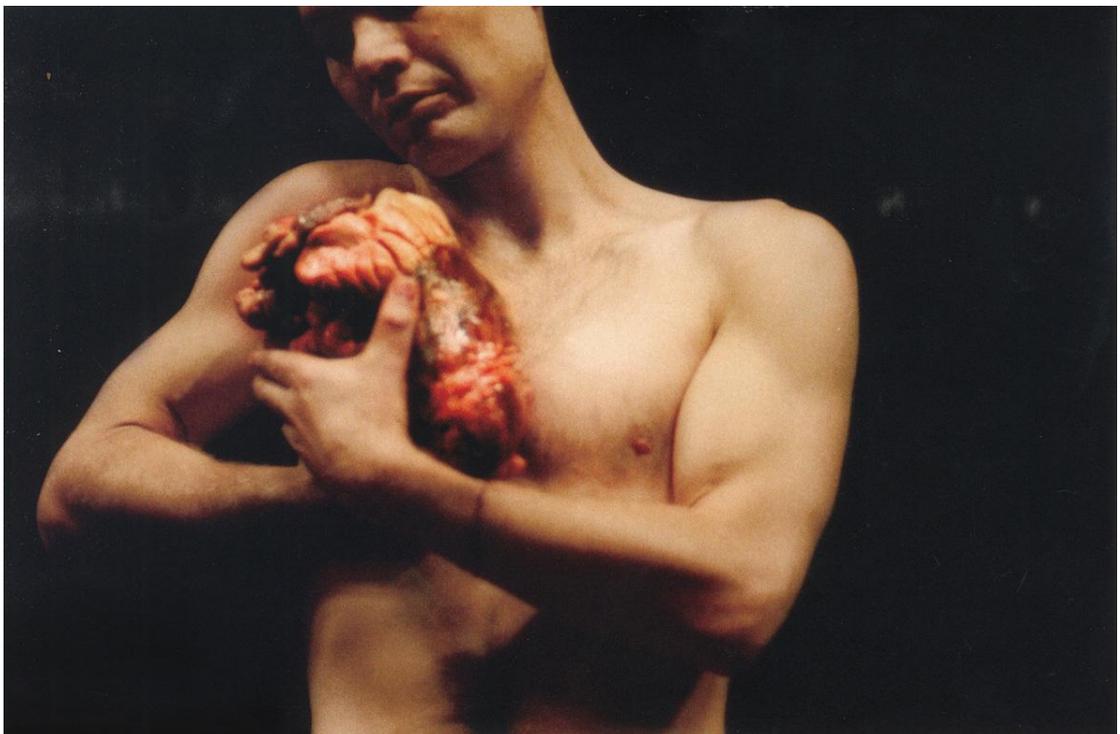
Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	5
List of Illustrations	7
Introduction	9
Chapter one Eating at the Origin: Rethinking the Subject through Nandipha Mntambo's woman/human/animal works	20
I. Introduction	20
II. "...the beast [feminine: <i>la bête</i> ] and the sovereign [masculine: <i>le souverain</i> ]"	28
III. 'The Dark Continent,' the deed, and the 'feminine beast'	34
IV. Skinned politics: animal death and colonial sovereignty	44
V. Animality and the abject	54
VI. Eating the m/other: cannibal subjects	62
VII. Reclaiming animality: <i>Europa</i> redux	78
Chapter two Spectres of the Inappropriate/d: Thinking Alterity with Jane Alexander's <i>Animot</i>	89
I. Introduction	89
II. Alexander's "uncanny beings"	92
III. Foreign bodies	103
IV. The problem of difference	111
V. Eating together	114
VI. <i>Security with traffic (influx control)</i>	117
VII. Ghosts, more than one	127
VIII. <i>Yield: "monstrous arrivant"</i>	133
Chapter three Towards an Ethics of Mourning: Touching with Elizabeth Gunter's <i>Rou</i>	139
I. Touching mourning	139
II. No touching	147
III. Appropriative consumption/ the work of mourning	157
IV. Mourning touch	163
Conclusion: An Ethics of Mourning	170
I. Introduction	170
II. "Show them your lack and your love"	174
III. Dancing with Death	176
Bibliography	178

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Steven Cohen, <i>Dance With Nothing But Heart</i> 2001	8
Figure 2 Steven Cohen, <i>Dance With Nothing But Heart</i> 2001	8
Figure 3 Nandipha Mntambo, <i>The Rape of Europa</i> 2009	15
Figure 4 Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) <i>Sunday Times</i> 3 April 2010	16
Figure 5 Nandipha Mntambo, <i>Beginning of the Empire</i> 2007	17
Figure 6 Nandipha Mntambo, <i>Silent Embrace</i> 2007	18
Figure 7 Nandipha Mntambo, <i>Europa</i> 2008	19
Figure 8 Jane Alexander, <i>Security with traffic (influx control)</i> 2007. Installation.	84
Figure 9 Jane Alexander, <i>Security with traffic (influx control)</i> 2007, detail with <i>Ghost</i> 2007	84
Figure 10 Jane Alexander, <i>Security with traffic (influx control)</i> 2007, detail with <i>Convoy (Trade)</i> 2007 and <i>Official</i> 2006-2007	85
Figure 11 Jane Alexander, <i>Security with traffic (influx control)</i> 2007, detail of <i>Custodian</i> 2005	86
Figure 12 Jane Alexander, <i>Frontier with ghost</i> 2007. Photomontage.	87
Figure 13 Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) <i>The Times</i> 30 May 2013	87
Figure 14 Jane Alexander, <i>Yield</i> 1997-2010. Installation.	88
Figure 15 Elizabeth Gunter, <i>Rou I</i> 2009	138
Figure 16 Elizabeth Gunter, <i>Rou II</i> 2009	138
Figure 17 Steven Cohen, <i>Dance With Nothing But Heart</i> 2001	168
Figure 18 Steven Cohen, <i>Dance With Nothing But Heart</i> 2001	168
Figure 19 Steven Cohen, <i>Dance With Nothing But Heart</i> 2001	169



**Figure 1** Steven Cohen, *Dance With Nothing But Heart* 2001. © Steven Cohen and David Krut Publishing 2013. Photographed by John Hodgkiss.



**Figure 2** Steven Cohen, *Dance With Nothing But Heart* 2001. © Steven Cohen and David Krut Publishing 2013. Photographed by John Hodgkiss.

## Introduction

“Full frontal poverty”<sup>1</sup>

*Dance With Nothing But Heart* (Figs. 1-2, 17-19, 2001) is a performance piece conceived by South African performance artist, Steven Cohen, and co-choreographed and danced by his long-time collaborative partner and lover, Elu. It is a work that presents, eloquently, simply, but also brutally, the core theoretical framework and rhetorical strategy of this thesis. My reading of it responds both to what Jacques Derrida calls the “calculation of the subject” that resides in the philosophical foundation of the Western humanist tradition, and Achille Mbembe’s call to reimagine the subject of the postcolony, or more acutely, of post-apartheid democracy, in the light of the historical and contemporary violence that this calculation has affected.<sup>2</sup> Mbembe’s critique of animalising violence and the violence of animalisation initiates my project’s desire to think ethics and politics of the subject ‘otherwise,’ from within the devalued and disavowed and indeed, sacrificed, animality that grounds it. While I discuss *Dance With Nothing But Heart* in greater detail in the thesis’ conclusion and reread the analytic frame through which I present here, it opens the thesis because it concatenates the key terms I use to complicate, trouble and disturb the presentation of a singular division between, as Derrida writes, he who calls himself ‘Man,’ and ‘Human,’ and that which he defines as ‘Animal.’<sup>3</sup>

Available now only through photographs and video stills, the performance of *Dance With Nothing But Heart* was accompanied by a warning in the programme notes for “full frontal poverty.”<sup>4</sup> There Cohen describes it as a piece without music, costume or

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Cohen, “Dance with Nothing but Heart,” *Q-Online*, Johannesburg, 8 March 2001. <http://web.archive.org/web/20061012004238/http://www.q.co.za/2001/2001/03/08-dance.html> accessed 14 September 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Eating Well, or the Calculation of the Subject (Interview with Jean-Luc Nancy),” in Jacques Derrida, *Points ...Interviews, 1974-1994*. Trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronell. Elizabeth Weber (ed.) Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, 255-287. Hereafter cited in the text as EW. Achille Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life.” *The Johannesburg Salon (Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism)* 4 (2011): 1. [http://jwtc.org.za/volume\\_4/achille\\_mbembe.htm](http://jwtc.org.za/volume_4/achille_mbembe.htm) accessed 2 March 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Trans. David Wills. Marie-Louise Mallet (ed.) New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Cohen, “Dance with Nothing but Heart,” *Q-Online*, Johannesburg, 8 March 2001. <http://web.archive.org/web/20061012004238/http://www.q.co.za/2001/2001/03/08-dance.html> accessed 14 September 2014.

choreography. It unfolds its deprivation as Elu dances, naked, across a bare stage and into the audience with nothing but an ox's heart, which he holds, cradles, and carries, and then tears open. Cohen describes the heart as the work's "only prop," hinting that the ox heart signifies lack.<sup>5</sup> Stripped down to nothing but 'heart,' in the words of the catalogue entry for this work in a recent publication, "*Dance With Nothing But Heart* is a commentary on Cohen and Elu's personal lack of funds as well as on the general lack of funding for contemporary dance in South Africa."<sup>6</sup> This interpretation seems to me to be an impoverishment of the work's aesthetic, its visual language and address, for the notion of meaning residing in a statement on the artists material sacrifice does not begin to account for the affect and violence of this work, a violence heightened by the contrast produced in the tenderness of Elu cradling of the heart (Fig.2). Instead, I want to figure its deprivation by way of the heart – that which is at once most alive for Elu, and most dead for the ox. Dancing flesh against meat, the contrast between Elu and the ox heart makes palpably and painfully real the fragile limit of shared embodiment and shared finitude. But the structure of deprivation that underpins the performance's organisation of the living and non-living as an economy of species, or rather, as a speciesist economy, marks out too the "sacrificial structure" that is the cornerstone of Derrida's concept of the calculability of the subject as human. That is, that the determination of 'the human' is, as he writes, a "matter of discerning... a place left open ...for a non-criminal putting to death of the other" (EW 278). Derrida traces the opening of this sacrificial logic to the dictum "Thou shalt not kill." Yet, as he states, the command not to kill has never been understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition in which it signifies as a prohibition on killing in general, only on the taking human life (EW 279). As such, it both addresses and institutes "man as other, the other as man" where "the other man is the subject" (EW 279). This sacrificial logic remains, as he writes, deeply humanist given that it cannot "*sacrifice sacrifice*" (EW 278). Or, in Cary Wolfe's words, the violent institution of the anthropocentric subject registers the limit of human through the sacrificial politics that designates the 'the animal' as killable and the animalistic as non-transcendent, base, or as Julia Kristeva will go on to say, abject.<sup>7</sup> And *Dance With*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> John Hodgkiss, "Works," in *Steven Cohen*. Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2003, 69.

<sup>7</sup> Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 6. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

*Nothing But Heart* is certainly an encounter with the ambiguity of abjection's intimacy with 'the animal.'

In opening up a space for non-criminal animal death, this sacrificial economy also opens the possibility in which the taken-for-granted appropriative consumption of the death of the other based on species can be transposed from 'the animal' to the animalised other of whichever species.<sup>8</sup> It is this transposition that Mbembe calls attention to in *On the Postcolony* when he refers to the organisation of the non-Western subject according to the "meta-text of the animal."<sup>9</sup> Mbembe's "metatext" occupies one pole of that which Wolfe and Jonathan Elmer model as a "species grid," which scales what is called 'humanity' and 'animality' along a single continuum ordered by a human/animal hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> Thus, on the one side of the calculation is an animalised animal, and on the other, a humanised human, and between, lurks the ambiguities of animalised humans and humanised animals.

Fleshing out these ambiguities, my thesis engages in what Derrida calls "another logic of the limit" or "limitrophy" that concerns, as he writes, "what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it."<sup>11</sup> In other words, a limitrophic analysis deconstructs the tyranny of the singular ontological difference between the human and nonhuman animal. It rejects the zero-sum game of the "metatext of the animal" which consigns the animal to negation and rewrites its one way traffic in a productive criticality which unravels the tensions pent up in this border policing. But this is a risky strategy, as my account of the socio-political ruptures and controversies that anchor each chapter testifies. Indeed, while Mbembe marks the necessity of engaging with that metatext and confronting its poverty, for him, 'the animal' remains so mired in its negation that it can offer no possible hope for disruptive re-articulation, and yet, re-articulation is precisely what needs to occur. For Mbembe, the reinstatement of the subject in a democracy marked by violence must respond with an "African mode of self-writing" that inhabits the uncertain and fragmented temporality of experience, but only inasmuch as it

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<sup>8</sup> Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfe and Jonathan Elmer, "Subject to Sacrifice: Ideology, Psychoanalysis and the Discourse of Species in Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs*" in Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 100.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29. Emphasis in original.

recognises the other as “fundamentally human.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast, I argue for an interpretative framework which sees in the complication of the limits between human and animal, between bodies that are killable and edible and those that are not, between the living and the dead, the possibility to rewrite the subject as nonanthropocentrically. This rewriting has the question of species at its base and draws on Donna Haraway’s concepts of inappropriate/d subjectivity and the relational co-constitution through which species meet, what Haraway calls “significant otherness.”<sup>13</sup> My use of Haraway’s framing of the “inappropriate/d” as a model for a subjectivity that does not close or immunise itself to the violence and violation of interruption is mirrored in my inscriptions of a subject that is riven by with differences at its heart. The multiplication of these differences and the always already heterogeneous self-relation is also figured in my use of Derrida’s neologism “*animot*” which takes aim against the brutalising abstraction of the reduction ‘the animal.’<sup>14</sup>

Central to the complications that I follow is Derrida’s use of a metonymy of nourishment for that which feeds and multiplies the porosity of those limits. The ethical and political complications that ensue from his “metonymy of eating well,” which he sets out in the interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, “Eating Well or the Calculation of the subject,” broaches the threshold where eating and taking in the other confounds the limit between edible and inedible bodies, between carnivorism and cannibalism, and does so by making the separation of literal and figural eating indeterminate. Internalising and troubling the orality at work in psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok’s work, Derrida sets out an ethical injunction that is ordered not according to who or what eats, but *how* – since, as he argues, we can neither regulate nor measure how much we internalise of the others with whom we identify.

Chapter one’s discussion of the trope of black body-woman-animal in Nandipha Mntambo’s work expands on the political and psychoanalytic relations of eating,

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<sup>12</sup> Achille Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing.” Trans. Steven Rendall. *Public Culture* 14 no.1 (2002): 239-273. Accessed 11 February 2008. DOI:10.1215/08992363-14-1-239.

Achille Mbembe, Oliver Mongin, Nathalie Lempereur, and Jean-Louis Schlegel, “Postcolonial Thought Explained to the French: An Interview with Achille Mbembe,” *Esprit* December (2006). Reprinted in *The Johannesburg Salon (Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism)* 1 (2009) accessed 2 March 2012. [http://www.jwvc.org.za/the\\_salon/volume\\_1/achille\\_mbembe.htm](http://www.jwvc.org.za/the_salon/volume_1/achille_mbembe.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 41.

abjection and animality that install and disturb the carnivorous violence of humanist and colonial sovereignty and do so in the ambiguous border that separates ‘the human’ from ‘the animal.’ I locate this ambiguity through Kristeva’s abjection. This chapter mines the sacrificial economy for the ways in which a thickened division between real and symbolic sacrifice, ingestion and introjection, living flesh and dead matter signals the return of un-devourable, inassimilable, and in Haraway’s terms, “inappropriate/d” female animal subject.<sup>15</sup>

Chapter two builds on the reading of Mbembe, Kristeva, Haraway and Derrida presented in the previous chapter. It explores the ways in which Jane Alexander’s non-normative human-animal embodiments imagine a non-anthropocentric subject that responds to the porous limits of its own abject constitution. I focus on Alexander’s recent installations and photomontages and interpret these as monstrous figurations of the inappropriate/d other: inappropriate, non-appropriable and ex-appropriative. In other words, I argue that Alexander’s foreign bodies articulate, to use Derrida’s words, a “certain inhumanity” that interrupts the auto-affective enclosure of the sovereign body of ‘the proper’ (EW 276). It is in relation to the promise that this monstrosity offers to the ‘not yet’ of Mbembe’s reimagined framing of the human as a discourse of mutuality and a democracy of life that I set out the uncanny spectrality of Alexander’s works. This is a promise in which, in “the metonymy of ‘eating well,’” the ethical is inherently tied to the political.

Chapter three returns to the complexities of eating but imagines them through the trace of the hauntological that I outline in chapter two. This chapter deals with Elizabeth Gunter’s drawings, both of which are titled *Rou*. It frames a move from a sacrificial economy of the subject to one caught in the interminable commitment to alterity, both of the other and of the self, and it is this that I figure as an ethics of mourning. The motivation for the chapter is to set out the ethical, psychoanalytic and political implications of a touching that has mourning at its heart. It is a set up that segues into

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<sup>15</sup> Donna J. Haraway, “Ecce Homo, Ain’t (Ar’n’t) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a post-Humanist Landscape,” in Judith Butler and Joan W. Smith (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*. London: Routledge, 1992, 86-100.

the conclusion, which returns to read the thickened relationality of mourning as an impossible wound in which the subject is other to itself.



**Figure 3** Nandipha Mntambo, *The Rape of Europa* 2009. Used with permission from the Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg 2015.



Figure 4 Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) *Sunday Times* 4 April 2010. © 2010 - 2015 Zapiro (All Rights Reserved). Printed/Used with permission from [www.zapiro.com](http://www.zapiro.com)



**Figure 5** Nandipha Mntambo, *Beginning of the Empire* 2007. Used with permission from the Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg 2015.



**Figure 6** Nandipha Mntambo, *Silent Embrace* 2007. Used with permission from the Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg 2015.



**Figure 7** Nandipha Mntambo, *Europa* 2008. Used with permission from the Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg 2015.

## Chapter one

### Eating at the Origin: Rethinking the Subject through Nandipha Mntambo's woman/human/animal works

#### I. Introduction

Nandipha Mntambo's *Rape of Europa* (Fig. 3, 2009) is a composite photograph depicting two naked female figures, both posed by the artist. The one figure lies on the ground with her arms spread out in a gesture of submission; the other, digitally covered in animal fur and wearing the horns and mane of a bull, kneels over her.<sup>1</sup> The scene refers to the sexual violence that follows Zeus' abduction and rape of Europa while disguised as a tame white bull and it recalls well-known art historical examples such as Titian's *Rape of Europa* (1559-1562). As Mntambo notes in an exhibition statement, its eroticised iconography of dominance and submission also draws on Picasso's Minotaur images and their overt masculinist heterosexuality.<sup>2</sup> Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa* encodes the familiar eroticised conventions of the Western theme of the female nude and presents the woman as an objectified spectacle laid out for the scopophilic pleasure of another. In the human/animal combination, this sexual content is mapped onto what Achille Mbembe describes as the "meta-text of the animal" through which the West imagines Africa.<sup>3</sup> *The Rape of Europa* thus presents a concatenated stereotype of both female sexuality and racist primitivism: an image of the black body as non-human, of the black woman as animal, of race and sex as both *of* and *in* the body, of the female body as mired in nature and of the black body caught in an animalising prehistory.

<sup>1</sup> From the outset then, the doubled figures within the work pose the question of animal nakedness – of skin and fur as a threshold condition. This is a point that circulates differently in relation to Mntambo's cowhide works, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> For her full statement on the exhibition "The Encounter," 16 April-30 May 2009, which included *The Rape of Europa*, see <http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/mntambo/index2009.htm> accessed 7 February 2011. Although the exhibition statements sometimes contain useful information about the making of the works, I have not followed Mntambo's own reading of her work. In her statement on "The Encounter," for example, Mntambo describes her interest in the multiple mythological narratives of the bull and her desire to take on the machismo of bull fighting. The idea sounds like a form of gender critique, but it stages a gender inversion that espouses a speciesist endorsement of the humanist privilege to enact oneself across the spectacle of unregistered animal suffering (this is especially evident in her statements regarding bull fighting). I note this here in order to establish that my aim is to think through the interrelation of race, gender and species and the forms of responsibility this produces. Or phrased differently, my focus is to disturb the framework in which race and gender require the debasement of species to produce a subject of rights and a programme of ethics founded on the strict division of legal and illegal consumptions of the other.

<sup>3</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 1. Subsequent references in this chapter will appear as OP in the text.

Inscribed in this primitivising take on the art-historical figures of Zeus, Europa and the Minotaur is Western civilisation and its bestial other, and all the hierarchical binaries this suggests: nature/culture; animal/human; black/white, female/male; savage/civilised; body/mind. Shades of the vexed history of Sarah Bartman (Saartjie Baartmann) and the Hottentot Venus/es loom large here and haunt this and other of Mntambo's confections of black woman and animal.<sup>4</sup> In both form and content, the image appears to install the masculinist and speciesist discourse of animalisation that reduces the sexualised black female body to a savage, deviant and exploitable carnality – a site and body of pure consumption. But this is only a seeming compliance: here the western logic of a conquering self that Titian's version veils as Zeus's lustful duplicity, is, to borrow a term that Stuart Hall uses elsewhere, "resignified" into a visual text that tracks, through in its own visual and citational doublings, the ways in which the West 'eats' its others.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as with the other Mntambo works I discuss in this chapter, *The Rape of Europa* explicitly *poses* a relation between women and animals, but it is one in which the interworking of sex, gender, race and species is more productive and ambiguous than may at first appear. *The Rape of Europa*, like the other Mntambo works I discuss, is an iteration that works within and against the speciesist language of sexual and racial

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<sup>4</sup> The explicit animalization of Sarah Bartman ties neatly into this coding of the animalized black female body. It also repeats the so-called 'race science' of Gobineau, Cuvier et al, who sought, in the physiological and ethno-anthropological investigation of 'African types' (Cuvier autopsied and dissected Bartman), verification of a biological determinism that confirmed their ideological fixation on 'human' and 'not-quite-human-enough' types. I signal this here as my focus is on the ways in which Mntambo's works address theoretical issues around violence, eating and animality that trouble the hierarchical division between human and animal (of which 'the Hottentot Venus' is a clear expression). There is an extensive bibliography on Saartjie Baartmann and other less well-known 'Hottentot Venuses'. For historical and art historical approaches to the reuse of Baartmann in contemporary art see, for example: Deborah Willis (ed.) *Black Venus: They Call Her Hottentot*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press and Chesham: Combined Academic, 2010; Yvette Abrahams, "Images of Sara Bartman: Sexuality, Race and Gender in early nineteenth-century Britain," in Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudri (eds.) *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historizing Gender and Race*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, 220-236; and Zine Magubane, "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus,'" *Gender and Society* 15 no. 6 (December 2001): 816-834. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081904> accessed 21 February 2009. Magubane and Abrahams are critical of Sander L. Gilman's "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12 no. 1 (1985): 202-242. See also Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of 'Hottentot' Women in Europe, 1815-1817," in Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (eds.) *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995, 19-48. For a recent approach, see Rebecca Tuvel, "'Veil of Shame': Derrida, Sarah Baartmann and Animality," *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* vol. IX no1-2 (2011): 209-229.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, "The After-life of Franz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin White Masks*?" in Alan Read (ed.) *The Fact of Blackness: Franz Fanon and Visual Representation*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996, 13-27.

animalisation and effects a rethinking of the concept of the consuming subject as a ‘conquering self’.

With this in mind, I argue that its display of gender, race and species, as well as its use of a politics of animalisation, is not coextensive with an ecofeminist critique of patriarchy’s animalisation of women and sexualisation of animals – what feminist-vegetarian/-vegan Carol J. Adams’ calls “the sexual politics of meat” – though, in some ways, it resonates with it.<sup>6</sup> My resistance to ecofeminism is twofold: first, Adams’ polemic is an activism and not a reading practice, and as such, is tied to a stability of meaning that is at odds with the effects of ambiguity, formal doubling, abjection and contradiction that Mntambo’s visual language elicits, especially in those works whose material is more obviously tied to animal death. Second, Adams’s thesis of interconnected oppressions prizes a levelling sameness above all else, and in doing so offers a politics of liberation based on an abhorrent equalisation of what are, in fact, deeply unequal forms of oppressions and commodification.<sup>7</sup> The central tenet of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, for example, suggests that there is no difference between the visual objection/fragmentation and consumption of sexualized women and the literal butchery and dismemberment of animals. In recent publications and interviews, Adams refers to Derrida’s carnophallogocentrism as a philosophical or theoretical counterpart to her own feminist-vegan activism. However, the denial of difference that lies at the heart of her project disables and invalidates any congruity she might find between her ideas and Derrida’s. Moreover, in the absence of difference and *différance*, she proposes a calculable relation between the ethical and political that is rooted in her

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<sup>6</sup> Carol J. Adams, “Preface to the Twentieth Anniversary Edition of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*” in Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. London: Continuum, [1990] 2010, 4. See also Carol J. Adams, “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?” *Feminism and Psychology* 20 no.3 (2010): 304. Her early texts employ the term feminist-vegetarian; recent writings use feminist-vegan. On this issue, critics frequently note that Mntambo is a vegetarian (for example, Hilary Prendini Toffoli’s “Encounters with cowhide” *The Saturday Star*, May 2-3, (2009): 13). In conversation at the Stevenson Gallery on 21 April 2009, Mntambo said that neither animal ethics nor animal rights motivate her vegetarianism, nor did she admit to any interest in the human/ nonhuman animal binary or a feminist-vegetarian position.

<sup>7</sup> I will return to this point later in the chapter but for an example of such a position, see Carol J. Adams, “An Animal Manifesto: Gender, Identity and Vegan-Feminism in the Twenty-First Century,” *Parallax* 12 no.1 (2006): 123. On vegan-feminism as a politics of equality, see Adams, “Preface to the Twentieth Anniversary Edition,” 1, also Adams, “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?” 315, as well as the introduction to Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (eds.) *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. London: Duke University Press, 2006, 3.

background in feminist consciousness-raising, resistance, solidarity and empowerment.<sup>8</sup> For Adams, all that is needed to “end ...predatory consumption” is for the male subject to renounce his complicity in patriarchy’s meat-eating culture and its objectifying consumption of both women and animals (an objective achievable through effective political outreach).<sup>9</sup> Yet as Derrida’s interview “Eating Well” reminds us, the singular line between real and symbolic eating, between human and nonhuman, living and nonliving and edible and inedible bodies is always-already compromised. There can be no ‘outside’ to this carnivorous relation and thus no way for the subject to side step implication in the violent appropriations of the other (EW 281). Thus Adams is plainly mistaken when she literalises Derrida’s framing of “eating well” as a call to veganism.<sup>10</sup>

Although Derrida’s description of a foundational virile and phallic carnivorism is superficially similar to Adams’ thesis, his critique of the humanist foundation of the Western subject is antithetical to her project. Instead of a programmed manifesto of action, Derrida’s “metonymy of ‘eating well’” is a philosophical-psychoanalytic elaboration of an oral ethical relationality that reframes the question of the subject beyond the ‘what’ or ‘who’ that is eaten. As Derrida argues, since one “must eat,” at issue in this real and symbolic carnivorism is a hospitality towards the other “whom one eats and lets oneself be eaten by” (EW 282). This accounts for the necessity (the excessive ethical responsibility) that underpins the “rule” that is to “eat well/eat the good” (*il faut bien manger*) (EW, 282). Eating in this expanded, relational, sense engages an ethics in which the relation between self and other is not prefigured by a species-specific assessment of which lives matter and which bodies do not. In what Derrida calls a “limitrophic” reading, the single dividing line between human and nonhuman is folded over into a multiplied co-implication of self and other that no longer supports the sacrificial division between criminal and noncriminal death: a liminality that Derrida describes as “thickened” and Kelly Oliver, after him, as

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams writes, “Feminist-vegetarian activity declares that an alternative worldview exists, one which celebrates life rather than consuming death; one which does not rely on resurrected animals but empowered people” (197). See also Adams, “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?” 315.

<sup>9</sup> Adams, “Preface to the Twentieth Anniversary Edition,” 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, Adams, “Preface to the Twentieth Anniversary Edition,” 5-6 and Carol J. Adams, “The Politics of Carol J. Adams: An Interview with Annie Potts,” *Antennae* 14, (Autumn 2010): 13. In “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?” Adams admits “the question of what it means to eat well” is one she has not resolved, but “certainly veganism is part of the answer” (312).

“curdled”.<sup>11</sup> In her analysis of this “limitrophy,” Oliver reminds us of the etymological troping of *trophe* as nourishment and nutrition as well as trophy, the spoils of conquest (AL 126). And it is in relation to the coagulation of the limit that grows between life and death that the political, psychoanalytic and ethical complication of the separation between self and other, returns us to the problematic of the subject.

My argument is informed by Derrida’s “Eating Well” interview and its deconstruction of the persistent humanism and sacrificial culture that underpins the question of the subject. In addition, I draw on Mbembe’s analysis of the question of the subject in the African postcolony. The use of speciesism in the politics of racial debasement makes reiterating the language of species in relation to questions of race and subjectivity in postcolonial and postapartheid contexts a risky approach. More than that, critical reiteration re-enacts the thorny relation between postcolonialism and deconstruction.<sup>12</sup> As Robert J.C. Young notes, there is a tendency in post-liberationist postcolonialism to mistrust deconstructive analytic practices because these draw, albeit critically, on the very forms of Western power-knowledge that produce colonial thinking.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, Young writes, deconstruction is mistaken as complicit with Western imperialism: Helen Tiffin, for example, observes that for all its benefits, deconstruction remains “the handmaiden of repression” – unable to effect real change or a politics of postcolonial agency.<sup>14</sup> As Young points out, this dismissal is based on a view of deconstruction (and poststructuralism more generally) as a mere extension of Eurocentric thought rather than taking into account its anti-Western and non-European origins. Deconstruction, he argues, is a theoretical foreign body that profoundly unsettles Western metaphysics’ and imperialism’s founding principles.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29; Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us To Be Human*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 126. Further references given in the text as A and AL respectively, followed by the page number.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler’s reading of an article version of Mbembe’s “On the Postcolony” makes a point of calling attention to Mbembe’s use of Eurocentric (French) theory in order to elaborate a postcolonial approach to Africa that is neither recuperative (nativist) or Afro-radical (Marxist). See Judith Butler, “Mbembe’s Extravagant Power,” *Public Culture* 5 (1992): 67-74.

<sup>13</sup> Robert J.C. Young, “Deconstruction and Postcolonialism” in *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide*. Nicholas Royle (ed.) Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000, 189-91.

<sup>14</sup> Tiffin is cited in Young, “Deconstruction and Postcolonialism,” 191. No further bibliographic detail is given. Young cites Tiffin, Benita Parry and Ajaz Ahmad as proponents of this belief.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 190. Young argues that both structuralism and poststructuralism are rooted in the politics of displacement that pervades the work of, amongst others, Mikhail Bakhtin, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Franz Fanon. With this in mind, he takes note of the events of May

Deconstruction's sustained politico-ethical insistence on rupture and the necessary impossibility of exteriority, totality and purity in identity, position or politics is central to my thinking of a non-anthropocentric subject in the discussion that follows. For, while the South African constitution lays claim to human rights in order to recover marginalised identities from the ruins of colonial and apartheid subjectivity, and aims to assert a politics of liberated identity, after deconstruction and the epistemic violence of psychoanalysis more generally, there can be no 'pure' or 'original' subject to recover. De-ontologising the subject though does not void any notion of subjectivity, politics and history. Rather, as Homi K. Bhabha's and Mbembe's examples bear out, it suggests that the subject's fabled origins are products of a metaphysical, political and psychoanalytic investment in structures of fantasy and desire, identification and difference that are always already rooted in, as Derrida would put it, the ethical decision of the 'who' based on which lives matter.<sup>16</sup>

In *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe analyses what he calls a failure of conceptual thinking on Africa.<sup>17</sup> He argues that the ethical demand to rewrite the subject cannot be fulfilled through a postcolonial identity politics because the latter does not engage with the question of the subject in terms of its foundational violence. Identity politics merely internalises and perpetuates the Western organisation of the subject and the temporal, philosophical, embodied and symbolic "bonds of subjection" that it extend from it (OP 14). For this reason, Mbembe diagnoses that the subject of the postcolony is enslaved not only to the political and economic aftermath of colonisation, but to its replicated forms. These produce the "macabre conviviality" that bind the postcolony's potentate to his subjects in a gluttonous feast of violence, phallic domination and death (OP 187). While Mbembe's analysis usefully highlights the relation between modalities of eating and violence, his point is also that in the contemporary postcolony, the formations of power and the modes of being these narrate are still structured by colonial rationality or

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1968 but the Algerian War of Independence as the pivotal moment in the emergence of anti-hegemonic structuralist and poststructuralist philosophy.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, 74.

<sup>17</sup> *On the Postcolony*'s aim is "to force Africa to face up to itself in the world" (14). Mbembe's thesis is not a call for a counter-hegemonic politics of resistance. Rather, it is a demand for 're-imagination' based on a performative deconstruction of the concepts of "time, the bonds of subjection, the ways domination is validated, the collapse of historic 'possibles,' or their extensions, the symbolic constitution of the world, constraint and terror as the limits of what is human and relations of transcendence and finitude" (14).

“*commandement*” that is itself fundamentally tied to the Western metaphysics of the subject (OP 111). Mbembe’s cycle of violence does not deny the possibility of narrating an autonomous subject, but it seeks to do so through Franz Fanon’s lesson of the self-alienation of colonial relations. Fanon argues that the violence that penetrates and lives in the thickened folds of experience is an embodied “entanglement” of the political and psychical that works on and through the bodies of the enslaved (OP 14).<sup>18</sup> There can be no recoverable subject to re-emerge un-entangled from this history. Indeed, the methodological problematic of Mbembe’s book is whether it is possible to rethink the subject from within the persistent conceptual and fictional deformations of colonial subjectivity. That is, to see the subject as an experience of “multiple *durées*” which are discontinuous and overlapping, and not bound to the figure of servitude and the tropes of “victimisation and *ressentiment*” that plague the postcolonial ideologies of authentic but traumatised subjects (OP 15). Only in playing out the embodied entanglement of devouring can the subject of the postcolony, he suggests, write itself as an “ex-slave” (OP 237). This act of self-writing is, moreover, caught in a future-oriented and death-infected time of “the not yet,” in which the subject is neither present nor absent, but as he puts it, in the “process of ‘being formed’ and of ‘being dissolved.’”<sup>19</sup> In this sense, Mbembe’s subject of the “not yet” responds to an opening that is suggestive of both Kristeva’s notion of abjection and of the interruptive heterogeneity of the remainder, the trace of a Derridian ethical responsibility that is conditioned by an infinite hospitality to that which is both past and ‘to come.’

Mbembe’s “not yet,” as a formation in which subjectivity and ethics are in process and unresolved, has another resonance. To borrow what David Wood writes in relation to carnophallogocentrism, Mbembe’s *commandement*, while pervasive and powerful, is not a formation of violence against which no form of resistance or accountability is

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<sup>18</sup> Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Paladin 1970. Fanon describes a narration of self that is internally alienated through the exteriorisation of race – I will return to this concept later in this chapter. Taking Freud’s notion that the ego is a bodily formation, Fanon argues that the experience of blackness in colonial society is “solely a negating activity... a third person consciousness” (78). Assailed from without by racist stereotypes, the black man, he writes, experiences his body and skin as a “corporeal malediction” and seeks to adopt the white mask of the West. But this assimilation is illusory (79). On the notion of a skin ego that extends Freud’s thesis, see Didier Anzieu, *Skin Ego*. Trans. Chris Turner. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Achille Mbembe in Christian Höller, “Africa in motion: an interview with the postcolonialism theoretician Achille Mbembe”. *Springerin* 3 2 (2005) [http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft\\_text.php?textid=1195&lang=en#fussnoten](http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1195&lang=en#fussnoten) accessed 21 April 2010. See also Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing,” 239-73.

possible.<sup>20</sup> Incorporating Wood's challenge to carnivorous hegemony in the context of re-imagining the subject in the postcolony is not coincidental. Indeed, as I show, the colonial *commandement*, and the forms of colonial sovereignty it produces and supports, emerge in and reaffirm a carnophallogocentric network of power whose vectors intersect and gain their vocabulary of domination and submission through the language of species. But my focus on the reuse of animalisation in Mntambo's works does not propose that they align and equalise racial, sexual and species oppression and violence. Rather, I argue that the Western organisation of the subject deploys race, sex and species as what Judith Butler calls asymmetrical relations of power, which, in requiring each other for their articulation, also create spaces of ambiguity and intervention.<sup>21</sup> How then to rewrite a denigrated subject except through what amounts to a performative deconstruction of the hegemonic fictions used to deny subjectivity to both the black body and the animal body.<sup>22</sup> In Mntambo's artworks, I argue, the questions of racial, sexual and species difference, and the real and symbolic structures of violence, eating, as well as of abjecting the other who is made 'animal,' are not only central, but opened up in troubling, ambiguous and excessive ways.

Although Mbembe offers a critique of the West's metaphysical discourse of animality and its politics of dehumanisation, he never poses speciesism itself as a problem. Instead, Mbembe theorises from within the Western metaphysical tradition in which 'the animal' *is* not. So entrenched is this negation that for him, 'the animal' can be nothing other than the vehicle for elaborating the racial politics of animalisation in the colonial and postcolonial attribution of 'the human.' In this sense, a speciesist politics of difference is collapsed into a generalised symptom of racism and the animal body is

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<sup>20</sup> David Wood, "Comment ne pas manger," in H. Peter Steeves (ed.) *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology and Animal Life*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex.'* London: Routledge, 1993, 18.

<sup>22</sup> At a recent conference organised by Tamar Garb on South African contemporary photography, "Figures & Fictions: The Ethics and Poetics of Photographic Depictions of People," 24-25 June 2011, Sackler Centre for Arts Education (Victoria and Albert Museum, London), Mbembe criticised much contemporary South African art for what he called its dead-end citational politics. He suggested that this is symptomatic of a widespread "failure of imagination" in postapartheid South Africa. My sense is that Mbembe's diagnosis reflects an institutionalisation of performativity as a style and an end in itself rather than a means of reiterated address. Although he does not use Derridian language, I think that his call to re-imagine the organising questions of social, cultural and political life demands a creative response to, and negotiation of, the aporetic conditions of justice, democracy, hospitality, and hence, of subjectivity and responsibility.

erased.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, I want to assert species difference as *the* politico-psychoanalytic problematic of the subject. I read Mntambo's work in terms of the ways in which it inscribes and disturbs that formation of carnophallogocentric subjectivity called 'human' across the bounds of race, sex and species. In the first section, I trace the elisions and instrumentalisation of 'the animal' in the speciesist political and psychoanalytic frames of origin that Mntambo's works suggest. I then analyse the artworks in order to complicate the human/animal binary through abjection and the hyperbolic ethical responsibility (which is also a politics) inscribed in Derrida's "metonymy of eating well." In doing so, I produce the abjected, wounded body of the 'ex-slave' as an animal that writes itself in ways that open the temporality of the "not yet" to an "inappropriate/d" otherness that is not species-specific.<sup>24</sup> Untied from humanist sovereignty and its self-authorising expression, this is an alterity that finds its script in non-normative embodiments and in the persistence of the remainder. Despite its formal contiguity to the sacrificial logic of the subject, this script is not available for reuse in service of the politics of speciesist violence.

II. "...the beast [feminine: *la bête*] and the sovereign [masculine: *le souverain*]"<sup>25</sup>

*The Rape of Europa* is not the most complex of Mntambo's works that I will discuss but I begin with it for two reasons, both of which are tied to the work's visual repetition of the trope woman-animal-human and to the ethical and political questions of alterity it opens. First, it sets up a strategy of formal doubling and critical iteration that gains complexity in the works in which slaughterhouse products such as cowhide are used. This doubling includes Freud's temporality of the primitive so that the political and psychoanalytic border-forming moments of 'the human' are exercised through the same

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<sup>23</sup> On this problem more generally, see Cary Wolfe, "The Animal Turn," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 2 (2011): 1-12.

<sup>24</sup> This is not in any sense a recuperation of the lost voice of the marginalised or animalised. Rather, to prefigure my argument, it is the interruption produced by the abjected otherness that shapes and violates the borders of subjectivity and sociality. Kristeva's abject is, among other things, mobilised as a figuration of alterity that that violates any notion of a unified subject. Always in-process/on trial, this model of thought metaphorically extends its thickened non-normativity into *différance*, and read together, produces an embodied subjectivity that opens onto the ethico-political conditions for responsibility which Haraway points to through the "inappropriate/d other" and Derrida, through his *animot*. I will discuss Haraway's use of "inappropriate/d other" as an "eccentric subject" in this chapter's conclusion. For the "animot" as a figure of interruption, see chapter two.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* vol.1. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009, 1.

horizon of speciesist separation. Second, because the image was at the centre of a recent controversy in which species discourse played out both as a metaphor of racist and speciesist debasement and as a site of reimagining the subject. However, the stated problem in this controversy was not race or animalisation. What was so objectionable, at least on the surface, was the problem of sex. But since both the image's doubling of the black female body and its postcolonial and psychoanalytic frames of reference pose racial and sexual difference as a question of species difference, what is at issue is precisely the human/nonhuman animal hierarchy and a critical rethinking of the speciesist, racist and sexist foundation of the subject. In *The Rape of Europa* as well as in the debate itself, the question of species is the unacknowledged, even disavowed, term.

*The Rape of Europa's* controversial outing starts on the 9 August 2009 when (then) Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulama (Lulu) Xingwana, walked out of the exhibition, "Innovative Women: Ten Contemporary Black Woman Artists," after just a few minutes of pre-opening browsing. "Innovative Women" received partial funding by the Ministry of Arts and Culture and was exhibited at Constitution Hill, a heritage site as inextricably tied to South Africa's racially violent colonial and apartheid past as it is to its present and future democracy.<sup>26</sup> It opened on Women's Day and was promoted as dealing with issues affecting women's rights in contemporary South Africa. Xingwana, the guest the honour, was to give the opening address. In her absence, however, her speech was read out by her spokesperson, Lisa Combrink. Some months later, when Xingwana's private reaction became public, she released a statement condemning the exhibition's inclusion of "naked bodies presumably involved in sexual acts:" imagery that she called "pornographic."<sup>27</sup> Objecting to Mntambo's work as well as lesbian activist Zanele Muholi's photographs of embracing lesbian couples, Xingwana said: "Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. ...the exhibition ...it was immoral, offensive and going (sic) against nation-building."<sup>28</sup> In order to distance

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<sup>26</sup> Constitution Hill is home to the colonial Old Fort, apartheid era Women's Jail, as well as the postapartheid Constitutional Court, the protector of South Africa's nonsexist, nonracial, democratic constitution. It also houses an art collection and is used as an exhibition space.

<sup>27</sup> Her bristly reaction was leaked to the press nearly seven months after the fact. Her statement appears on <http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/Innovative-Women.aspx> accessed 1 March 2010.

<sup>28</sup> See Sally Evans, "Minister slams 'porn' exhibition" 1 March 2010, <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/article332784.ece> ; Verashni Pillay, "Xingwana: But is it art?" *Mail and Guardian*, 4 March 2010, <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-03-04-xingwana-but-is-it-art>; Gail Smith,

herself from criticism that her views are homophobic and discriminatory, Xingwana located her revulsion squarely in front of *The Rape of Europa*, or as she put, “the image called ‘Self-rape.’”<sup>29</sup> Resurrecting the art versus pornography debate in relation to female nudity, and, railing against the exposure of children and families to ‘such imagery,’ Mntambo’s work, she said, not only trivialises the widespread sexual violence against women in South Africa, but stereotypes all women.<sup>30</sup>

It is a spurious argument on many levels and it would be easy to dismiss Xingwana’s response to these images as merely the reactionary outrage of a political conservative or as evidence of one unfamiliar with what Stuart Hall calls the “politics of resignification” in some contemporary art practices.<sup>31</sup> But her ideas are so patently dangerous a threat to the constitutional rights protecting same-sex partnerships and freedom of expression that she, as a member of the government, swore to uphold, that it is worth taking her seriously.<sup>32</sup> It is worth it not only because her vision of social cohesion is rooted in the kind of heteronormative African patriarchy in which homosexuality is ‘unAfrican’ (a view that fuels the ‘corrective rape’ and murder of lesbians). But also, because this homosocial preference for heteronormativity is informed by a pervasive speciesism whose animalising consequences legislate the very racist, homophobic and sexist discrimination that the humanist political discourse of the subject of rights is supposed to disavow, as satirist Zapiro’s (Jonathan Shapiro) political cartoon of Zimbabwe’s

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“Minister shoots self in foot” *City Press* 7 March 2010, <http://www.citypress.co.za/SouthAfrica/Features/Minister-shoots-self-in-foot-20100307>. Also “Straying from the spirit: Lulu Xingwana and ‘Innovative Women’,” <http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/Straying-from-the-spirit.aspx> 11 March 2010; Lerato Mogoatlhe, “Fanning the flames of sexual oppression,” *City Press*, 14 March 2010, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Gabeba Baderoon’s open letter to the minister offers a more conventional take on this controversy: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-03-09-on-looking-and-not>. Lulu Xingwana is still in government. She is now Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities.

<sup>30</sup> Lulu Xingwana press release, published on <http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/Innovative-Women.aspx> accessed 1 March 2010.

<sup>31</sup> On Stuart Hall’s politics of resignification and its use in contemporary art, see Kianga K. Ford, “Playing with Venus: Black Women Artists and the Venus Trope in Contemporary Visual Art,” in Willis (ed.) *Black Venus*, 96-106.

<sup>32</sup> Criticism included calls for her to resign and apologise. Facebook pages were set up to campaign against her, for example, “We don’t need a homophobic, bigoted Minister of Arts and Culture!!” <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=369831496829&v=wall> accessed 10 March 2010. See also “Minister of Intolerance and Prejudice” <http://www.mambaonline.com/article.asp?artid=4213> accessed 10 March 2010 and “Dark Times for South African Arts and Culture” <http://www.thedailymaverick.co.za/article/2010-03-08-analysis-dark-times-for-south-african-arts-and-culture> accessed 10 March 2010.

political negotiations pointedly underscores (Fig. 4).<sup>33</sup> It is worth asking, therefore, what is it in *The Rape of Europa* that so threatens the minister's vision of social cohesion? What is so 'obscene,' so violating, that it offends women, the image of the nation, and the heteronormative subject and forms of embodiment that attend to it?

Xingwana's response is buffered by a notion of an unmarked and universal human sovereignty that pivots on the repression of difference. For underpinning any reading of *The Rape of Europa* as an image of self-rape or as against nationhood and all women, is an anxiety over what Derrida calls the "silent but insistent" coupling of human/animal and masculine/feminine that haunts the question of the sovereign subject.<sup>34</sup> In this context, Xingwana's assessment of the image as "a sex act with a nature scene as a backdrop" evidences not only a stretched iconography but also a knee-jerk recourse to a rhetoric of 'obscenity.' As Donald Downs notes, the notion of the 'obscene' etymologically refers to not only "those things considered disgusting, offensive, filthy, foul, repulsive" but also "to making public that which society deems should be hidden."<sup>35</sup> This latter notion of the obscene as "*ob-scaena*" – as that which is off-stage and which should not be seen – bears uncanny similarity to Freud's definition of the *unheimlich* as that "class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."<sup>36</sup> It is a resemblance all the more potent given that what is obscene in this sense is precisely the doubling of sexual into animal difference and the political-psychoanalytic risks to the separation of self/ other this embodiment suggests.

Xingwana's outrage is therefore directed not against the imagined spectre of pornography: the corruption of children and heteronormative sexuality that she thinks she sees in *The Rape of Europa*. Rather, its target is the uncanny appearance of female animality, which, in the anthropocentric schema of the subject that Xingwana clings to, can only be seen as the female subject's deliberate, masochistic self-violation. Recast

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<sup>33</sup> Zapiro's cartoon (*The Sunday Times* 3 April 2010, 10) uses speciesism to satirise the way the belief that homosexuality is 'unAfrican' unites political rivals in Zimbabwe, a view repeated in homophobic violence in South Africa, and legislated in Malawi and Uganda, among others.

<sup>34</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Xingwana's assessment of the iconography is cited in Mogoatlhe, "Fanning the flames," 3. Donald Downs, *The New Politics of Pornography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, 9. Downs writes that the "Latin root *obscenus* means 'ill-omened' or 'adverse'" but also "*obscaena*, or 'not for stage'" (9).

<sup>36</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock. London: Penguin, 2003, 124.

as self-rape, the image is one of a species intermixture that de-humanises the self-identical subject of rational democracy at precisely the moment (Women's Day) and the site (Constitution Hill) where the racialised and gendered postapartheid subject claims and commemorates her hard-won, nonracist, nonsexist political sovereignty as both citizen and 'human.' In this light, Xingwana's 'revulsion' is not about the supposed 'immorality' of the image but a fraught attempt to shore up the animal breach in the seeming 'purity' of the unmarked human(ist) subject. Except, as feminist scholarship teaches us and Haraway, for example, writes, humanity's "generic universal" is not unmarked but masculine.<sup>37</sup> In its carnophallogocentric schema, as Derrida puts it, it is assigned first to "man (*homo* and *vir*)" and then reset as a conditional and positional formation along a seemingly self-validating universalist scale that authorises not only gender but also racial and species difference (EW 278).

Paradoxically, in valorising humanist exceptionalism as a political model of the subject, Xingwana's stated efforts to protect all women from 'unAfrican' and 'illegitimate' sexuality as well as 'rape-inducing' 'pornography' in effect delimits a patriarchal frame of the subject that is organised entirely around a carnophallogocentric determination of the self.<sup>38</sup> Rather than a liberated partner in nation-forming democracy, this schema inserts 'woman' into Wolfe and Elmer's "grid of species" defined at its poles by the subject-existence of the "humanised human" and the object-being of the "animalised animal."<sup>39</sup> That is, Xingwana's argument reinforces, in a manner akin to Simone de Beauvoir, a somatophobia in which woman is still too tied to her species-being, her supposed innate animality, to be a full and equal subject – a condition she might attain were she able to, as de Beauvoir might say, purify herself of her "animal odours."<sup>40</sup> Unable to transcend the abject bounds of her animal body, she cannot fully embrace

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<sup>37</sup> Haraway, "Ecce Homo," 86-100.

<sup>38</sup> And in that formation, as Zapiro's cartoon shows, purely and proudly, indeed, postcolonially, African. On the phallus as organiser of both colonial and African sovereign power, see Mbembe's *On the Postcolony*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Wolfe and Elmer in Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 100.

<sup>40</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Random House 1949, 158. Beauvoir writes: "woman becomes plant, panther, diamond, mother-of-pearl, by blending flowers, furs, jewels, shells, feathers with her body; she perfumes herself to spread the aroma of the lily and the rose. But feathers, silk, pearls and perfumes serve also to hide the animal crudity of her flesh, her odor (sic)." Oliver's analysis of de Beauvoir's ambivalent relation to animals suggests that de Beauvoir uses animals to anchor the circumstances of women's historical and social vulnerabilities and thereby establishes the possibility of a gendered solidarity across species. However, de Beauvoir also enforces an absolute human/animal distinction in the hope that women might transcend their mere reproductive animality and become part of the 'properly' creative fraternity of men. See Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 155-74.

reason or the “self-limitation” that defines what Mbembe calls the West’s “romance of sovereignty.”<sup>41</sup> This romance guarantees a unitary subject who possesses “absolute fullness and finality of consciousness” and which lays the ground for an imperialist discourse of domination.<sup>42</sup> Or as Derrida puts it, one whose classical metaphysics of presence erects precisely the hierarchy of exclusions that returns the West to itself as the ordering foundation of the ‘properly human:’ what Derrida, and Young after him, calls “white mythology.”<sup>43</sup> For Derrida, “white mythology” is a discourse of the “selfsame” that “has erased within itself the fabulous scene that produced it,” though it is not without challenge.<sup>44</sup> Extrapolating from Mbembe’s and Young’s analyses of the colonial subject in the light of reason’s Western bias, “white mythology” is a formation that sees man claim his ‘true’ freedom and autonomy in a purified form of self-origination, and in this auto-affection and self-mastery, also the right, authority and power to name ‘the animal’ and thus to enact colonialism’s ‘civilizing’ mission.

The subject of this “white mythology” is a carnophallogocentric formation whose will to dominate produces what Mbembe will call a “necropolitical” sovereignty that has power to distribute death (N 11). I will return to Mbembe’s point soon, but first I want to tie in the biopolitical and the carnophallogocentric. This is to underscore that sovereignty here is not an archaic political formation supplanted by later biopolitical formations of power (as Foucault would have it). Instead, it is the normative core of a humanism whose conquering essence is colonial because it is carnivorous, and whose

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<sup>41</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics.” Trans. Libby Meintjes. *Public Culture* 15 no.1 (2003): 14. DOI: [10.1215/08992363-15-1-11](https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11) accessed 11 February 2008. Further references given in the text as (N) with the page number.

<sup>42</sup> Bernard Harrison, “‘White Mythology’ Revisited: Derrida and his Critics on Reason and Rhetoric”. *Critical Inquiry* 25 no. 3 (Spring 1999): 517. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344188> accessed 21 April 2011.

<sup>43</sup> “Metaphysics – the white mythology that reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man makes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form he must wish still to call Reason.” Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 213. Derrida’s text principally concerns the centrality of metaphor to metaphysics – that is, that metaphor is itself a “metaphysical philosopheme” rather than alien to philosophy. The whiteness of the title refers to the notion that metaphysics’ “bleaches out” the sensuous and the contingent in order to attain a seeming finitude of thought, but in the passage quoted above it also invokes European imperialism’s totalising definition of itself through the subjection and appropriation of its others. It is this latter notion of “white mythology” that Young develops further in his deconstruction of the imperialist master narrative of History. See Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies*. London: Routledge, 2004, 33-38.

<sup>44</sup> Derrida, “White Mythology,” 213.

racial and sexual politics are rooted in species, even if, given its disavowal, the latter is its elided term.<sup>45</sup>

While the “humanised human” signs his ontological and political sovereignty in his distance from nature, from the body of the animal and the feminine, it is an illusory distance.<sup>46</sup> This ambiguous and impossible separation is neatly captured in the grammar and syntax of Derrida’s *la bête et le souverain*.<sup>47</sup> As its politics of race, species and gender suggests, this grammar is not merely linguistic but instead orders and feeds the very sacrifice-accepting, meat-eating, nature-conquering virility it not only legitimises but also makes possible. It sets up sovereignty as a condition and exercise of power outside of, or rather inextricably tied to, the moment of founding the Law, and therefore also the founding of ‘the animal’ as that abstraction outside the Law that shapes its contours without having access to it. It speaks to the imbrication of sexual and species difference which makes available the racial politics of the ‘beastliness’ of the black body, a ‘beastliness’ all the more loaded when the locus of its animalising attention is the black female body.

Like other works by Mntambo that I discuss here, *The Rape of Europa*’s visual language calls attention to various registers of this colonising carnophallogocentric institution of the self and the seemingly singular boundary that separates the “humanised human” in his unmarked universal whiteness from all that he thinks he is not. Like the other works in this chapter, it stages racial, gendered and sexual relations of animality but does so ambivalently, in ways that work within and against the political, psychoanalytic and speciesist ontogenetic narrative of the Law through which ‘Man’ calls himself ‘Human’. It is to this narrative and its troubling that I now turn.

### III. ‘The Dark Continent,’ the deed, and the ‘feminine beast’

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<sup>45</sup> This assumes the persistence and cross articulations of sovereign, disciplinary and biopolitical modes of power: see Stephen Morton and Stephen Bygrave (eds.) *Foucault in an Age of Terror: Essays on Biopolitics and the Defence of Society*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, 1-13. On the colonial essence of sovereignty, see Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans Patrick Mensah. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988, 59.

<sup>46</sup> The term is Wolfe’s, *Animal Rites*, 100.

<sup>47</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 1-5.

*The Rape of Europa*'s critical strategy of reiteration that grounds its use of the stereotyped nexus of black woman-human-animal plays out between nostalgia for a primordial pre-civilisation and the threat of unbound animality and recurrent savagery.<sup>48</sup> The doubling of the black female body into human and nonhuman not only visualises theoretical racism's animalizing "anthropological universal,"<sup>49</sup> as Etienne Balibar puts it, but explicitly marks it as female. It recalls the racialised and sexualised trope of the 'dark continent' in which both the female body and Africa are rendered monstrously penetrable yet intimately unknowable. As Mary Ann Doane notes, this metonymic collapse of woman and Africa, and psychic and physical territories, is at the heart of Freud's "The Question of Lay Analysis" (1926) where he describes adult female sexuality as the "dark continent of psychology."<sup>50</sup> This analogy between the 'dark recesses' of psychoanalytic and anthropological origins is informed by a nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific racial anthropology, which, according to Sander Gilman, was transfixed by the so-called primitive hypersexuality of black women (archetypically, the 'Hottentot Venus'), which was then transferred onto European female prostitutes.<sup>51</sup> The 'dark continent's' gendered consolidation of racial anthropology and psychoanalysis works, in effect, to pathologise female sexuality as always-already atavistic.

This trope of feminised Africa, without history or civilization, comes to stand, as Freud's writes on the opening page of *Totem and Taboo*, "as a well-reserved picture of an early stage of our own development."<sup>52</sup> For, as Mbembe puts it, thinking no doubt of Hegel and Joseph Conrad, Africa turned primitive, beastly and savage as the Western imaginary's "white mythology" considered and consolidated its (gendered, sexual and racial) origins, all which are intimately bound up with its identity as Human, civilised

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<sup>48</sup> This kind of double reference is also noted in Kobena Mercer, "Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe" in Emily Apter and William Pietz (eds.) *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. London: Cornell University Press, 1993, 313.

<sup>49</sup> Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism" in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.) *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. Trans Chris Turner. London: Verso, 1991, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film theory and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1991, 209. See chapter 11, "Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," 209-48. Further references given in the text. Sigmund Freud, "The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person" (1926) in James Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* vol.20. London: Hogarth Press, 1959, 212, cited in Doane, 209.

<sup>51</sup> Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies," 202-242.

<sup>52</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Correspondences on the Mental life of Savages and Neurotics*. [1918]. Trans. A. A. Brill. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998, 1. Further references given in the text as T followed by page number.

and rational.<sup>53</sup> Freud's transposition of the term 'the dark continent' from adult female sexuality to a definition of human origins seemingly erases female sexuality from the frame altogether and compresses discursive primitivism into a thesis of all human development. Doane sees in this realignment Freud's commitment to the notion that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny (211): that is, to the now-discredited theory in which individual development repeats the evolutionary development of the species; or for Freud, the belief that the stages of human psychological development is recapitulated in the practices of 'primitive' "contemporary ancestors."<sup>54</sup> The racist tint of this recapitulation, however, means that psychoanalysis, to borrow Doane's words, is also the "ethnography ...of the white Western psyche" (211). Read to its logical conclusion then, Freud's racialised developmental logic proposes that the primitive other remains in a state of animality because she is without the necessary repression required to produce modern civilisation. Without repression, in short, the primitive is "unpsychoanalyzable."<sup>55</sup>

It is into this developmental darkness, Freud asserts, that psychoanalysis must shine its "ray of light" (T 126). His metaphor of illumination is not accidental. It claims not only universalised scientific authority for psychoanalysis but ties 'psychoanalyzable' man to the Western Enlightenment subject. Therefore, rather than erasing female sexuality, Freud's doubled use of the trope of the 'dark continent' retains the stain of dark animality that locates it in a racial hierarchy of savagery and civilisation, and in doing so, displaces racial and sexual difference onto species difference. The 'dark continent' not only ties the feminine to the animal but signals both as the object of

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<sup>53</sup> Mbembe quotes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the epigram to *On the Postcolony*, as well as Hegel's view of Africa as History's negation (OP, 4-5). Hegel's vision of Africa is a paradigmatic instance of the racial mastery at the heart of Western philosophical discourse and its construction of the human. In his "Lectures on the Philosophy of World History" (1822-1828), for example, Hegel writes: "man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made a distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of his development: he is dominated by passion, and is nothing more than a savage....The Negro man is an example of animal man...and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes... [as] nothing consonant with humanity is to be found in his character". See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Lectures on the Philosophy of World History" in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.) *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 127. See also Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. London: Cornell University Press, 1988 and Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent" *Critical Inquiry* 12 no.1 (Autumn 1985): 166-203. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343467> accessed 9 June 2009.

<sup>54</sup> The phrase "contemporary ancestors" is Oliver's, *Animal Lessons*, 251.

<sup>55</sup> I borrow this term from Doane, *Femmes Fatale*, 211.

conquest through which the carnophallogocentric subject erects his status as sovereign, white and ‘properly’ human, and produces the animalisation of the racial and sexual other. And nowhere is this white-mythologizing, self-instituting, carnophallogocentric humanism more fervently articulated than in Freud’s thesis of civilization’s originary violence – *Totem and Taboo*’s primal feast.<sup>56</sup>

In *Totem and Taboo: Some Correspondences between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1918) Freud narrates the formation of civilisation (law, religion and culture) in terms of an implicitly racialised, gendered and speciesist relation of sacrifice. As he does in his later racist deployment of the ‘dark continent,’ he sees “savages or half-savages” as examples of primitive man at the start of his (white, male, European) human development (T 1). He argues that the practices of (mostly animal) totemism and exogamy tally with psychoanalysis’ findings on the primary taboo formation in Western (‘properly’) human society. He rereads the ‘civilising’ turn of man through his psychoanalytic first principles, Oedipal desire and the castrating father, and poses it as the forgotten origin of the law itself. As Oliver notes, species is central to his argument since he determines a fundamental continuity in psycho-social behaviour towards animals that ‘evidences’ the link between the ‘primitive,’ the neurotic and child in patriarchy (AL 247). In his terms, the child is psychically consonant with ‘the primitive’ in the totemic system and both with the neurotic as all fail to differentiate between humans and nonhuman animals. A fluid human/animal divide means that the ‘the primitive’s’ conception of the totem animal as the clan’s common ancestor is parallel to the child/neurotic’s displacement onto the animal. Conflating the mechanism of animal phobias and totem animals, Freud ‘finds’ the ‘real’ meaning of both to be a substitute for the father and repository for Oedipal ambivalence. And this despite the fact that texts he reads on totemism speak of clan relations rather than family ties, of ancestorship in a non-paternalistic sense, and identify totemism with more matriarchal cultures (T 91). Freud asserts, nevertheless, that the two taboos that anchor totemism (killing the totem animal outside of ritual sacrifice and having sex with a clan member) are in essence Oedipal in origin and therefore totemism cannot be “a creation of the

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<sup>56</sup> What I am suggesting here is that Freud’s primal feast or the sacrifice of animality at the institution of ‘the human’ is precisely Derrida’s “fabulous scene” of white mythology’s origin: the one that, although erased “nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest” (“White Mythology,” 213). It is its invisibility that Freud’s use of recapitulation theory aims to uncover.

feminine mind” but must be “of the masculine” (T 101-102). In thus rescuing totemic kinship from what he calls the “sick fantasies of pregnant women,” he uncovers, of course to his great surprise, the high drama of patriarchy’s Oedipal creation myth, only one more like a paternalistic immaculate conception than anything else (T 101-02).

Freud’s redeployment of animal phobias to this Oedipal end is not simply evidence of the text’s deeply ahistorical tenor. As Oliver notes, it also refers to its circular logic of displacement in which the animal and the father pace and replace each other (AL 248). This produces the domesticated relation by which Freud supplants the fluid species border of the totemic system with speciesist patriarchal kinship. Thus, in Freud’s thesis, since the totem animal and the totem clan are common ancestors (of one ‘blood’ or kin) and since the totem animal ‘really’ stands for the father, ‘real’ (Oedipal) kinship is grounded in shared familial blood. The central scene of this sharing is that of the primal horde’s murder of the primal father and the primal feast.

To set the scene for his founding violence, Freud draws on Darwin’s idea of a primate family group dominated by an alpha male and marries it to W. Robertson Smith’s understanding of totemism’s ritual animal sacrifice as a form of communal bonding through sharing out (often by eating its flesh) responsibility for the death of the sacrificed animal. Freud thus proposes an originary clan or primal horde led by a tyrannical primal father who alone has sexual access to the female members of his clan and who therefore expels his sons. Fuelled by jealousy and desire, the brothers join together, kill the father and eat his flesh. However, since they both hated and respected him, they react ambivalently. Their anthropophagic incorporation of him is a celebration of his death; however, they also mourn him through a symbolic introjection of his authority. That is, in consuming him, they are also consumed by guilt and resurrect his paternal authority in the substitute totem. Doing so, they also reinstitute his prohibition over sexual access to clanswomen, and thus establish the incest taboo (T 120-23).

The fraternal organisation of the law is thus anchored and legitimised in the totemic reinstatement of patriarchy and phallic authority. Lacan would later read this act of symbolic substitution as the onset of the “Name of the Father”: that is, as the paternal metaphor of the Phallus that organises the Symbolic function of the Law and its

prohibitive ‘no.’<sup>57</sup> This act of substitution sets up the boundary between literal and symbolic and between ingestion and introjection. The latter, a term taken from psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok, whose unmarked influence feeds Derrida’s concept of a “metonymy of eating,” draws an analogy between literal eating and the psychical processes of internalisation through which identification is formed. The act of substitution defines the retroactive onset of the societal law that founds sexual difference, culture and religion, and consequently, the very division of human and nonhuman animal that drives the sacrificial logic that flows from it. This primal scene, in other words, establishes the difference between criminal murder and noncriminal killing, and thus between bodies rendered inedible and edible precisely because it is the moment, as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks states, “of the separation between human and animal, and of their interrelation” (102-03). The moment of the prohibition against murder and incest formed in the primal deed is thus also the moment of the phallic institution of the human as a subject who is subject to the Law. But in this separation, the human is nonetheless inseparable from the trace of the animal. Following Lacan’s reading of *Totem and Taboo*, Seshadri-Crooks argues that the formation of the subject produces not only murder and incest (which for Freud were the “only two crimes” that mattered) but also the “ancillary taboos” of cannibalism and bestiality (102-03). Both of these are transgressions against species difference and therefore rupture the civilising turn away from the satiation of carnal hunger to the sublimations of law, religion and culture and all that is considered ‘proper’ to the human.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock, 1977, 67. Cited in Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, “Being Human: Bestiality, Anthropophagy, and Law,” *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious* 1 (2003): 100. Further references given in the text. Lacan’s un-hyphenated term prefigures his more rigorous formation of the “Names-of-the-Father” in which the paternal metaphor instituted by the substitution of the totem for the father in Freud’s narrative is tied to the problem of naming which takes place around the proper name of God in the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. Seshadri-Crooks notes that the sacrifice of the ram for Isaac in the name of God signals a turn towards the transcendental which means that the totem animal of Freud’s narrative “is not yet the moment of logos” (101, 106). In both of Lacan’s senses – hyphenated and unhyphenated – the term refers not to an individual but to a paternal function, aligned with the Law and thus the condition for the circulation of desire in the Symbolic’s substitutional economy of signification. Since this economy is without end (its foreclosure, for both Lacan and Kristeva, results in psychosis), it gives rise to Lacan’s later formulation in the plural: “Names-of-the-Father.” See also François Regnault, “The Name-of-the-Father” in Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Marie Jaanus (eds.) *Reading Lacan’s Seminar XI: Lacan’s four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Albany: State of New York Press, 1995, 65-74.

<sup>58</sup> Derrida also notes, for example, that for Lacan, “What is proper to man, the origin of man, the place where humanity begins, is the Law...what separates man from beast is the Law, the experience of the Law, the Superego, and therefore the possibility of transgressing it in Crime.” Derrida, *The Beast and The Sovereign*, 102.

The substitution of the animal for the father that Freud sees in the aftermath of the primal feast therefore not only erects the Name of the Father, but produces the species boundary as a territory that is irrevocably crossed. Lacan asserts, as Seshadri-Crooks points out, that the primordial father who enjoys without limit (Freud, after all, calls the brothers before the onset of guilt “cannibalistic savages” (T122)) originally and “*mythically...can only be an animal*” (101). Lacan’s focus on the mythic status of the primal father as animal means that the formation of the subject and the moral law consequently renders, as Seshadri-Crooks writes, the “question of the existence of the animal as an ontic category ...impossible” (104). Or as Oliver phrases it, human kinship is formed in the literal and figurative sacrifice of animality and animal kinship (AL 248). Significantly, as Seshadri-Crooks points out, this sacrifice “mak[es]...the animal disappear even as it appears” (104). It reduces the embodied animal to ‘the animal’ – an abstraction that signifies only, in Seshadri-Crooks’ words, as “an *iterative* device deployed by the law for self-authorization” (99). Thus in the substitutional logic of the Symbolic, the animal body is performatively erased and turned into a signifier for the abjected, excluded and expelled animality that sets the limits of the subject as ‘human,’ and consequently, the kinship and significatory systems that derive from it.

However, as in the trope of the ‘dark continent,’ this abjected animality is gendered. As Kristeva asserts, Freud’s narrative of the forgotten origins of man expunges both woman and animals from its relations of fraternal sociality and totemic paternal authority.<sup>59</sup> In its narrative logic, women, uninvited to partake of the primal feast and therefore unencumbered by its guilt, are condemned ever to remain on the side of atavistic animality: to be unable, in the language of capacity proper to ‘the human,’ fully to access the carnophallogocentric subjectivity that stands (upright) before the Law. Female sexuality is conflated with human animality to form the naturalised, instinctual and primordial edge of man (that old, dark, ‘unpsychoanalyzable’ unfathomable), the “organic repression” of which, Freud writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, is the “cost of the protection that civilisation offers us from nature and from human violence.”<sup>60</sup> The price of this passage from nature to culture, which, Wolfe and Elmer

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<sup>59</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 57. Hereafter references given in the text as (P) and page number.

<sup>60</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1961, 59. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: savage intellects, modern lives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, 194-97. Torgovnick also notes the irony of Freud’s thesis of the refuge of ‘civilisation:’ *Civilisation and its Discontents* was written while Nazism arose in the heart of ‘civilised’ Europe.

write, accompanies man's newly found ability to walk upright, is the disavowal of embodied materiality and physicality. This institutes a "cultural trend towards cleanliness" as a mark against savagery, the body and the filth of nature.<sup>61</sup> Thus, as Wolfe observes, Freud's human is an "animal ...who *sees* rather than *smells*."<sup>62</sup> This privileging of sight produces the rational insight 'proper' to self-conscious humanism: that is, one whose fantasy of phallic mastery is characterised by a disembodied gaze that orders its visual field to its own phallogocentric measure.<sup>63</sup>

But this dematerialised purity of origin is merely a fantasy, for, if this gendered animalised animality defines the "constitutive outside" (as Butler would call it) of the human, it is also its inside, and, as Kristeva notes, the abjected bodily matter embodies precisely that horrifying ambiguity which renders the ontological contours of the subject unstable (P 2).<sup>64</sup> This ambiguity is more thoroughgoing than what Wolfe describes as the "chain of infinite supplementarity" that binds the human to the animal in the paradox that is organic repression.<sup>65</sup> Rather than simply a matter of *différance* that makes the concept of a pure origin impossible, this ambiguity is also that of abjection which torments the subject. Abjection, Kristeva writes, is not only that violent, archaic and fragile border across which the subject "ceaselessly strays" into animality, but the material and maternal reminder (the remainder) of the human subject's animal origins. The abject is that from which the self tries but can never radically separate, and against which the borders of the subject, of culture and sociality are both set up and put at risk (P 1-13).

Women and animals, or "Kristeva's strays" as Oliver calls them, thus "produce the metaphor of contagion" – an abject and uncanny return – that infects Freud's text of man's civilising turn (AL 277). Thus, in *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva rereads *Totem and*

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<sup>61</sup> Wolfe and Elmer in Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 108.

<sup>62</sup> Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> On this notion of disembodied looking and its epistemological links to a patriarchal rationality masquerading as universal, see Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991, 183-201.

<sup>64</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Wolfe identifies the paradox that organic repression is caught up in as one in which the human, before and in order to become human, must already recognise that the "organic is repulsive and must be repressed" and thus can never untie himself from the animality at his origin. Wolfe doesn't link Freud's notion of the mysteriousness of this process back to an originary repression of women and animals in *Totem and Taboo*. See *Animal Rites*, 2.

*Taboo* to find not paternal authority and the Oedipal family romance behind ritual animal sacrifice and animal phobias, but the abjected generative power of the maternal. This is not excluded from the Symbolic but exceeds it as a polluting, dangerous animality that is ritually contained (but cannot be purified) in order for the symbolic order of language and sociality to function.<sup>66</sup> As abject, however, the material and maternal always threatens to erupt and dissolve the boundaries of the subject and the social: to drive symbolic order and the Law of the Father back into the pulsing chaos of the drives or a pre-symbolic in which subject and object are in-dissociable because no separation of self and other (and indeed, human and animal) has yet occurred.<sup>67</sup> Hence, Kristeva writes, the existence of taboo-ridden rituals of purification in religion and culture that police the “clean and proper body” from the threat of women and animals (P 102). Yet, in the foundational fantasies of this carnophallogocentric psycho-sociality of sacrifice and abjection, and hence, of feminine and animal excess, are what Oliver describes as “textual sore spots where the animal and feminine figures escape from their natural enclosures and bite back” (AL 248). In the rest of this chapter I explore how Mntambo’s works engage this disobedience, and argue that it is in the gnawing interrelation of the postcolonial, the psychoanalytic and the discourse of species that the work of limitrophy is to be found.

Looking again at *The Rape of Europa*, its visual language and glossy photographic surface appear to display the West’s phallic investment in a primordial fantasy of sexual mastery, overlaid with racial superiority and shored up by species difference. But this is not simply a scene of scopophilic pleasure filtered through colonial desire. Instead, it is the textual space of ‘the primitive’ origin of ‘man’ as human, prior to the Law instituted by the primal feast. The scene’s mythological overflow is one of cannibalistic becomings, corporeal excess, unfettered appetites, rampant bestiality, and of an eating of the other that is immersed in, to borrow Mbembe’s words “absolute brutality, sexual

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<sup>66</sup> I will return to this point but, as Oliver notes, Kristeva’s Symbolic is a rejection of the Lacanian model. It does not exclude drive energy or semiotic elements but rather proposes a dynamic dialectical opposition or oscillation between the two elements, semiotic and symbolic, that comprise the Symbolic. There is no question of trying to do away with the Symbolic (since for Kristeva that would lead to psychosis, anarchy and death), nor complete repression of the semiotic within the Symbolic, since that would produce totalitarianism and the death of creativity. The semiotic exceeds the Symbolic but is only knowable within it as rupture, resistance, disorder, abjection and poetic language. Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: unravelling the double bind*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 4, 9-12.

<sup>67</sup> I will expand on the way in which the maternal abject disrupts the subject and the social later in this chapter.

license and death” (OP 1) – that is, before the division of human and animal, edible and inedible, sexually available and inaccessible is instituted. The doubling of the black female body as both human and human-animal is therefore a provocation that stalks the gendered and speciesist line that divides and links the beast and sovereign. The figure of the feminine beast in this image signifies then not the guarantee of racial, gendered and speciesist deprivation, but the persistence of the threat to the clean and proper boundaries of the masculinist human subject and socius. It is as a threat to a model of individual and national belonging, of being subject in both senses of the word, that Xingwana’s charge that *The Rape of Europa* is ‘against nation building’ finally signifies. This ‘obscenity’ is precisely the space of abjection. Here is not the mythic triumph of carnivorous virility and its civilising conquest of animality (and hence not the ascendance of the ‘purely’ aesthetic, as if that were ever the case) but a transgressive re-embodiment of the subject in which the ‘safe’ limits of ‘the human’ are always already riven from within. The ethico-politics of this limit, and the site of its relationality, is signalled, moreover, by an iteration of animality posed through the rhetoric of cannibalistic devouring. Only, this is an edible politics that does not finally translate into the transcendent confirmation of the authority of sovereign whiteness it so nearly promises. The question is then, how to interrogate that cannibalistic devouring? Or, in the metonymic register of Derrida’s “eating well,” how to be hospitable to what passes through the mouth, whether flesh, breast or word, while still remaining within the sacrificial economy it elicits? And by extension, how to reinscribe embodiment into this logic of sacrifice in ways that exploit animality to critical, and disruptive, effect?

In what follows, I take up these questions through negotiating sites of devouring in three other works by Mntambo: *The Beginning of the Empire* (Fig. 5, 2007), *Silent Embrace* (Fig. 6, 2007) and *Europa* (Fig. 7, 2008). In all three, constructions of animality, colonial Africa and what is called ‘animal’ are performatively cited through and produced across the dead bodies of cattle. I argue that in these works, relations of eating, abjection and animality install and disturb the carnivorous violence of humanist and colonial sovereignty by foregrounding the ambiguous border that separates the human from the animal. Ultimately, I argue for a thickened division between real and symbolic sacrifice, ingestion and introjection, living flesh and dead matter that signals the return of un-devourable, inassimilable, and in Haraway’s terms, “inappropriate/d”

female animal subject; or at least one that opens up to the possibility of a nonanthropocentric subjectivity that, as Haraway would say, “nourishes indigestion” at the core of carnophallogocentric power.<sup>68</sup>

#### IV. Skinned politics: animal death and colonial sovereignty

*Beginning of the Empire* is a sculptural installation in which eleven torso fragments are arranged in a row and suspended from the ceiling by means of transparent wires. The partial figures are made of cowhide, which Mntambo buys as raw or untreated as possible from a slaughterhouse near her Cape Town studio. She cleans the hides using a power drill to take off the subcutaneous layers of fat, then soaks them in a chemical bath and tans them.<sup>69</sup> The prepared cowhides are then wet again and fastened onto body casts taken from Mntambo and her mother. As these dry and take shape, the interior is fixed with resin. Part garment-part skin, these half human-nonhuman animal hybrids seem at once strange and familiar, an uncanny effect that not only draws attention to the naturalised wearing of dead nonhuman animals in the form of leather and fur, but also sets into play a palpable, almost excessive, ambivalence.<sup>70</sup> The figures seem both quietly menacing and submissively tragic; each quotes human form but disturbingly does not resolve into one; each seems to contain a volume yet is empty; evokes a presence but also contains absence; appears to hover in space but is firmly secured; looks achingly fragile but is surprisingly resistant; is sensuous and invitingly tactile, yet at the same time, slightly repellent. The work has a lingering meaty, salty, chemical odour, which depending on the viewer’s sensitivity to the smell of dead animal flesh, calls attention to the fact that this art medium was once a living being.<sup>71</sup> Fragmented and hollowed out, the torsos are simply skins, the animal body having long since been ‘absented,’ as Adams would say, through the eating of its flesh. Or to be more precise, these partial forms are the skinned remainders in which bodies encountered each other

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<sup>68</sup> Haraway, “Ecce Homo,” 86; Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 300.

<sup>69</sup> Prendini Toffoli, “Encounters with cowhide,” 13.

<sup>70</sup> This raises the technology of clothing as a form human exceptionalism and complicates it with an animal nakedness that does not signify as such. Derrida explores this in the bathroom encounter between nakedness and un-nakedness in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 4-6.

<sup>71</sup> Viewing Mntambo’s *Ingabisa* exhibition, Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, 16 August - 15 September 2007 of which this work was part, I found the smell quite strong but this is not an aspect that has been remarked on in reviews of the show. The smell does seem to dissipate the more time one spends with the work but I was always aware of it. I think responding to it as meaningful involves both a critical relation to anthropocentric privilege and personal sensibility.

as flesh – literally, both in the indexicality of cowhide and body cast as well as in the act of ingestion. But this is a relation across species that is deeply asymmetrical and death-infected. The speciesist hierarchy of human/nonhuman is rendered material on the very basis of skin: that is, in the resinous separation of the flayed *pellis* of a dead cow from the trace of living sensible human *cutis*.<sup>72</sup>

At the level of form then, the installation makes visible and central the sacrificial economy that both separates human and nonhuman animal and ties the latter to the former as its nullified shadow. It marks the beast and the sovereign in intimate correlation and sets this ambiguity at the social boundary of the human and animal at the institution of culture, law and civilisation, or in this case, empire. This is a co-implication made all the more pervasive since the human bodies cited are both black and female. *Beginning of the Empire* therefore visibly transfers the noncriminality of the death of the animal to animalised human others and foregrounds the intersectional cross-articulation of carnophallogocentric vectors of power. In making skin visible as the primary fetish of the racist, the installation also literalises what Franz Fanon called the “epidermalisation of race.”<sup>73</sup> Since the trope of female animality is theoretical shorthand for all that the western patriarchy considers primitive, regressive and un-human, *Beginning of the Empire* makes possible a rereading of race and gender through the trace of an abject animality, which is both embodied and absented in these fragments. In other words, it sets its affect-ridden formal ambivalence into play in the logic of devouring that sustains humanist and colonial subjectivity and the racial and gendered politics of animalisation it subtends. In its material and symbolic references, however, is a challenge to the philosophical and psychoanalytic sacrificial violence in which ‘the human’ as sovereign subject is so deeply invested.

As its title suggests, *Beginning of the Empire* locates its animalised bodies in the context of European colonialism in Africa. In this context, the hide figures and their neat arrangement recall taxidermied hunting trophies stuffed and mounted on the wall. Or rather, docked of heads and limbs, they resemble more closely products not of single

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<sup>72</sup> On *pellis* (dead skin) and *cutis* (living skin) see Steven Connor, “A Skin That Walks” unpublished paper presented at the Humanities and Arts Research Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, February 13, 2002. Available online <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/skinwalks/> accessed 22 January 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 10.

trophy-killing but of mass slaughter. In the formation of the empire, the work suggests, the slaughter of animals and colonial racism are analogous biopolitical expressions of the carnophallogocentric virility of the ‘becoming human’ of the subject. In Mbembe’s theory of “necropolitics,” the carnivorousness of sovereign power is inextricable from the death-distributing administration of racism, itself a discourse of virility as war (N 11-12).<sup>74</sup> Necropolitics, in other words, is carnophallogocentrism writ large: it is the colonial deployment of a contingent, brutal and arbitrary violence in which game hunting, industrial slaughter and governance are ordered by a will to power that equates masculinist authority with human privilege. This is not to annul the differences between expressions of necropolitical excess, but it is to assert that these are underscored by a conception of human sovereignty founded on domination that is caught up in speciesism and mobilised by it.<sup>75</sup> For Mbembe, this sovereign power over death and the primacy of domination finds its master narrative in Hegel’s well-known thesis of lordship and bondsman and its attendant notion of self-consciousness and transcendence through conquest. Mbembe explicitly links this Hegelian model of the subject to colonialism, but, as Kathy E. Ferguson suggests, a Hegelian sense of coming into subjectivity through conquest, and hence of a masculinist access to creativity and transcendence, underpins the normative framing of the subject as human.<sup>76</sup>

Very briefly, for Hegel, consciousness accedes to the self through recognition by the other, but this recognition is pitted in separation and conflict. As Mbembe recounts, what for Hegel will become mastery’s defining notion of “self-conscious freedom” proceeds through a process of double negation: an autonomous subject not only separates from nature in order to transform and dominate it, but comes to self-consciousness of that separation in relation to a triumph over death through

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<sup>74</sup> On racism as a primary manifestation of the discourse of war, see Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (eds.) Trans. David Macey. London: Penguin, 2004, 257. Also Stephen Morton, “Torture, Terror and Colonial Sovereignty” in Stephen Morton and Stephen Bygrave (eds.) *Foucault in an Age of Terror: Essays on Biopolitics and the Defence of Society*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, 183.

<sup>75</sup> Karen J. Warren’s notion of the “logic of domination” has echo here. Her “Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” contrasts patriarchy’s vertical and hierarchical thinking – its propensity to dominate and conquer – and its evaluating, “arrogant eye” to an ecofeminist ethics of care which, she argues, is horizontal, interconnected, and symbolised by a “loving eye”. See Karen J. Warren, “Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” *Environmental Ethics* 12 (Summer 1990): 125-46. DOI: [10.5840/enviroethics199012221](https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199012221) accessed 14 April 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Kathy E. Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 36-68.

confrontation with another consciousness (N 14).<sup>77</sup> If recognition is to produce a self-creating subject, it cannot be mutual for such self-delimitation can only be achieved through the (metaphorical) annihilation of the other. In his narrative of lordship and bondsman, the former's sovereignty is achieved through freely risking death – in other words, the human comes into mastery through his triumph over his own animal need for self-preservation or immediate survival. The bondsman, unable to separate from nature and sacrifice his life, capitulates and is subsequently enslaved through his fear of biological death, or indeed, through an animal need to survive at all cost. To be master in Hegel's terms "is to be for itself"; to be enslaved, on the other hand, is to "succumb to the negation of consciousness...or existence for another".<sup>78</sup> Although Hegel's language is ontological, his dialectic in effect poses any definitive frame of mastery as a dead end, for the master's freedom and self-definition is paradoxically dependent on the slave he commands and subordinates; the slave, although degraded, achieves self-definition through work and attains a self-existence and independence that cannot be taken as the property of the master. This is why Butler, for instance, suggests that 'master' and 'slave' are merely "instructive fictions" rather than literal positions.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, the narrative of lord and bondsman maps hierarchical co-ordinates of nonreciprocal recognition that has real effects in the speciesist politics of animalisation, and it is these that Mbembe's account of the emergence of necropolitical sovereign subjectivity takes up.

Coming into autonomy through necropolitics replays the sacrificial model of Hegelian nonreciprocal recognition but shifts its emphasis away from the dialectic.<sup>80</sup> Thus, its hierarchy is entrenched and expressed ontologically as species difference. That is, becoming sovereign as act of transcendent self-creation through the ability to pass through death in order to truly live becomes the limit that separates human existence from mere animal being. Like the institution of the Law after the murder of the father, it marks the internalisation of power as a triumph over death through the abjection of

<sup>77</sup> On Mbembe's use of Hegel, see Adeleke Adeeko, "Bound to Violence? Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony*," *West Africa Review* 3 no. 2 (2002): 1-10. For Mbembe's response, see "On the Postcolony: a brief response to critics," *African Identities* 4 no. 2 (2006): 143-178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725840600761096> accessed 20 September 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V Miller. Oxford: Clarendon, 1977, 233, as quoted in Adeeko, 8; see also Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 192.

<sup>79</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, 21 quoted in Ferguson, *Man Question*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Adeeko is critical of this aspect of Mbembe's analysis. See Adeeko, "Bound to Violence," 1-10.

animality. In what Wolfe and Elmer term the “desubstantialization of the subject,” man consolidates his humanness through his ‘purifying’ separation from any origin in nature, in woman, and thus from any trace of his own embodied animality.<sup>81</sup> Restating the primal feast’s conflation and exclusion of woman and animal from the scene of power, it positions too all the frames that fix ‘the animal’ outside the law and thus in symbolic and political relations of lack and negation.

In the light of this framing, the animal hides and human bodies instantiate what Mbembe calls colonialism’s “all-devouring *commandement*” – that founding violence that defines the colony as a place where violence is the stuff of gluttonous indulgence not subject to any legal restriction (24-65). The colony is, in other words, organised through the discourse of species and the institution of speciesism so that which is animal is formed under the sign of its own disappearance: nullified before the law, but without access to transcendence, and therefore mere being, base, discardable and ungrievable. The *commandement* is the political manifestation of the carnivorousness of the ‘becoming human’ played out through and across bodies made animal and therefore put under erasure, made killable and consumable in real and symbolic terms. For colonial racism to govern, in other words, it requires not consensual politics but the speciesist invention of ‘the native’ as simply ‘animal’: or as Mbembe puts it, as a “thing that is, but only in so far as it is nothing” (187).<sup>82</sup>

*Beginning of the Empire* at first glance seems to install this animal materiality with all the deadening objectification and organic inertia that such a process entails. Cowhide summons slaughter, as mentioned, but it also stands for an animality not quite domesticated, but dominated and defined in terms of its use value. Subject to colonial instrumentalisation, the use of cowhide turns the black body into pure livestock. Viewed as nothing but embodiment, the black body is enslaved as a beast of burden – good for nothing but labour. This brand of colonial and apartheid negation is reinforced in the visual source for the installation: a 1968 photograph of a mineworkers’ inspection

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<sup>81</sup> Wolfe and Elmer in *Animal Rites*, 109.

<sup>82</sup> So thorough is this racist and speciesist conflation of ‘animal’ and ‘native’ that Hegel writes that the taboo on cannibalism does not signify and, as he puts it, “the eating of human flesh is quite compatible with the African principle; to the sensuous Negro, human flesh is purely an object of the senses, like any other flesh.” Yet, in a telling echo of the primitivism of the primal feast, he adds, “It is not used primarily as food; but at festivals....” Hegel, “Lectures on the Philosophy of World History,” in *Race and the Enlightenment*, 134.

by photographer and anti-apartheid activist, Peter Magubane.<sup>83</sup> Magubane's photograph shows a line-up of naked male diamond mine workers, arms raised in submission, and poised for the routine inspection of their orifices. While ostensibly enforced by the apartheid-era mine administration to prevent diamond theft, this bodily degradation underscores the phallic nature of sovereign power's right to violate without limit. Stripped and policed, these men's bodies are penetrable. As such, they are coded as feminine and animalised, repeating patriarchal exclusion of women and animals at the fraternal institution of sovereignty and culture. It is an image of the monstrous intimacy of phallic visibility, of the human who sees, and the biopolitical bodily invasion that returns its own racist, sexual and speciesist mastery.

Translated into the installation's terms, *Beginning of the Empire* mimetically installs the photograph's symbolic cannibalism so that the bodies are not only feminised but metaphorically and metonymically made animal: here is not only, in Mbembe's words, a necropolitical "deathscape," but the primal fantasy of the institution of the human.<sup>84</sup> The bodily fragmentation repeatedly bears witness to colonial sovereignty's power of ontological negation. But the fragment is also supplementary to sovereign power: as both 'native' and 'animal,' the fragments are the fictionalised support through which the coloniser fuels his devouring appetite and the satiation it brings. The fragments make manifest, in other words, to slightly recast Seshadri-Crooks' point, the emptiness that pursues the iterative operation of 'the animal' as the Law's self-validation, and thus, presents mastery as deficient at its origin. As an abstraction, 'the animal,' like the voided figures, shows up sovereignty to be a performative effect rather than an ontological prerogative.

While this iteration opens up a space for ambivalent re-inscription, sovereign performativity is conditioned by the visible demonstration of its own will to rule. Through the visual reference to the mine inspection, the suggestion of raised arms and the material trace of the slaughterhouse, the effects of a colonial racial taxonomy as taxidermy are actualised as the production of bodies that can be subjugated and ripped

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<sup>83</sup> As noted the Stevenson Gallery website, <http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/mntambo/index2007.htm> accessed 12 June 2009.

<sup>84</sup> Mbembe in Höller, "Africa in motion" [http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft\\_text.php?textid=1195&lang=en#fussnoten](http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1195&lang=en#fussnoten) accessed 21 April 2010.

apart. These partial figures appear as hacked remnants of this relation: the sundered remainders of an animalised corporeal schema in which blackness, Fanon writes, is visually “sealed into...crushing objecthood”.<sup>85</sup>

While Fanon focuses on black masculinity, the edible body of the slaughtered animal is turned over onto the black feminized body and seems to embody that very structure of the “absent referent” that grounds Adams’ “sexual politics of meat.” In Adams’ feminist-vegan argument, the “absent referent” is the end point of a process that not only makes possible the legitimate slaughter of billions of nonhuman animals a year, but supplies a naturalised symbolic vocabulary for the oppression of women. As a process of abstraction, the “absent referent” holds that the commodification of the animal body in the industrial production of meat is the same as that of the commodification of women in patriarchy, for in both the real conditions of violence against the female animal body are overwritten or absented by the legitimising signifiers of patriarchal meat culture. Thus, the real bodies of female animals are objectified, turned into ‘meat’ and sexualised (what Adams calls the feminisation of animals and the animalisation of the feminine) so that they appear to desire their own consumption. The absent referent refers to the female animal that lies behind this fragmentation and commodification, but it is also the linguistic shield that obscures the flesh-eater from the violence they sanction. It is the “moral abandonment” that affirms the process of substitution in which, for example, a butchered dead cow is resignified as beef, and so with other animal products.<sup>86</sup> She argues that women are caught up in a similar cycle of sexual violence in which butchery is aligned to rape and in which patriarchal representational practices work to animalise and objectify the female body (“chick, beaver, Playboy bunny”) in ways that metaphorically dismember it (a ‘piece of ass’, ‘a leg man’, or ‘breast man’) for easy consumption by men’s brutalising desire. As she writes: “the animal substitutes for the woman and the woman, or part of the woman, substitutes for a dead animal.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks*, 77.

<sup>86</sup> Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat*, 53.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. See chapter two, “The Rape of Animals, the Butchering of Women,” 50-73; the quote is from Adams, “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?” 306.

Although Adams frames the absent referent as an operation of objectification, fragmentation and consumption, the latter forms the basis of her argument for the commonality of oppressions. Rather than the kind of porosity and ethical responsibility that marks the metonymy of “eating well” as a relational ingestion of flesh, word and identification in which the self “both eats and allow himself to be eaten” (EW 282), Adams sees consumption as an instrument of a heteronormative and unidirectional meat-fuelled masculinist violence.<sup>88</sup> In all too neat a formulation, to refuse to eat meat is to refuse its politics of consumption and thus also to refuse the sexual and species hierarchy it supports. Thus in the bullet points for an “animal manifesto” that she lists in an interview with Tom Tyler, she declares, “I am a vegan-feminist because I am an animal among many, and I don’t wish to impose a hierarchy of consumption upon this relationship.”<sup>89</sup> She frames her veganism as nothing less than a political expression of an ethics of solidarity that recovers the shared subjectivities of female animals across all species.

However, as I suggested earlier, this is an ethics that not only denies difference but positively militates against it. Her resistance to difference seems to be bound to what she diagnoses as “retrograde humanism” which sets the limit of anthropocentric privilege.<sup>90</sup> In response to this separatist logic, Adams proposes a seamless continuum of organic life in which the human is merely a part and not the telos (a version in effect, of what Leonard Lawlor elsewhere calls “biological continuism”).<sup>91</sup> Declaiming her “animal manifesto,” for example, Adams states, “I am not articulating a manifesto based on otherness. If we begin by saying ‘we are animals, we move in animal bodies, we are connected and related to – kin and akin to animals’ – then I don’t think we see animals as *others*.”<sup>92</sup> This misconception of difference as anthropological separatism works to disavow any kind of complexity and openness in the ethical encounter with others. Indeed, in the very notion of a manifesto is precisely the antithesis of Derridian

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<sup>88</sup> Adams asserts that “[c]onsumption is the fulfilment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of separate identity”. See Adams, “Politics of Carol J. Adams,” 13.

<sup>89</sup> Adams, “An Animal Manifesto,” 123.

<sup>90</sup> On her manifesto, see *Ibid.* For the notion of “retrograde humanism,” see Adams, “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?” 311.

<sup>91</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 25.

<sup>92</sup> Adams, “An Animal Manifesto,” 123.

responsibility. No longer “an ordeal of the undecidable”<sup>93</sup> and all the possibilities this opens onto, the manifesto reifies the question of the ethical into a direct programme of unambiguous action that mollifies through its appeal to “good conscience”.<sup>94</sup> Thus formulated, it is possible to complete this ethical obligation and to extricate oneself from any form of responsibility outside of its terms.

If we are all simply animals without difference, if like is for like, responsibility is no longer conditioned by the other but by a commitment measured according to the self. Adams’ politics of enlightened resistance merely restates a hyper-individualism that is fundamentally humanist: it is here that her equivalence between the actual death and suffering of nonhuman animals and the representational forms of bodily violation endured by women in patriarchy resonates. While the structure of masculinist meat eating in her argument produces positional similarities in the feminisation of animals and animalisation of women, all oppressions are not equal nor are their material outcomes. To suggest that there is a relation between speciesism and sexism (as *Beginning of the Empire* does) is not the same thing as Adams’ wilful denial of the difference between real and symbolic dismemberment, however well-meaning its polemical ends. As a critique of the intersection of sexism and speciesism as forms of institutional power, this politics of equivalence needs some major adjustment. It is an unconsidered irony that Adams’ vegan-feminist rhetoric of shared embodiment and co-victimhood is predicated on as much of a violent erasure of the bodies of nonhuman animals and the real conditions violence as the very heterosexist humanism she argues against. It is so because it does not pose the subject as a question without a fixed condition or a political resolution. Instead, it starts with a notion of the subject who ‘knows’ (in this case that “eating well” ‘really’ means a commitment to veganism) and in this self-knowledge, can effect change – a version, in other words, of a rights-based humanist subject.

While Adams’ analogy between violated animal bodies and female bodies sexualised into pieces of meat unrelentingly collapses the literal into the metaphorical, *Beginning*

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<sup>93</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority,” in Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (eds.) *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. New York: Routledge, 1992, 24.

<sup>94</sup> On the bad faith of “good conscience,” see Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*. Trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, 19.

*of the Empire* underscores that animalisation is, itself, an expression of an ontological violence that hollows out, dismembers and objectifies. It is therefore not a question of a straightforward equivalence of the objectification of women and farmed animals but of a meat-eating virility that defines itself in terms of a self-willed absence of embodiment. Or to state this again, embodiment and its vulnerability only figure as the site for the elaboration of carnivorism. It is in the service of consolidating this mastery, and its model of consciousness as a conquest of embodied frailty, that the stereotype of black female animality is deployed.

According to Bhabha, however, the stereotype is far from the stable and monolithic form of identification it appears. Rather than a confident display of ‘self-evident’ knowledge, its fixity is instead rooted in an anxious repetition, akin in function and meaning to the psychoanalytic fetish. Caught in this double movement, the stereotype is therefore functionally over-determined: its effect of truth must always be in excess of the verifiable.<sup>95</sup> For Bhabha, the stereotype, like the fetish, operates through a relation of recognition and disavowal in which the subject’s anxiety of difference at the origin is allayed by a compensatory signifier that defensively and compulsively reasserts his narcissistic fullness.<sup>96</sup> A coping mechanism formed in both pleasure and fear, the performative iteration of the compensatory signifier of the black-female-body-as-tamed-beast is designed to shore up the human mastery that underpins colonial sovereignty’s sacrificial logic. But what returns here is rather the performative violence it requires to sustain itself and the abject entanglement of self and other this brings. Violence itself is fetishised as an instrument of reason and tautologically acted out and guaranteed in ever more excessive terms.

As a process invested in fantasy and desire, plenitude and lack, the fetishistic dimension of *Beginning of the Empire* raises another question of the ‘beginning’ posed by the title: one that takes on the version of the subject it presents at its own foundational fiction – the apparent separation of man from all he calls animal. As Bhabha writes, behind every fetish is the ambiguous activation and denial of “the primal fantasy ...[of] a pure origin”.<sup>97</sup> The subject who devours in *Beginning of the Empire*, who imagines and

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<sup>95</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 95.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 107.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 74-75.

secures his authority in his disembodied relation to the real and symbolic death he metes out across the violated bodies of his animalised others, is shown up to be nothing but a fetish. If every performative demonstration of carnivorous power disavows the animal, it also betrays an essential dependence on animals that conditions the psycho-political notion of the human. And this disavowal and its betrayal takes place at its most fetishised, and therefore most abjected site, the remains of the dead animal body.

## V. Animality and the abject

Although in the sacrificial economy of the subject nothing says mastery quite like the death of the animalised animal, it is a death that needs to be properly contained. To this end, it occurs in a designated place of noncriminal killing (the slaughterhouse) and the sundered, dismembered body is turned over to noncriminal eating, to carnivorous hunger in both real and symbolic terms.<sup>98</sup> Eating the animal is therefore a managed denial of the materiality of the corpse. For Kristeva, nothing is more abject, more ambiguous, and hence more dangerous to the autonomous self, than the corpse. As with the maternal body to which it is related, the corpse reminds us of an unsacrificable and non-transcendent dependence on materiality (P 4). It is this return of the dead animal body and the embodied contagion of brute matter – in short, the threat of the “becoming-corpse” of the subject – that the combination of dead animal hide and reified human form, self and other, substance and subject, sets up and spins out.<sup>99</sup>

*Beginning of the Empire* enacts an ambiguous erasure of the dead animal body: first, in the material remainder of its skin, and second, in that the skin is turned into a metaphor for human form. As a site of human-nonhuman indeterminacy, the figures embody Derrida’s point that the boundary between real and symbolic sacrifice cannot be

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<sup>98</sup> According to her Wikipedia entry, Linda McCartney reportedly said that “if slaughterhouses had glass walls, the whole world would be vegetarian”. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linda\\_McCartney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linda_McCartney) . While I share the sense of horror expressed, I think this claim overstates the case. Animal death has always been both acceptable and spectacle, and more so in relation to the advent of industrial farming – the industrial age’s tours of the slaughterhouse killing floor and dis-assembling line is testimony to this. I argue, however, that this is denaturalised through the abject materiality of the artwork.

<sup>99</sup> I thank Kari Weil for the term “becoming-corpse”. She offered it as a comment on my paper “Skin/ned Politics” at the “Sex Gender Species” conference, Wesleyan University (Middletown, Connecticut), 24-25 February 2011. The conference was co-organised by Lori Gruen and Kari Weil. See also Ruth Lipschitz, “Skin/ned Politics: Species Discourse and the Limits of ‘the Human’ in Nandipha Mntambo’s Art.” *Hypatia: a journal of feminist philosophy* 27 no.3 (2012): 546-566.

determined (EW 278); yet, as Oliver makes explicit, the valency of the symbolic sacrifice of animality is always bought at the cost of the real nonhuman animal body (AL 278). This turns the dead animal body, as the abject substrate of the purified subject, into one of Oliver's "textual sore spots," and all the more so in relation to Kristeva's reading of the exclusion and containment of the animal feminine that Freud plays out in the fraternal ordering of patriarchy. For the abject, as previously noted, is matter not textuality: a recalcitrant corporeal materiality that is nowhere more real and unruly than in relation to the corpse.

Kristeva describes abjection as "a repulsive gift" that is prior to the division between subject and object and sets up a frontier that is fraught and ambiguous (P 4). It is linked to animality since it has its source in the animal body (in society) and in the maternal body (in individuals). Abjection is a structure of affect rather than of signification: the "repelling and repellent" residue of the archaic pre-objectal non-ego that persists in the Symbolic as boundary-disturbing bodily waste: blood, excrement, filth, decay, and the corpse. The abject is neither a form of knowledge nor desire, but an irruption of *jouissance* in the liminal zone where the 'I' is confronted by his own deathly becoming (P 4). Abjection, produced through the sacrifice of human animality, is the means of defence against subjective dissolution on the one hand and the collective drive-ridden chaos of cannibalism, bestiality and brutality on the other. It marks the edge of Freud's humanising turn to civilization that separates man from what is not 'proper' to his self: the maternal and the animal, and thus links the two in the formation of the subject and *socius*. But abjection is a frayed edge over which the self 'strays,' neither human nor animal but both. It is a double-edged border that institutes the self and unravels it, or as Kristeva puts it, the cause and the crisis of narcissism. As such, it is both unassimilable and sublimated: a "somatic symptom," which overruns the self and a signifier of debasement that keeps this jettisoned contagion at bay (P 13-14). In Kristeva's terms, the subject is split but not in a single moment of repression (whether Oedipal guilt or submission to the Name of the Father). Instead the subject is an unfinished site of struggle, a "subject in-process/ on-trial" who is in the Symbolic only as a site of becoming that must be constantly negotiated in the face of an animality that both shapes it and threatens (to eat) it from within.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> On Kristeva's term, see Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva*. London: Routledge, 2004, 54.

Abjection has no object but is always an experience of something that disintegrates the bounds of self and other. The bodies on display in this work pose a corporeality that is created and moulded by death. As bodily remnants of ritualised violence, they are a record of a carnophallogocentric rite of purification that anchors the human as separate from what he literally and figuratively kills and eats. The figures can however also be read as a memorial to an anthropocentric sovereign subjectivity haunted by the malodorous spectre of fragility figured as the abject closeness of the animal. Even though they are sealed from the inside with resin, their fragmentation suggests the persistence of a perverse promise of decay that returns to devour its dreamed disembodiment.

Suspended in mid-air, the human-nonhuman animal fragments echo the hanging carcasses of the slaughterhouse. The scars, brandings and tears that are visible on various torsos testify to not only the bodily life (and therefore death) of the cattle from which they are composed, but to the shared ordeal of embodiment in which the corpse of the other wounds me as a confrontation with my own incompleteness. It does so through a formal interrelation of the absent animal and the viewer's expectations of human form – an expectation that is produced through the shared bodily scale and space of the work. It is this possibility of somatic mutuality that renders disturbing the absence of heads and the hands – precisely those markers of humanism's civilizing capacity for nature-transforming thought and manipulation. Docked at the torso, these partial figures are of indeterminate species. In relation to the flayed skins whose voids evoke the torn away flesh of disappeared bodies, this indeterminacy marks, to use Wolfe's term, our "exposure" to the fleshy vulnerability and propensity for suffering that binds all animals in their mortality.<sup>101</sup>

This "exposure" is not a straightforward translation across the possibility of woundedness. Standing in embodied proximity to the fact of animal death, I cannot, for instance, say as J. M. Coetzee's fictional Elizabeth Costello does, "I know what it is like

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<sup>101</sup> Cary Wolfe, "Introduction: Exposures," in Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Ian Hacking and Cary Wolfe, *Philosophy and Animal Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, 8-12.

to be a corpse.”<sup>102</sup> Although Costello is clearly not blind to the suffering she speaks out against, the ‘I’ of her statement does not fragment in this wounded disorientation.<sup>103</sup> Rather, as an ‘I’ who speaks and who ‘knows,’ she gathers death to herself in all its unconcealed truth.<sup>104</sup> In effect, this auto-affection turns empathy from a mode of relating to an other into a power or capacity to take. In giving herself this ability, she appropriates the death of the other and, despite herself, annuls any chance of suffering-with/ com-passion. Constructed in pure self-knowledge, Costello’s relation to the animal corpse is thus akin to a having access to death ‘as such:’ it speaks of the anthropocentric plenitude that consigns the animal to privation, and thus of the “profound humanism” against which Derrida argues (EW 279).<sup>105</sup> Costello’s phenomenological certainty therefore changes suffering into a mode of having that is hers alone. She consumes animal death and paradoxically, makes her suffering as self-confirmation all the more hollow.<sup>106</sup> Since animal death is appropriable, it follows therefore that animals do not suffer; only ‘we’ do as their witnesses.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*. London: Vintage, 2004, 76; see also Wolfe “Exposures,” 8.

<sup>103</sup> This is a reading of single line isolated from the rest of the narrative. Taken in context, Elizabeth Costello’s sense of self is clearly under duress. However, Wolfe also sees in this sentence evidence of her humanist leanings (Wolfe, “Exposures,” 22). For my alternate reading of Costello in relation to the narrative, see note 106.

<sup>104</sup> I draw here on the account of Derrida’s “*Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*” and “*Awaiting (at) the Arrival*” (from *Aporias*) in Lawlor’s *This is Not Sufficient*, 45-70. In these, Derrida deconstructs the distinction Heidegger makes between human and animal access to death ‘as such,’ and shows that Heidegger’s belief that the animal is deprived of *Dasein*, and therefore does not ‘properly’ die but simply perishes, is rooted in an anthropocentric auto-affection. See Jacques Derrida, “*Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*.” Trans. by John P. Leavey, Jr. In John Sallis (ed.) *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 161-196, and Derrida, *Aporias*, 33.

<sup>105</sup> The relation between plenitude and privation is not one of degree but essence: this is to reference Heidegger’s three-fold division in which a stone is without world (*weltlos*), the animal is poor in the world (is *weltarm* or has world in the manner of not having it) and man is world-forming (*weltbildend*). Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 50-51.

<sup>106</sup> There is another possible reading of Costello’s impotent suffering. Her inability not to speak of those things that trouble her hosts; her coming ‘undone’ in conversation with her son; her seeming recalcitrance at the dinner held in her honour – all can be read as (insufficient) responses to a realisation that the post-Cartesian subject is an instance of the totalising, and ultimately suicidal, violence which Derrida calls “the worst.” Hence, Costello’s horror that no one else seems to be alert to the ordeal of responsibility required to interrupt it, a responsibility that can only be born alone and each time renewed. In the context of enduring this ordeal, it is hardly surprising that Costello compares the industrialised slaughter of animals to the Holocaust. Her inability to keep quiet can thus also be seen as a nonpower that opens onto a responsibility that exceeds reasoned calculation or the consolations of ‘good conscience.’ For further elaboration of Derrida’s notion of “the worst,” see Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 23-25, 29, 38-40. I discuss “the worst” and its relation to “radical violence” in chapter two.

<sup>107</sup> Derrida writes that in the transcendental schema of ontological difference, death is what is most proper to *Dasein* and must therefore be “taken over” as a property and potentiality that “stems from being as being-possible” (*Aporias*, 64). In death, *Dasein* “awaits itself.” One of Derrida’s interventions is to make this waiting open onto something other than itself, the *arrivant*. See also Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 55. On the *arrivant* as monstrous, see chapter two.

In contrast, the human-hide forms of *Beginning of the Empire* pose vulnerability and suffering as a question of in-capacity and in-ability, which changes this notion of witnessing. The fragment as a wound traces what Derrida would call the “radical passivity” in which finitude is not a privation but an opening to the “nonpower” at the heart of power (A 28). The power, precisely, to be unable to deny the suffering of animals, indeed, of the living in general, since at root none of us have access to a privileged understanding of death. Thus, although they are reminders of the humanist sacrificial schema, standing before the doubled erasure of both human and nonhuman animal bodies does not reconfirm my ability to imagine myself into the sundered body of another. Instead, the indeterminacy of the figures signals an aching exposure to the horror of absent presence in which I am confronted by an “unthought”<sup>108</sup> surplus that cannot be delimited or appropriated to secure the boundary of ‘the Human’ or my own sense of self. What is visible then is not death ‘itself’ but its remainder; and there is always a remainder, which is precisely what produces both mourning and abjection. This remainder signals that death is unknowable and unactualisable, yet always possible: it uncouples potentiality from the self-confirmation that is the power/ability to know death ‘as such’. Since death is unknowable, it is also other and non-coincident with auto-affection: it takes away from the self all possibilities for being-present to the self.<sup>109</sup> It is this nonpower as a ‘being unable’ (here, an inability to know the essence of death ‘itself’) that unties frailty from ontological difference.

Exposure is thus in the weakness of the living, rather than in the power of the being of being human to close back in on itself, and it is here, in what Lawlor calls the “de-closing” of the subject (that is, of opening up auto-affection to hetero-affection) that the undeniability of the suffering of animals resides.<sup>110</sup> The wound that implicates me through my own vulnerability is therefore without limit; yet, it comes to me only through the encounter, each time singular, with the death of the other. Viewed ‘in the flesh,’ this encounter is repeated in front of each fragment for each difference in size, in

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<sup>108</sup> The term is Derrida’s, from *Aporias*, 35.

<sup>109</sup> Possibility is “the ontological law that rules the being of *Dasein*” and is therefore tied to death (Derrida, *Aporias*, 63). Derrida’s argument makes death (as the most proper possibility of *Dasein*) fundamentally other to *Dasein* – “heterological” – since death as the possibility of “what can happen or always arrive” takes what is most one’s own away. It takes all possibilities away.” Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 56.

<sup>110</sup> Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 101. This inability forms the basis for Lawlor’s “weak” or “more sufficient” response to the violence of “the worst.”

texture, in the colour and thickness of the hair, in the brandings, scars and folds of skin marks anew and again the shared nonpower of the inability to appropriate the death of the other. It is this ‘weakness’ that the body casts reinforce: or rather, the moulded death-infected animal bodies measured to human scale suggest a somatic mutuality that contaminates the purity of the division between human and nonhuman, and between living and nonliving, so that death is both other and within as a unrealised possibility.

To say that death is an excess of shared embodiment (a notion that will be complicated shortly by the maternal body) is not some sort of affirmation of biological continuism. Rather, it is to recognise that the ethico-political and metaphysical categories such as self/ other, human/ nonhuman, living/ nonliving are erected only through the cultural and psychoanalytic policing of the abject boundary of somatic mutuality. The porous limit where the corpse of the other invades me and transgresses my culturally regulated borders ties the ‘becoming-corpse’ of the subject to the repressed return of the ‘becoming animal.’ Although abjection is similarly a structure of affect, this becoming is not that of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s “becoming-animal.”<sup>111</sup> It is tied neither to their preference for collective political assemblage (the pack), nor to the non-divisible flow of energy that produces the mutual becoming of its participants. Rather, the becoming-corpse of the subject marks as illusory any sense of the affirmation of self in the sacrificial schema of the subject. Instead of being the most complete statement of the subject who finds his necropolitical transcendence in the risk of dismemberment, as Mbembe would put it, the becoming-corpse is an excess of animality that points to the unsafe limits of this risk, and thus to the instability of the social, political and psychoanalytic boundary of the human. The animal skin that delimits human right to make killable signals instead the infinite permeability of the animal self to others.

Skin is in this sense is a figure of orificial relationality which cannot settle into a ritualised, literal and species-based separation between who and what one devours and expels. The becoming-corpse of the subject-as-animal is the infection of death-in-life. Where the skinned animal and hollowed-out human form double each other, is an uncanny recognition of what Kristeva calls the “death that ‘I’ am:” a recognition in which the subject, unable to finally separate from the animal even as a split subject

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<sup>111</sup> On “becoming-animal,” see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Continuum, 2004, 256-341.

before the Law, resides only at the ambiguous border of the abject (P 14). The partial skin/ned-nonhuman-human-animal bodies are by turn precarious and foreboding objects that make ambiguous the very turn to civilization and the sovereign Law of the Father erected to maintain the difference between livable and killable lives. Instead of permanent separation, the excluded and eatable other is bound to the self. It is only in relation to the always-already internal animality of the un-digestible other inside of me that the repelling urgency of abjection makes sense. But since that expulsion of the other is partial and incomplete, the subject is fundamentally other to itself. Neither won nor settled, the subject is, instead, caught “in process/on-trial.”

What is called ‘human,’ then, is not lifted into a patriarchal hegemony of the fraternal but as inextricably implicated in sexual, racial and animal difference as subject is in substance. Written across these corporeal fragments is the problematisation of the anthropocentric schema of noncriminal animal death, and as such, a limitrophic disturbance of the border between human animal and animalised human. In the overlay of the black body and the feminine beast is not the animal as the legitimate sacrifice of the flesh-eating human but a relation of appropriation that agitates the boundary between *trophe* and *trophy*: between that which foregrounds nourishment – or which feeds and complicates or grows the limit – and that which maintains its border through domination. The Derridian agitation of this limit, Oliver suggests, implicates one in the flesh of the other (AL 126). Nourishment is inextricable from violence and is as tied to conquest as it is to difference. This makes the question of separating out ethical ‘good eating’ from carnophallogocentrism’s devouring logic into a political, ethical and psychoanalytic encounter with ambiguity.

Mntambo’s skin/ned politics thus establishes that the carnivorous nature of imperial hunger stands in for a more profound ambivalence: that of the always-already penetrable borders of human animality. For what so disturbs the colonial psyche and threatens the white mythology of humanist subjectivity is not that the ‘human primitive’ in Africa is ‘animal’ but that she is not ‘animal’ enough.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, in *Beginning of the Empire*, at the very place where the West exercises its turn to civilisation, the subject

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<sup>112</sup> For example, Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Dell, 1960, 70: “No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it.... It would come slowly to one. ...the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar.”

who consumes and appropriates the animal other is resituated at the compromised division between purified human and abject substance. The doubling of the black body and the female animal does not consolidate the necropolitical privilege of the ‘humanised human’. Rather, the material trace of the corpse pursues the sovereign subject to confess the ‘dark horror’ of his own non-ego, his origin as animal and in abjection. Rereading the exclusions of carnophallogocentric power through species reveals the ambivalence of ‘the animal body’ to stay in its literally and legally edible place. *Beginning of the Empire*’s overlay of race, gender and species and the co-implication of human and animal across the figure of the corpse not only complicates and confounds the separation of real and symbolic sacrifice but turns the eatable animal body back onto the symbolic appropriation of the animalised body. As such, the threshold between living flesh and dead matter cannot be divided. This pollution of the Symbolic’s ‘clean and proper’ body (of the subject and the socius) in effect, brings ‘the animal’ back into discourse: not as an abstraction that orders the human by its very unlivability, but as a violated body that ‘speaks,’ albeit from the liminal zone of abject animal embodiment.

Of course, this a figurative ‘speaking’: the liminal animal body returns no-thing to the self but a nonverbal ‘unthought’ that, as Kristeva might say, oscillates between symptom and signifier but is irreducible to either (P 11). The abject body speaks of (or to) an animality that Kristeva elsewhere calls “semiotic” and which cannot be digested within the Symbolic.<sup>113</sup> It is the Symbolic’s surplus: uneatable, untouchable, voided and odorous. It hovers at the intimate edge of the senses or, in Derrida’s terms, at the “orifices” that define “eating well” as a relational ethical frontier no longer rooted in the humanism that calculates the ‘who’ or ‘what’ in terms of livable lives and eatable deaths (EW 282). But if this abject animality sticks in the throat of what Derrida calls the “eat-speak-interiorize” – precisely where word and flesh, identification and nutrition, speaking and eating, are no longer strictly separate – then the devouring subject might not only be carnivorous, but indeed, also cannibalistic (EW 281-282). In other words, if the un-digestible other is incorporated at the same time as the speaking subject introjects and enters discourse, then the subject (and the formation of ‘the human’) is

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<sup>113</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

not conditioned at the origin by the digestive closure of eating the primal father, but rather, held open in an ambiguous and unresolved eating of the m/other.

## VI. Eating the m/other: cannibal subjects

The question of the mother, and thus of the oral relationality of the purportedly literal ingestions of incorporation and figural or symbolic introjection, is internal to both material and medium: as mentioned, the body casts used for *Beginning of the Empire* derive from both the artist and her mother. In this context, the use of material produced from the sacrifice of the animal body calls up Kristeva's primal site for the disavowal of animality and the onset of discourse: the separation of the subject from the mother or, in her terms, from the maternal animal on which the not-yet-subject is materially dependent. In *Revolutions in Poetic Language*, Kristeva names this separation "material rejection," but in her later *Powers of Horror*, it is the unnamed operating mechanism within abjection.<sup>114</sup> For Kristeva, materiality is of the same order as the maternal. It is mater as matter and corporeality as semiotic, rooted in pre-Oedipal drives. I use Kristeva's frame of maternal union and abject separation, and all that is at stake in forming the boundaries between eating, speaking and killing, as the context for *Silent Embrace* (Fig. 6), a work in eleven parts composed of photographs of the eleven figural fragments of *Beginning of the Empire*.<sup>115</sup>

*Silent Embrace* poses a relation between bodily incorporation and its erasure that takes on, within the ambit of slaughter and sacrifice, those themes of nutrition, nurture, separation and death – precisely that which feeds and articulates the limit between mother-infant dyad and other. It traces an anxiety of animality and difference at the origins that invokes the orificial opening toward the other where, for both Derrida and Kristeva, word and flesh traverse the same ethical frontier: the mouth. For Kristeva, orality is the primary zone of abjection: it is the site of the binding and separation of self and m/other and the privileged site of the negotiation of presence and absence, eating and speaking. Orality is also the threshold for the production of the indeterminacy that

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<sup>114</sup> On Kristeva's *Revolution* and its relation to *Powers of Horror*, see Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 1-17.

<sup>115</sup> For Mntambo, using her mother's body to cast from is a restatement of the fact that "[h]er body and her skin... has been the protective membrane for my gestation." Mntambo, artist's statement <http://www.stevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/mntambo/text.htm> accessed 23 November 2008.

pursues the subject as a “speaking animal” (P 15). This ambiguity, Kristeva argues, can only be stabilised once the place of the mother is settled: once the difference between edible and inedible bodies, between bodies that speak and those that we eat, is established and once cannibalism and carnivorism are distinguishable. This attempted stabilisation is precisely where *Silent Embrace* extends *Beginning of the Empire*’s limitrophy.

Although first exhibited as a series, the numbered images are all individual art works. Exhibited collectively, however, the repetition of animal skin, coupled with the photographic and bodily traces of mother and child, make manifest an ongoing relational intimacy that speaks of the material and maternal core of the bonds of subjectivity and species. It is a materiality so fundamental, Kristeva insists, that it persists in language, albeit ambivalently and despite the symbolic prohibition of the Name of the Father. This material ambiguity inheres in the physicality of the fragmented skin as well as all the other signifiers of absent presence that each image utilises: the body cast, for example, and Roland Barthes’s ultimate form of remembrance, the photographic medium.<sup>116</sup> As in the installation, each of these signs both the deathly erasure of the flesh of the animal body and the unspeakable vulnerability of the living. Material ambiguity is also in the title’s framing of silence, or more accurately, in its resonance with the foundational semiotic “non-speech,” which, I argue, also feeds the imagery of *Silent Embrace*.

The relation between maternal materiality and language for Kristeva begins as abjection marks out the space of primary repression.<sup>117</sup> This is a zone in which identities such as self/(m)other and subject/object are not yet formed but are implanted by the first stirrings of a bodily ‘I’ who is, but is not yet an ego (Freud’s archaic self). Since narcissistic differentiation is only potential at this stage (the mirror stage’s secondary repression, or in Kristeva’s terms, the “thetic break” into the Symbolic, has not yet been entered), the not-yet-subject’s boundary is improper, compromised and under the perpetual threat of being swallowed back into the totalizing semiotic space of the pre-

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<sup>116</sup> See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 1993.

<sup>117</sup> Although abjection is the instrument of primary repression, and it horrifies within the Symbolic as a return of the repressed, it is not the same as repression.

Symbolic – what Kristeva calls the chora.<sup>118</sup> The not-yet-subject is a pulsing receptacle of bodily or semiotic drive energy centred on need and regulated by the mother who shares her body with the infant and also, exceeds and enfolds it. In this dyadic space the bounds of selfhood are both established and jeopardised through the abjection of an otherness within the self from which the not-yet-ego tries to separate from but cannot, yet must do so in order to live (though it will forever mourn the loss of this sacrificed fullness).

The co-ordinates for identity laid down in abjection's primary repression of the maternal are taken up and anchored (albeit in misidentification) by what she terms secondary repression or the mimetic operation of Lacan's mirror phase. The pre-Oedipal ego is formed in narcissistic identification with a unified self-image external to it. The mirror stage's representation of self as double (in the reflection), yet unified and separate from the mother, breaks the unmediated and antisocial dyadic union and lays the foundation for the substitutional economy of the Phallus or entry into the Symbolic (Lacan's split subject who, once becoming self-conscious, takes up an ego and a position through the Name). That is, for Lacan, once separate, the child realises it can no longer be the mother's desire. Fearing complete severance from gratification, the child substitutes the symbol (or desire in language as regulated by the No/Name of the Father) for his incestuous desire of the mother. It is in relation to 'having' the Phallus – namely, having the ability to signify – rather than 'being' the Phallus that Lacan elaborates sexual difference.

Kristeva accepts the Lacanian formations of the mirror phase, the Oedipal scenario and the symbolic castration of the Law of the Father as the points for the organisation of the subject/other relation, but rewrites the notion of the object that sustains the Freudian-Lacanian prohibition against maternal body. However, she ultimately reaffirms the

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<sup>118</sup> On the semiotic chora, see McAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, 57 and Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, chapter two, "The Abject Mother," 48-68. Kristeva's chora and her acceptance of a phallogocentric universe (to anticipate a later point) is controversial for feminism. Judith Butler, for instance, argues that Kristeva offers an essentialist female subjective identity built on compulsory maternity. See Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," *Hypatia: Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 3 no. 3 (Winter 1989): 104-118. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges position her work as "unproductive for a feminist politics," and quite virulently, in some places, heterosexist. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the 'Good Enough' Mother*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1992] 2006, 6, 68. The relation between Kristeva and feminism is beyond this discussion, but the idea that her work is antithetical to a certain kind of feminism results from her criticism of "existential" feminism's desire to unchain the feminine from the animal/nature/body relation.

paternal function as the logic of subjectivity and sociality: her choice of masculine pronouns for the subject throughout *Powers of Horror* confirms this. It is worth noting though that since the process of abjection is pre-Oedipal, it is to a processual difference in general rather than the formation of sexual difference per se that abjection refers.<sup>119</sup> However, in the process of maternal sacrifice and the taboos, exclusions and sublimations of the maternal semiotic that discharge its force within the Symbolic, Kristeva's abjection resurrects sexual difference as species difference and aligns it firmly within carnophallogocentric privilege.

The place of the mother as prototypical object of desire in Freud and Lacan, Kristeva argues, "can be exploded by its own contradictions," for it ignores the pre-Oedipal union and the mobility of drives (P 32). She thus privileges the pre-Symbolic mother-child dyad and suggests that, contrary to the idea formulated in the Oedipal scenario and the intrusion of the Father, there is no singular and stable site of separation between mother and infant. Instead rooted in the mother-infant dyad, there are only "modalities of separation" (starting with the breast) and this ambiguity produces a relation to the object that masks a foundational relation of "want, deprivation, original fear" (P 35). Thus, before she is the embodiment of symbolic castration that sustains both the fiction of the Law and the compensatory logic of the sign, the mother, Kristeva reminds us, is the remaindered, abject and ambiguous 'object' of primal repression.

Before the not-yet-self can become subject through submitting to the paternal function within the Symbolic's circuit of desire, the maternal must be abjected and the infant's drives channelled through what Kristeva calls the "thetic phase" that marks the onset of symbolisation.<sup>120</sup> The "thetic phase" installs the mirror stage and prepares the subject to take up an ego position through initiating the symbolic or substitutional function of language. However, since abjection is never 'over and done with,' and since the thetic is simply a threshold born of abjection, it does not set up a permanent break between the

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<sup>119</sup> Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 20-32. Kristeva holds that since abjection is the basis for the Imaginary's division between subject and object, the process of separation from the maternal body produces all subjectivity and difference.

<sup>120</sup> Kristeva writes: "The thetic phase marks the threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic. The second includes part of the first and their scission is thereafter marked by the break between signifier and signified. Symbolic would seem an appropriate term for this always split unification that is produced as a rupture and is impossible without it." Since the thetic is the initiator of the Symbolic, any maintenance of the Symbolic through sacrifice, art or ritual is also a thetic act. Kristeva, *Revolution*, 49, 74.

drive and phallic economies. Rather, since the thetic only exists because of maternal rejection – abjection – the semiotic relation to the mother is not simply repressed. Instead, it is carried over into the Symbolic order as its excess. As Oliver explains, Kristeva’s understanding of the Symbolic order is not reducible to the Lacanian realm of the Name of the Father and the Law. Rather, the Kristevan Symbolic describes a complex system in which the mobile drives and its regulatory symbolic elements are both constituent parts that work against each other in a dialectical tension.<sup>121</sup>

Kristeva’s subject thus pulls between an urge to lose the self in the violent plenitude of *jouissance* (the confluence of being and unmeaning, in effect, the Freudian “death drive”) and the desire for self-preservation (through marking out separation from the maternal container and the sacrifice of the m/other). The abject thus plagues the Symbolic as the trace of both a primal animality as well as an inaugural loss (the lost maternal union): it confronts the subject-in-process with a semiotic residue that always threatens to tip over into the “unnamable” and unsymbolisable that bears the trace of the maternal animal. Like Freud’s *unheimlich*, the threat of the return of the subject’s original gestational *heim*/‘home’ turns it into its opposite, a strangely terrifying and unhomely corporeality that persists, despite its sacrifice. Unlike Freud’s version of the *unheimlich*, however, the abject mother threatens not castration or a loss of a part of the self, but all of the self. It opens onto the abyss of death, the womb as tomb, or the becoming-corpse, against which the speaking being, sovereign only in language, marshals words as a fetishistic defence (P 10-12, 37).

Kristeva’s “unnamable” is that animality unbound by symbolic or figural identification. It is orality prior to, and outside of, the pathways of desire but integral to the infant’s internalisation of object relations. This unnamable resides in the mouth that fills itself at the mother’s breast: it is corporeal, driven by need and dependent on the maternal body. Following Melanie Klein’s account of the nursing infant in the mother-child dyad, Kristeva links orality to an intensified death drive in which the infant, in an aggressive oral-sadistic phantasy, tries to stave off abandonment by its not-yet-object (mother) through holding onto, tearing into, devouring and incorporating the maternal

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<sup>121</sup> This dialectic shows Kristeva’s Hegelian influence. The Symbolic is an oscillation between static and mobile elements, symbolic and semiotic – hence the necessity for matricide to maintain its precarious balance. Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 9-12, 62.

body.<sup>122</sup> But since for the not-yet-ego, this maternal “container” is both of its flesh and m/other, the yet-to-be subject is no longer the one who feeds but the object of its own destructiveness and consumption. At the border between inside and outside, the infant thus revolts against, expels, and abjects that part of itself that is m/other. That is to say, for both Kristeva and Klein, and for Derrida too, heterogeneity, rather than an imagined unity, is the foundation of the self.<sup>123</sup> The not-yet-ego introjects the nurturing “good (gratifying) breast” as a “part object” and, redirecting its own aggressive drives, projects the “bad (frustrating) breast” onto the now devouring, now persecuting maternal body.<sup>124</sup>

This unnamable orality is a form of bio-social eating prior to that of the primal horde: the breast is the site of a division between self and mother that prefigures the mirror stage and the economy of the Phallus. The maternal organisation of drives sets up the semiotic as the precondition for subsequent symbolic distinctions.<sup>125</sup> So foundational is this eating that the mouth that fills itself with words is not immune to its unruliness and aggression. Unlike Lacan’s notion that the drives are repressed into the inaccessibility of the “impossible real” at the onset of symbolisation, Kristeva argues that semiosis precedes, exceeds and torments the Symbolic (P 41). That is, language maintains an ability to elaborate want and not simply desire, but only through a disruption of its defensive symbolic function. In other words, as an oral activity born of abjecting the devouring mother, language attempts to hold onto that which slips away from it, and which, now “deformed,” threatens to devour, overwhelm and disintegrate it from without (P 41).

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<sup>122</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*. Trans. Ross Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, 61. I have retained Klein’s spelling of phantasy to distinguish her notion of presymbolic psychic life from other forms of fantasy referred to in this chapter. For Klein (and for Kristeva’s theory of abjection), object relations and the death drive exist from birth.

<sup>123</sup> Part three of Kristeva’s *Revolution* is devoted to “Heterogeneity”. This concept is also the basis for Kristeva’s “herethics” (see “Sabat Mater” in Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). It is also at the core of Kristeva’s notion of ethics in *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. The latter is the subject of chapter two’s engagement with the foreigner, the abject and the uncanny in Jane Alexander’s works on the theme of borders and limits.

<sup>124</sup> Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*, 62. The terms are Klein’s. Abjection and what will become Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position are both founded in an amalgamation of bodily and representational (fantasised) elements.

<sup>125</sup> Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 46-47.

This devouring orality that is within the Symbolic but not of the Symbolic – the semiotic language of want/need – forms the basis for Kristeva’s rereading of Freud’s thesis on animal phobia. Since Freud links animal phobia to both fear and the object, Kristeva argues that what is at issue is not paternal authority but the place of the maternal as abject (P 34). Whereas for Freud the animal phobia represents the guilt-ridden projection (onto the animal that bites) of an Oedipal hostility towards the prohibiting father, for Kristeva, it demonstrates “a drive economy in want of an object” or the profound unravelling of the maternal as object of desire. She sees in Little Hans “over-mastery” of language, for instance, the phobic’s fixation on uncontrolled orality. So eager is Little Hans to name everything, Kristeva writes, that he “runs into the unnameable,” into that drive-ridden no-thing, that animality that undoes his very being (P 35). That is, the phobic’s “spoken fear” of the animal is a redirection of the unspoken oral aggression towards the maternal body that threatens to engulf, or rather, tear apart, the not-yet-ego (P 34). Animal phobias for Kristeva are projections within the Symbolic order of those feelings incommensurate to the maternal as the primary object of desire.

Orality is thus the site of both desire for and fear of the m/other. Abjection’s fascination and repulsion bear the trace of this ambiguity into language as a signifying-without-sense. The subject of the symbolic therefore requires the semiotic to be stabilised and its *jouissance* controlled through sacrifice: what Kristeva terms, the “killing [of] substance to make it signify.”<sup>126</sup> However, if all substance summons up the first body – the devouring maternal body – then the speaking being, Kristeva writes, must separate from his own body, or in Freud’s terms, repress his animality, in order to set up the “clean and proper” body of the human. In other words, since abjection turns the maternal body into what is foul, inedible and polluting, the borders of ‘the human’ and the sociality he erects must become similarly “non-assimilable, uneatable, abject” (P 78-79). The ambiguity between eating and speaking that the semiotic opens up must be shut tight; or, as Kristeva puts it: “I give up cannibalism because abjection (of the mother) leads me toward respect for the body of the other, my fellow man, my brother” (P 78-79).

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<sup>126</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution*, 78.

For Kristeva, ‘the human’ separates from ‘the animal’ not through the Freudian anthropophagy of the primal horde but through the abjection of the edible mother. Fraternity is rooted not in the Name of the Father but in fear of the archaic power of the maternal. For Kristeva, therefore, the being of sociality, the species and the subject are founded on the abject mother, the undecidable maternal Thing (both self and m/other). In order to take up his heteronormative place as human in the Symbolic order, the subject must repel the mother’s body and thereby renounce eating his kin and kind. In separating out the maternal from the edible, Kristeva separates cannibalism and carnivorism and authorises the killing and eating of animal flesh. She seals what she calls “the limits of the human universe” through sacrificing kinship ties to animals (P11): in other words, as Oliver writes, the literal, edible flesh and blood of nonhuman animals consolidates the metaphorical, inedible flesh and blood ties of human kinship (AL 292).

Since for Kristeva the animal always stands in for the mother, feminine animality must be contained within patriarchal law through dietary prohibitions and purification rites. However, sublimating ritual animal sacrifice into the logic of food prohibition does not disturb the fact that animal bodies are still the objects for the violent inscription of ‘the human’. Instead, as Oliver suggests, it merely domesticates it and turns animals into the symbolic regulators of the human (AL 292). In doing so, she argues, Kristeva rejects the possibility of animal alterity (AL 295-296). Thus, while Kristeva makes place for the animal and feminine within the space of subjectivity, it is as a place of foundational ambiguity that must be excluded from the Symbolic, lest the subject gives way to his not-quite human origin. Subsuming the feminine into the expelled animal body reaffirms her allegiance to the one-way carnophallogocentric traffic that aligns ‘the human’ with the speaking being. Ultimately, in relation to the animal, Kristeva’s thesis of abjection is a retreat into anthropocentrism and resurrects the biopolitics of the nature/culture divide that her notion of the maternal, in fact, complicates. Her conflation of the animal body with the abjected maternal, in other words, reinstates the boundary between “Speak or Kill” in strictly speciesist terms.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> The quoted phrase is from Sara Guyer, “Buccality” in Gabrielle Schwab, *Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 77.

It is here at the division between material animal substance and symbolic substitute for the maternal, between incorporation and introjection – that is, at the speaking and signifying boundary between who ‘we’ are and ‘who’ it is that ‘we’ eat – that *Silent Embrace* intervenes. In fact, as I argue, the representational language of these images, read through Kristeva’s division between eating the mother and eating the other, re-inscribes a processual ambiguity that is at the core of her argument, but which refuses her speciesist re-containment and recuperation of the Name of the Father. *Silent Embrace* initiates an ambivalent relation between materiality and meaning that returns an un-sacrificable liminal zone in which the speaking subject is always-already a heterogeneous bio-social animal. This complication enacts the very “eat-speak-interiorize” that grounds Derrida’s hyperbolic ethical obligation to “eat well/eat the good” (EW 282).

*Silent Embrace* establishes the relation between mater, meaning and materiality through the interplay between embodied proximity and distance or physicality and its substitutional destruction. It traces that ambivalence not so much across the bodies of dead animals but across polished photographic surfaces. This pull between absented soma and bodied sign is at the heart of its thematic, and in this tension, the material skins do not trigger as violent a visceral recognition and repulsion as they do in the installation. Instead, the images filter affect through a reflexive visual language that calls attention to its own materiality. This reiteration of physicality in textuality, for example, occurs in the way the cropped image frame echoes the hide’s status as a fragment. But while this fragmentation evokes absence, it also signs presence since the photograph, the cowhide and the body cast mould around which the cowhide skin is shaped are all indexical signs produced through a direct physical relation to their referents. They summon the once-having-been-there of the nonhuman animal body and the human body, and this absent presence is underscored by being isolated, ‘frozen’ and fetishised in the photograph.

Shadowed by the indexical inscriptions of bodily erasure, these works evoke a form of disembodied intimacy that accentuates that strange spectrality already present in the objects themselves. That is to say, *Silent Embrace* embodies, precisely as disembodiment, the speaking being whose material presence incorporates the lack that it

founds in abjection. As physical records of human animal bodily contact – of animal hide and human form, of the artist and her mother, of the interconnection between food, flesh, death and the body of female animal – these images are partial objects symptomatically linked to the sacrifice of animality. A sacrifice in which, for Kristeva, the corporeal and material come to stand for the abjected maternal that founds signifying practice and which makes the Law of the Father possible. As signs, however, these images are also visual metaphors of that material rejection and abjection and testify to its essential condition: the object cannot be finally excluded. It returns both order and disorder; it articulates and disarticulates. The object is both self and other – the self as other to itself – and between subject and object. The object is the material trace of heterogeneity that suspends the illusory symbolic and linguistic unity of the subject – but it only does so only through ambiguity.

The images of *Silent Embrace* overlay part for whole (skin for flesh), object for object (edible animal for in/edible mother), and turn the layering of indexical signs into markers of the material basis of signifying activity. In other words, these works call attention both to the rejection of bodily materiality and human animality that ground the subject's entry into the Symbolic and its impossibility. The use of the photographed cowhide in place of the 'real thing' mimics the unavailability of the maternal semiotic but bears the trace of the subject's precarious disavowal of the incorporating maternal animal body into the Symbolic. *Silent Embrace* thus both duplicates the sacrifice of female animal body upon which the Symbolic's carnophallogocentric logic of desire is instituted and maintained, and unravels it. This doubling moreover puts Kristeva's carnivorous maintenance of both the borders of the subject and the Symbolic at risk. Even though *Silent Embrace* makes use of her reduction of the animal body to the maternal, it also disturbs this collapse and the sexual and animal difference it attempts to stabilise. It renders ambiguous Kristeva's border between edible and inedible through mapping the symbolically inedible maternal body onto the material remains of the edible animal. This formal combination of human and nonhuman animal not only elicits the play between the semiotic and the symbolic and puts into question the oral threshold of 'transition' between incorporation and introjection, but also declares the unacknowledged and uncomfortable connection, even debt, of carnivorousness to cannibalism.

This double movement is also at work in the title. Taking the title to mean a ‘spoken’ or signifying fear (one that redirects substance to make it meaningful) makes the image into a memorialisation of the lack that is founded in abjection. *Silent Embrace* thus reads at one level as the image of symbolic compensation and mastery over the desire for reunion with the absent or lost mother that Freud analyses in his grandson’s invented game of fort/da. In this game, Ernst, prior to his mother’s death but still in her absence, throws a reel out of its cot and calls out what Freud hears as ‘fort’ or ‘gone’. The child then pulls back the reel using the string he tied to it and utters what Freud hears as ‘da’ or ‘here’. Aligning the word, the reel and the absent mother, Freud proposes that language is a symbolic redirection of, and compensation for, the mother’s absence and the child’s nostalgia for the unity with her. Language, for Freud, negotiates the intrusion of death drive and inscribes a psychic economy of profit and loss that confirms the male subject’s linguistic mastery through his phallic substitution of word for lost object (mother). Fort/da is a structure of maternal sacrifice that proposes a relation between death and the onset of culture that prefigures, yet does not replace, the totemic eating of the father. In this sense, the embrace of the title signifies as the sublimated ‘recovery’ of the object of desire through the substitution of the signifier.<sup>128</sup>

However, for the Kristevan subject-in-process/on trial, born of abjection, neither that sacrifice nor its symbolic ‘pay off’ is ever complete. Remembering that language for Kristeva is merely fetishistic, any attempt to affirm the subject’s mastery is but an attempt to paper over the ever-gnawing semiotic language of primal want (“the incorporating mouth”) that pervades the Symbolic as its surplus (P 38). It is in this processual sense that *Silent Embrace*’s material inscriptions resist containment within the Symbolic’s substitutional circuit. Indeed, as the trace of the maternal suffused with the deathly materiality of slaughtered animal, *Silent Embrace* threatens to mean too much and too little. This double movement between signifier and symptom means that *Silent Embrace* 3, for instance, with its ragged edges, incomplete and torn bodily contour and marked furriness, is insistently and compellingly both speakable and unspeakable. As such, its relation of absent presence plays out the fragility of the fetish. While it duplicates the symbolic violence against the female animal body that authorises

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<sup>128</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, introduced by Adam Philips, London: Penguin, 2006, 140-42.

the carnophallogocentric logic of desire, it also re-presents what Kristeva, in her discussion of animal phobia, would call a “visual hallucination”: that is, it does not so much signify as resist signification (P 42). Outside of discourse but within its symbolic language, the image calls up the presence of the abject mother: the evacuated animal body reads as the remaindered form of the expelled m/other that is also the self, which, Kristeva suggests, haunts the identity of the subject.

Frontal and almost totemically arranged (and all that this summons as the antithesis of the ideal father that Freud prophesised the totem to be), the versions of *Silent Embrace* return the “maternal Thing” that threatens the carnophallogocentric subject with dissolution (P 42). Headless, these abject objects do not require the gaze of the other to signify: prior to identification, they rehearse both the antisocial dyadic union and the first stirrings of a sociality, that is rooted in the maternal regulation of the material processes of the infant body – what goes into it and comes out – and not the Law and paternal authority. If, in these photographs, the voided nourishing female animal body appears as a hovering material-maternal spectre to summon the risk of abject corporeality to the unified subject of desire, it does so not simply because it returns the repressed in the very process of its repression. Rather, it is because it shows up, through the abject, an ambiguity between real death and symbolic sacrifice. Because the abject is always, for Kristeva, a “a revolt within... the being of language,” a reminder of the semiotic basis of the self as a impure, drive-ridden non-ego bound to the mother, *Silent Embrace*’s spoken silence spills into the unspoken (P 45). The double movement between m/other and real and symbolic death is thus a reminder too that the subject who speaks is rooted in an animality it can no more exclude than itself.

Thus, in the process of literalising the symbolic management of the unsymbolisable (the abject mother), the image, like the resistant materiality of the becoming-corpse, returns that unnamable orality that slides underneath symbolic language’s fetishistic defences and so renders the relation between literal and figurative similarly ambiguous. While, on the one hand, the co-implication of the material and the figurative in the image calls up the destruction of the flesh for word, at the same time, it produces an image in which the boundaries between subject and substance, self and other, meaning and non-meaning, sign and affect, human and animal, are inherently mobile.

*Silent Embrace*'s indexical signs, for instance, trace a physical relation to mark making that is not reducible to the human. The images both incite and defer a relation to the material: they invite yet frustrate a desire to touch the surface, to make contact with that which is already lost and yet which persists as the "unnamable" remainder of a violent oral relationality of incorporation and introjection. The pull between presence and absence in the images paradoxically resists erasing the animal body and collapsing the animal into the maternal because the silence of absence, even though figured as the shell of the female animal body, cannot send out the word to settle on a horizon of self-presence. Rather than reduce all human animality to the stain of the abjected maternal, *Silent Embrace* invokes incorporation as an ambiguous eating in which the taking in of the animal other does not veil the language of devouring want that remains unsatisfied within symbolic representation. The human/animal figure traces what is heterogeneous to the Symbolic (both in the sense of the semiotic and the eaten animal body), into its foundational logic but does not assimilate its violence into 'normative' animal death. The play between spoken and unspoken silence is uncanny because animal death here cannot guarantee the subject's masterful presence to itself (in separation from the animal and as fetishistic defence against the devouring maternal). The silence of *Silent Embrace* is the non-speech or non-sense of that which exceeds discourse but is internal to it, as well as that of the silenced female animal on which that discourse feeds: it is a figure of materiality that is within and which, as abject, can never stabilise the separation of self and other. In visualising an unassimilable heterogeneity at the origin, the work images symbolic substitution as an ahuman or inhuman *différance* rather than as human auto-affection. It realises a relational subjectivity of a 'who' who cannot claim the mastery of one who speaks through having introjected the paternal authority of the word at the expense of dependence on the flesh of the animal, for it shows up that sacrifice as illusory. Indeed, here is a hallucinatory construction of the subject in language who *is*, but only in an embodied proximity to an abject animality that cannot be sacrificed through the logic of substitution.

In taking Kristeva at her word and in visualising the real death of the animal as the reference point for the symbolic death of the maternal, the work, in fact, puts her distinction between cannibalism and carnivorousness at risk. The failure of the division

between subject and substance to cohere suggests something more for the heterogeneous subject. If the subject is formed through abjection, and abjection is based on eating the mother instead of the primal father (through the Kleinian notion of the good/bad breast/object), it foregrounds, to borrow Oliver's words, "an economy of the breast" instead of a phallic economy.<sup>129</sup> It creates a subject in whom, because of abjection, the relation between incorporation, projection, separation and introjection is in process rather than stabilised. Since maternal regulation organises the circulation of drives in the not-yet-ego, these drives are not only semiotic but also social, and set up a relation of otherness, however embryonic and ambiguous, that prefigures identification in the Mirror stage. In other words, language is taken in at the breast – eating and speaking are always already cannibalistic. Because the semiotic persists in the Symbolic, the move from eating the mother to eating the other is not clear-cut. If the foundation for the speaking subject is prior to the division between real and symbolic death, between human and nonhuman, then the subject is always in an unresolvable oral negotiation with the devouring other both within and without and any determination of bodies edible and inedible can only be an ordeal of undecidability. This suggests, following Derrida's metonym, that the subject in language does not only eat along unidirectional species lines, but is also eaten across multiple forms of symbolic consumption-appropriation and internalisation that breach the limit between human and nonhuman, living and nonliving. For, if the animal is no longer the disavowed foundation for human exceptionalism but is instead always-already in speech, in language and within the law as its unassimilable surplus, then Kristeva's "speaking animal" becomes an embodied witness to our own unsacrificable animality. Following Derrida, the 'Speak or Kill' boundary that sustains the sacrificial logic of sovereign subjectivity can no longer go unquestioned (EW 282).<sup>130</sup>

However, this expended sense of what it means to eat the other is not meant to simply equate the literal absence that is the death of the animal body to the metaphorical absence of self-presence in language. Rather, it is to underscore the fact, disavowed in Kristeva as much as in Freud and Lacan, that symbolic substitution in the anthropocentric narrative of origin is born of and written through real animal killing, whether that killing is taken as the institution of paternal authority or as a defence

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<sup>129</sup> Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 29. Despite this, Kristeva does not relinquish phallogocentric privilege.

<sup>130</sup> See also Guyer, "Buccality," 81.

against the maternal. Therefore, as Oliver argues, despite opening up a place for the feminine and animal in the foundational narrative of anthropocentric patriarchy, Kristeva pulls back into carnophallogocentric formation of primitivism and posits the site of subjectivity as masculine and that of animality, as feminine, and as such erases all possibility of recognising animal otherness (AL 301).

In contrast, even though *Silent Embrace* seemingly reproduces the sexual and species politics of the humanist subject, the combination of human and nonhuman animal and of a body marked as female does not disavow animal alterity. Nor does the representation of the torn-off skin of the animal corpse settle into the abstraction of ‘the animal’ as the symbolic guarantor for the ‘proper human.’ The unnamable haunts the image. Without a clear symbolic meaning for animal death, the absented animal body cannot consolidate the speciesist division between edible (as carnivorous) and inedible (as cannibalistic). It cannot separate self from m/other because materiality stands not for the necessity of maternal rejection but for the impossibility of casting off human animality. It thus disturbs, to use Oliver’s phrase, “the metonymy of animal-maternal-body-food” that feeds into Kristeva’s revision of the Freudian family romance (AL 301). *Silent Embrace*, in other words, presents a silence that cannot be swallowed in the normative hegemony of the same that digests cannibalism into language.

In this sense, *Silent Embrace* sustains Kristeva’s thesis that abjection troubles the carnophallogocentric structure of patriarchal virility through the return of its repressed, jettisoned or excluded terms. But it also suggests something else: that Kristeva does not pursue the ambiguity of abjection far enough. The nexus of human animality that Kristeva identifies through the maternal dyad and the relation between incorporation and projection (or the good object and abject m/other) points to a species boundary that it always-already traversed by a hospitality to the animal other that complicates the conditions of nourishment and conquest, of trope/trophy. In both *Beginning of the Empire* and *Silent Embrace*, carnophallogocentric determinations of animal difference and sexual difference are shown up to be what Oliver calls “foundational fantasies” that are retroactively mounted at the psychic and political origin of ‘the human’ (AL 248). These are the border controls that police a kinship rooted in shared materiality. In both installations, the absent body of the animal whose sacrifice is supposed to secure human

subjectivity produces a thickened relation between real and symbolic cannibalism. Earlier I described these objects as recalcitrant, but what they are is a manifestation of the undevourable. This undevourability suggests that the mouth, as Derrida notes, is not the site for assimilating the disavowed other into the enduring humanist calculation of the sacrificial. Rather, the mouth figures a relational structure of responsibility in which openness to the other is neither defined by species nor is it ever free of the violence that accompanies this hospitality (EW 282).

*Beginning of the Empire* and *Silent Embrace* produce an eating of the feminized animal at the origin of the narrative of the ‘primitive human’ (the black African) and the ‘human primitive’ (the maternal time-before-time of abjection). In both, the raced and gendered sites of the production of ‘the human’ are implicated and articulated through a relation between violence, animality and animal death that does not feed back into its authorising speciesist privilege. ‘Eating’ the other here is reformulated as an ethico-political recognition that the subject who identifies himself through carnivorous virility is, as Derrida suggests, a fiction or a fable, even though the effects of this violence are real. An ethics that recognises animal alterity opens up the subject to a politics in which animalisation can no longer be deployed as a project of racial, species and sexual debasement. In both art works, the insistence on the material in the relation of form and content stands as metaphor and metonym for our-always-having-been-animal and is the very membrane of nonspeciesist relationality. In contrast to the sacrificial eating of the animal as a symbolic stand-in for the conquest of animality and the separation from the primitive, here is a relation of kinship in which we cannot separate who we are from who we eat. Indeed, in the return of the abject figured across the raced, gendered and species bodies excluded from the ‘clean and proper’ body of the human, ‘we’ are, in fact, who we eat. The subject, as Derrida writes, is always-already negotiated through oral relations, hence the necessity to eat responsibly, to eat well – that is, to eat ethically: “*il faut bien manger*” is a command (“one must”). “[T]o eat the good/ it is good to eat” is an ethical imperative to pay attention not to the ‘*what*’ one eats (for the self, too, circulates in the economy of eating as appropriation), but to *how* one eats and allows oneself to be eaten. Rather than to devour in order to dominate and assimilate, to ‘eat well’ is to recognise that taking in the other is a form of address in which, owing to the absence of an oppositional limit, the self is excessively implicated: to echo Derrida,

since one never eats alone, an ethics of generosity is always demanded (EW 281-83). Taking responsibility for the literal and figurative violence of eating the always-already edible other means recognising, as abjection shows, that what is called ‘animal’ and so rigorously pursued into death in order to nourish the white mythology of ‘the human,’ is, in fact, insistently and constantly too close. This intimacy is more than the politics of contamination and impurity: it is the ethical un-maintain-ability of a singular limit between human and nonhuman, living flesh and dead matter, self and other, by an embodied relationality that precedes the formation of those symbolic limits ‘proper’ to the human.

## VII. Reclaiming animality: *Europa* redux

But what does a reclaimed animality mean for a notion of a post-anthropocentric subject? Recalling the arguments of Mbembe, Kristeva and Derrida drawn on here, how does the subject in process/on trial open up an ethical space for the disavowed subjectivity of the other to speak of their ex-slavery? And how might this intersect with Derrida’s injunction to eat well, an imperative in which the subject is unbound by sex, race or species, and with Wood’s emphasis on resistance to carnophallogocentrism?

By way of setting up a conclusion, a 2008 version of *Europa* (Fig. 7) invites and frustrates some of the same issues that I outlined in relation to *The Rape of Europa* (Fig.3), but it also presents some ways of thinking through the above questions. *Europa* is a composite photograph of a figure in which the head of a slaughtered bull is digitally merged with Mntambo’s face. According to Mntambo, the bull’s head she bought from the slaughterhouse was originally white and she painted it to match her skin tone.<sup>131</sup> *Europa* is an arresting image that turns on the myth of Europa and subverts the sexualised and racialised dynamic of conquest that feeds into the voyeuristic gaze. The figure’s confrontational gaze turns on the viewer and takes on carnophallogocentrism’s racial, sexist and speciesist consumption of power through the visual discordance of the conflation of the black female body and the symbol of masculine power, the bull. *Europa* restores the head to the headless female animal torsos of Mntambo’s earlier works, but it returns it as a vision of a subject that is undifferentiated, both male and

<sup>131</sup> Mntambo, email communication, 2 November 2009. See also McInnes, “Bestial Visions.”

female, and human and nonhuman. Or rather, it returns as a subject-in-process, who carries abjection's ambiguity into *différance*. It is an image of the violence of appropriation in that the body of the killable animal authorises its language, but the gaze-that-demands-an-object describes a reconfigured subject in which human and nonhuman are not hierarchically positioned. Instead, in the process of digital manipulation, human and animal, are corporeally co-inscribed. Since the head is the seat of reason and reason is the organising "mythos of the West",<sup>132</sup> this image reconstructs the relation between white mythology and its theories of racial, sexual and species primitivism. It is as much an unflinching refusal of voyeuristic consumption of the female body as it is a testimony to the internalisation of the abject animal within any notion of 'the human.' In other words, the bull is not a symbolic placeholder for the human as is the case in Kristeva's animal appropriations, but is an animal subject who looks back (albeit through the mediating force of the feminine). In this returned look, the carnophallogocentric logic of the subject is disturbed. No longer the privilege of *homo* and *vir*, the subject is not distanced from the woman nor the nonhuman animal. In both its narrative and philosophical terms, victim (Europa) and sacrifice (the animal body) are confused and co-implicated as the critical surface for the interruptive reimagining of the heterosexist politics of domination and submission.

Read through Mbembe's emphasis on a re-imagined subjectivity (embodied, entangled and in multiple *durées*) the image puts temporality in play. The merging of blackness and female animality might suggest the Freudian notion of animal ancestors, or even the primitive origins of the Kristevan time before time in the pre-Symbolic. Yet as much as this primitive animality is presented as a property of the black female body, it is clearly loaded as a challenge to the fetishistic gendering of animality that affirms humanist privilege on the one hand, and the eroticised availability of the sexed black body on the other. The overlay of race, sex and species in the context of the myth of Europa produces a visual temporality in which the myths of animal timelessness and primitivism do not teleologically produce the heteronormative vision of human history.

Race and species are not the objectified means through which the violent nullification of animal and animalised human are effected, but the site of a critical intervention in

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<sup>132</sup> Derrida, "White Mythology," 312.

precisely that white mythology of carnophallogocentric origin. In the combination of the painted bull's head and the living flesh of the artist, *pellis* (dead skin) and *cutis* (living skin) merge. The logic of racist difference and animalizing discourse is at once embodied in its most archetypal stereotype and displaced: Mntambo's act of painting her skin tone onto animal fur to create the illusion of species continuity between the feminine and the beastly points to the construction of another ideological illusion – that of Fanon's racial epidermalisation. Corrupting the speciesist human/animal binary, *Europa* thus takes the 'pure female animal' of patriarchal ideology and the racist's always-already 'known' animality of the black woman and reiterates them as racist and sexist fictions of speciesism. Its critical function lies in the production of a bodily organisation of subjectivity: the reclamation of animality across the body marked as animal – at once human and nonhuman – reads not only as a transgression of that grid of species signification that polices the ideological and phantasmatic borders of the human/animal boundary in the humanist economy of self and other, but as a statement of difference that recognises, as Wolfe writes, that "...the 'human,' ...is not now, and never was, itself".<sup>133</sup> It is this recognition and its accompanying risks of embodied relationality that I tracked in this chapter.

In the Mntambo works I have discussed, the sacrificed body of the animal is written back into the economy of the human but as a disruptive term that exposes the necropolitical formations of speciesism. In tracing the question of human origins as a failure to absolutely divide from the animal body, these works frustrate the formations of purity that sustain the all-too-compromised boundaries between licit and illicit eating used to police the heteronormative relations of self and other. 'Eating at the origin' is instead a complex of literal and symbolic registers such that orality, as the porous threshold where ingestion and identification meet is always already inscribed as a site of violence and difference. Reconfiguring eating as a "metonymy of introjection" Derrida not only points to the psychoanalytic proximity of the animal that I 'eat' but locates carnivorousness at the heart of the question of the 'who' (EW 282). In Mntambo's work, this meaty problematic of the subject is countersigned by a corporeal, organic, and blood-stained visuality, and traced through by a sufferance that refuses to turn away from kinship with the abjected animal other. Mntambo's work is materially tied to

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<sup>133</sup> Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 9.

animal death. It is this literalness that not only generates ambivalent meanings across the philosophical, historical and psychoanalytic ‘dismemberment’ of those bodies called ‘animal,’ but opens up an abject, undevourable figure through which these disarticulated bodies claim a subjectivity that is, in Haraway terms, “eccentric” or “inappropriate/d” – unassimilable, liminal and indeterminately multiple.<sup>134</sup> It is not that these bodies are not, in Derrida’s expanded sense, edible, for as he suggests, we are always in relations in which we eat and allow ourselves to be eaten in multiple and conflicting ways. Rather, it is that in the indeterminacy between real incorporation and symbolic introjection, literal and figurative sacrifice, the maternal and the animal, cannibalism and carnivorousness, living and nonliving matter, substance and symbol, skin and hide, human subject and animal object, there is not a denial of difference but a multiplication of differences across boundaries that are no longer singular and stable. This proliferation of *différance* produces a subject who is not self-present but heterogeneous at its origin (EW 266). Derrida suggests that this is a formation not of appropriative totalisation but of “ex-appropriation,” where the remainder called the subject “never ... closes itself” (EW270). The subject in both abjection and deconstruction is thus infinitely open to an other that it cannot assimilate or distil in a violent homogenised self-identity (EW 270). It marks, in other words, an irreducible heterogeneity that infects any stable sense of the ‘who.’ The contaminative force of this opening – what Derrida calls “a certain inhumanity” (EW 276) – is at issue in the “infinite hospitality” that conditions the ethics of ‘eating well.’ I develop this non-dialectical tension between totalising containment and ex-appropriation in chapter two’s focus on the foundational violence of ‘the foreign’ in both abjection and “the inappropriate/d.”

Haraway’s “inappropriate/d” others and its accompanying notion of an eccentric subjectivity occur in her essay, “Ecce Homo.” A critique of the masculinist structure of the Enlightenment subject, “Ecce Homo” offers a figure of an inassimilable humanity in which Haraway argues that the fiction of ‘the human’ is a construct that ‘we’ cannot not desire. But it is a desire that must be “diffracted”<sup>135</sup> as a set of relations in which ‘we’ are not the only participants. This is to reimagine a humanity that does not answer to the always-already known ‘who’ of the narratives of virility but rather to what Haraway calls “significant otherness,” or Derrida, the incalculability of “an indefinite ‘Who?’”

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<sup>134</sup> Haraway, “Ecce Homo,” 86.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 88.

(EW 276). Reading Haraway's "Ecce Homo" alongside Derrida's call for a deontologised response produces an ethico-politics that seeks, in the figure of the "inappropriate/d other," a metaphor for a "nonoriginal" humanity that is broken, mutant, and torn apart. This originary violence opens up what Haraway, in an earlier framing of the relationality she later pursues as the "mess mates" of companion species, interprets as sites of "possible connection and accountability".<sup>136</sup> For Haraway, the "inappropriate/d" 'speak' through their embodied disarticulations, in contradiction and ambiguity, to a relationality that is an impure, non-species specific and non-hierarchical 'becoming-with'. This relationality is not in denial of differences or limits, nor does it seek to blur these into some sort of hybrid equivalence. Instead, it is a call to a self-critical awareness of what, in Derrida's terms, feeds these boundaries and enables them to be mobilised and policed into hierarchies across and in denial of differences, and also, opened up to them. It is this ethico-aesthetic sense of reconfiguring what it means to recognise oneself as a human animal from within the violated bodies of the speciesist, racist and sexist framing of Western humanism that produces the border-transgressing feminist notion of subjectivity Haraway designates as "eccentric."<sup>137</sup> It is also through this that the wounded and abjected "ex-slave" becomes, not as an animalised victim of a perpetuated cycle of violence, but as a radicalised and disruptive figure of the "inappropriate/d other".

As the controversy of Mntambo's *Rape of Europa* shows, reading race and gender through species exposes the speciesist limits of the humanist discourse of human rights as always already caught up in the white mythology of the unmarked masculine universal. Framed in impure relations to these terms, or "curdled," to use Oliver's term (AL, 26), in the abject entanglement of human animality, the question of the subject is held open as in "process/ on trial:" a heterogeneous formation and deformation of borders that interrogate their sites of origin. In this thickening, the status of animality remains a provocation and relations of skin, violence and species are controversial,

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 86. Also Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 32.

<sup>137</sup> See Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness". *Feminist Studies* 16 no.1 (Spring 1990): 145. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177959> accessed 5 September 2010. Haraway's figure of the "inappropriate/d" is in this text a specifically feminist one. I have expanded its feminist politics to include a critical posthumanist ethico-politics, which is, I think, especially in the force of *Europa's* gaze, in keeping with the spirit of Haraway's use of the figure of Sojourner Truth and Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestizas* as well as the kinds of relations of significant otherness produced in *When Species Meet* (2008).

urgent and deadly serious. In my reading of Mntambo's works in this chapter, the borderline figure of the "inappropriate/d" other, which is produced in the critical redeployment of the edible politics of carnophallogocentric and colonialist sovereignty, becomes a way to think the excessive responsibility inscribed in "eating well." This is to recognise that any notion of the subject as a figure of mastery is a fiction, and that what man calls himself and what he calls 'Animal' has real consequences, both for those nonhuman animals whose death does not signify, and for those animalised humans consumed in less literal ways.



**Figure 8** Jane Alexander, *Security with traffic (influx control)* 2007. Installation. © 2015 Jane Alexander/DALRO, South Africa. © Rafael Vargas.



**Figure 9** Jane Alexander, *Security with traffic (influx control)* 2007, detail owith *Ghost* 2007© 2015 Jane Alexander/DALRO, South Africa. © Rafael Vargas.



**Figure 10** Jane Alexander, *Security with traffic (influx control)* 2007, detail with *Convoy (trade)* 2007 and *Official* 2006-2007. © 2015 Jane Alexander/DALRO, South Africa. © Rafael Vargas.



**Figure 11** Jane Alexander, *Security with traffic (influx control)* 2007, detail of *Custodian 2005* © 2015 Jane Alexander/DALRO, South Africa. © Rafael Vargas.



Figure 12 Jane Alexander, *Frontier with ghost* 2007. Photomontage. © 2015 Jane Alexander/DALRO, South Africa.



Figure 13 Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) *The Times* 30 May 2013. © 2013 - 2015 Zapiro (All Rights Reserved). Printed/Used with permission from [www.zapiro.com](http://www.zapiro.com).



**Figure 14 Jane Alexander, *Yield* 1997-2010. © 2015 Jane Alexander/DALRO, South Africa.**

## Chapter two

### Spectres of the Inappropriate/d: Thinking Alterity with Jane Alexander's *Animot*

#### I. Introduction

In chapter one, I argued, alongside Derrida and Kristeva, that the “infinite hospitality” of the “metonymy of eating well” is tied to the subject’s irreducible and foundational heterogeneity. Metaphorised in the limitrophic co-implication of conceptions of animality – human and non-human, literal and figurative, political and psychical – originary heterogeneity makes possible the idea of a non-anthropocentric subject. It also posits relationality at the centre of an ethico-politics, and consequently, renders indigestible any notion of a unidirectional, speciesist and sacrificial ‘eating’ as well as a safe division between real and symbolic violence. The intersection of sex, race, gender and species in Mntambo’s work sets out not only the significance of abjection for troubling the Western sacrifice-accepting formation of ‘the who’ (human, masculine, heterosexual, virile, carnivorous and white), but also the operation of *différance*. In Kristeva’s terms, this remainder marks a subject “in-process/on trial,” in which any relation to ‘others’ of whatever species originates from an abjected relation to an ‘own and improper’ otherness that can never, ultimately, be excluded. In the chapter’s concluding pages, I introduced Haraway’s reading of the “inappropriate/d” as a figure for this heterogeneous, insurgent and originary alterity.

In this chapter, I will argue that this is an alterity that is not only inappropriate, non-appropriable and abject, but also, uncanny. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva argues that abjection is experienced as a “massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness,” an ambivalence in which the familiar is also radically and disturbingly foreign: “Not me. Not that, But not nothing, either” (2). It is the ethical and political effects of the imbrication of radical alterity and an uncanny foreignness that I want to explore through Jane Alexander’s mixed media installations of hybrid interspecies figures, but I do so too from within the economy of violence that is “eating well.”<sup>1</sup> I follow the registers of

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Alexander’s distinctive interspecies aesthetic is evident in her earliest exhibited works, the figural fragments made of sculpted wax and found animal bone which she created in her Fine Art degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in the early 1980s. She completed a Masters in Fine Art

the foreign/er and the trope of ‘the animal’ not only in Alexander’s work, but also in Kristeva’s political intervention into an ethics of psychoanalysis. I then consider the intersection of violence, species, abjection and ghostly alterity in contemporary South African political and philosophical discourse. My aim is to propose a more complex reading of the interrelation of species, alterity and violence than that proffered by recent literature on Alexander’s work. In doing so, I critically animate Mbembe’s desire to articulate a subject beyond the framing of ‘the human’ that is inherited from the West. I will show how the inappropriate/d alterity that inhabits the uncanny, abject formations of ‘the foreign’ in Jane Alexander’s visual language articulates the ex-appropriative, unassimilable, indigestible and indeed, spectral remainder, or as Derrida terms it, “a certain inhumanity,” at work in the deconstructive ethics of ‘eating well’ (EW 276). Since Derrida argues that we cannot sidestep the carnivorousness of the relation (“one must eat”), his question of “how to eat well” suggests that the ethical is not absolved from a relation to violence but is inextricably tied to it, which is why the ethical injunction to ‘eat well’ – the *il faut* (one must) – is shadowed, even, haunted by an urgent, unwavering and undecidable alterity (EW 282).<sup>2</sup> It is this undecidable alterity, one that answers not to ‘the human,’ nor to that which he calls ‘animal,’ but to the constitutive mortality of the *animot* that I pursue in this chapter.

In what follows, I will first address the ways in which an uncanny alterity is underpinned by ‘the animal’ in the literature on Alexander, and its troubling of the imagined limits of the human neutralised; and second, how the question of the animal inscribes what Mbembe calls an “anthropological crisis” in relation to conceptions of difference and the foreign in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> In this, I respond to a question Mbembe poses in a recent essay titled “Democracy as a Community of Life,” in which he asks

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there in 1988 and the thesis component focussed on themes of violence and disquietude in her own work and as well as in works by Edward Kienholz, Mark Prent and Malcolm Poynter, all of whom she cites as influences. Widely exhibited both nationally and internationally, she has recently been the subject of two exhibitions, *On Being Human* (Durham 2009) and *Jane Alexander Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)* (New York 2011). Both exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues with commissioned essays: Pep Subirós (ed.) *On Being Human*. Durham: Institute of Advanced Study, Durham University, 2009; and Pep Subirós (ed.) *Jane Alexander Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)*. New York and Barcelona: Museum of African Art and Actar, 2011. See also John Pepper, “Animal Bodies/ Absent Bodies: Disfigurement in Art after Soweto.” *Third Text* 17 no.1 (2003): 71-83.

<sup>2</sup> See also Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas” in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 2001, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 6.

after the conditions for a “radical future-oriented politics” in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> In his argument, however, “the human is another name for the future.”<sup>5</sup> Since Mbembe’s question is a philosophical gambit rather than a programmatic statement for political action, my challenge to its anthropocentric premise by way of Alexander’s *animot* responds to its critical provocation. For that is what I think Mbembe’s point is: to question what remains of that phantom called ‘human’ inherited from the West and perpetuated by a necropolitical culture of violence.<sup>6</sup> Yet, precisely because the target of this carnophallogocentric violence is ‘the animal,’ it is a question that must be, as Derrida writes, “indissociable” from the “becoming of so called animal life.”<sup>7</sup> Analysing the intersection of species, violence and alterity in the selected works by Alexander not only recognises this but offers an imaginative answer to Mbembe’s implicit appeal for a regenerative politics of possibility that is also an ethics. This is all the more so since Mbembe’s question of the future asks how to “deal with ghosts.”<sup>8</sup> *Ghosts*, as Derrida would put it (to borrow from his *Specters of Marx*): always “more than one/ no more one.”<sup>9</sup> Derrida inscribes this undecidability of the spectre, and its non-dialectical complication of singular and plural, in the phrase ‘*plus d’un*,’ which translates into the knotted valency of “most one/ more than one/ other than one.”<sup>10</sup> *Plus d’un*, therefore, is a phrase that requires to be grappled with, and, thereby, points to the aporetic nature of the ethical injunction ‘*il faut*,’ which demands the calculation of the incalculable through the necessity of a decision without the assurance of certainty. ‘*Plus d’un*’ stages, as Stefan Herbrechter writes, the aporia of “the im/possible one...without which deconstruction cannot take place.”<sup>11</sup> As *plus d’un* is an undecidable term, it also stages that the question of alterity is not one of ontology but of relationality, and, first of all, of self-relation: that what is in question is the ethical necessity to think anew about an inherited politics of life, law and sovereignty. That is,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Mbembe asks: “what is ‘the human’ – or rather, what remains of ‘the human’ or even of ‘humanism’ – in an age of violence, fear and torture, war, terror and vulnerability.” Ibid. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994, 106.

<sup>8</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 5.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xx.

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Herbrechter, “*Plus d’Un*: Deconstruction and the Translation of Cultural Studies.” *Culture Machine*, 6 (2004). <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/viewArticle/4/3> Accessed 6 January 2014. See also Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xx. Lawler translates *plus d’un* as “‘more of one’ or ‘no more one’ or ‘more than one.’” Lawler, *This is Not Sufficient*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

to think again about the relation between ‘the one’ and ‘the many’, or in Mbembe’s terms, of “an ethics of mutuality.”<sup>12</sup> At issue in my re-imagining of the subject-in-process as *animot*, both haunted by and remade through species, is the question of an excess that Derrida would call the ethical incalculability before whom/what we must answer: how to live with ghosts?<sup>13</sup> Through analysis of two of Alexander’s multi-figured life-size installation works, *Security with traffic (influx control)* (Figs. 8-11, 2007) and *Yield* (Fig. 14, 1997-2010), I want to make meaningful this interruptive address to ghosts – those of the other and the self. It is this ontological interruption that Derrida calls “hauntology.”<sup>14</sup> As my chapter’s title suggests, I propose that this interruption takes place as a spectral violence that opens the possibility of thinking both alterity and the *animot*. At stake in this chapter is the very nature of the violence that underpins the ethical relationality of “eating well:” it is a question that is internal not only to the rhetorical embodiment of the *animot* at work in Alexander’s figurations of the inappropriate/d, but any thinking of the ethico-political, and thus, of democracy, mutuality or becoming-with.

## II. Alexander’s “uncanny beings”<sup>15</sup>

Since the 1980s, Alexander’s work, whether in sculptural or photographic form (what she terms photomontage) has consistently drawn on an interspecies aesthetic of imagined hybrids of human and other animals. These incorporate both found objects and take in familiar and sometimes, as in the case of *Security with traffic*, even identifiably specific, settings. Often repeated across media and arranged to respond to the curatorial demands of different environments, Alexander’s figures produce a visual lexicon of the strangely familiar, and familiarly strange that seems to stage what Freud, in his analysis of “*Das Unheimliche*/The Uncanny,” describes as “an immanence of the strange within the familiar.”<sup>16</sup> It is not simply that these figures appear to violate taxonomic laws, species categories and physiological norms; it is also that they seem to disturb a structure of realistic and logical expectations, all the while sharing the same space and time of the encounter. They seem to offer the viewer a silent, unearthly

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<sup>12</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 1.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xviii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>15</sup> Maren Stange, “Reassembling the Visible World” in Subirós (ed.) *On Being Human*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Freud, “The Uncanny,” 124.

welcome in which the viewer is cast as a witness. These acts of witnessing, however, while addressed to the viewer, are not quite an invitation to participate. Instead, the works appear to take the form of a visitation. As if to materialise the definition of the *unheimlich*/ uncanny which Freud borrows from Schelling, Alexander's tableaux read as distillations of that which "ought to have remained ...secret and hidden but has come to light."<sup>17</sup> So pervasive is this sense of apprehension and unease, of curiosity tinged with an almost unnerving inventiveness, that, as Jennifer Bajorek also observes, it has become common for critical literature on Alexander to identify her work as uncanny.<sup>18</sup> The collection of essays in the catalogue that accompanied a recent major exhibition of her work provides several examples: Lize van Robbroek, for instance, sees Alexander's figures as "sinister portents from the realm of the night" who intrude on a "daytime universe,"<sup>19</sup> while for Kobena Mercer and Pep Subirós, Alexander's works are "poetic monsters"<sup>20</sup> which "hover in the viewer's mind as distressed/distressing ghosts... Alien yet shockingly familiar."<sup>21</sup> As Bajorek writes, this framing of the uncanny in Alexander's figures begs the question whether her figures are disquieting because they are strange or because they are familiar, because of their so-called humanness or because of that unruly animality.<sup>22</sup> Or rather, is it because, both visually and analytically, they appear to confound the question with what Subirós terms "the imprecise, fluid edges between human and nonhuman animal".<sup>23</sup>

Looking at the figures that 'people,' the large-scale installation *Security with traffic (influx control)*, for example, they appear to embody, in the most literal sense of the word, an ambiguity that evokes vulnerability and pathos as well as indeterminate dread, or even, perhaps, the uncertain promise of something monstrous. Otherworldly, foreign – they do not seem properly to inhabit the place of their enclosure. Situated in a courtyard, the installation consists of a double enclosure in which a larger rectangular

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Bajorek, "Jane Alexander's Anti-Anthropomorphic Photographs," *Angelaki* 16 no. 1 (2011): 80.

<sup>19</sup> Lize van Robbroek, "Harbinger of Night: Jane Alexander's Posthumanism" in Subirós (ed.) *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Kobena Mercer, "Postcolonial Grotesque: Jane Alexander's Poetic Monsters," in Subirós (ed.) *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Pep Subirós, "In Africa and Beyond: Reflections on Jane Alexander's Mutant Universe," in Subirós (ed.), *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Bajorek, "Jane Alexander's Anti-Anthropomorphic Photographs," 80.

<sup>23</sup> Pep Subirós, "In Africa and Beyond," in Subirós (ed.), *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 24; Gildenhard, "Ontological fluidity," in Subirós (ed.) *On Being Human*, 29.

inner fenced area is separated from an outer, razor-wire topped fence by a roughly one-metre perimeter. The inner cage houses a singular figure, *Ghost* (Fig. 9, 2007), an ash-grey human-bodied, life-size male figure with an impala-like head. *Ghost* is clothed in a white overall, and wears red industrial gloves. Draped over his shoulders in front of him are wires with used red industrial gloves, machetes (also called pangas), sickles, and a walking stick or *knobkerrie*. Hanging from the front of his overall is a *rooikat* (caracul) pelt. Behind him, sickles and machetes extend outwards from wires. In the cage around him, strewn across the earth-covered floor, are used red industrial gloves, as well as 1000 machetes, 1000 sickles and 100 inner tubes. In the fenced perimeter are other composite figures: the *Official* (2007), slender long-armed human-like figure with a wild dog-like face directs the *Convoy* (2006/7), a three figure group of elongated, stooped bodies with arm-like appendages, spindly legs and black Ibis-beaked heads (Fig. 10); the hyena-dog-like *Small Beast* (2003) patrols one side; the wingless *Bird* (2004) another; *Monkey Boy* (2006) points towards *Official* and *Convoy* with one arm and holds onto a rope attached to a lamb-like form with bound rear legs, *Hobbled Ruminant* (2004). *Custodian* (2005), a human-ape-like form, is perched atop a surveillance platform on which more red gloves are placed (Fig. 11).

Even in these purely descriptive terms, *Security with traffic (influx control)* stages a contested limit but also, a troubled and troubling experience of multiplied thresholds. In the literature on Alexander, this troubled limit is contracted to an anthropocentric reading of a species border: Alexander's figures, Subirós asserts, appear "[t]hreateningly inhuman. Or perhaps, unsparingly too human."<sup>24</sup> For Bajorek, the attempt to account for this anxious ambivalence generates what she calls "an almost universal compulsion" amongst Alexander's critics to catalogue the component parts of her figures, one to which I, too, have fallen prey.<sup>25</sup> But this urge to list and categorise, I would argue, is not simply an attribute of the figures' inventive evocation of the unexpected. Instead, the desire to make sense of the figures is a product of an uncertain anticipation generated by an enigmatic dread that is internal to the figures' own visual language. This is a dread which both prompts and troubles the ontological question 'what is?' and which inhabits all attempts to identify and place these figures in a coherent relationship to their constituent parts.

<sup>24</sup> Pep Subirós, "In Africa and Beyond," in Subirós (ed.), *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Bajorek, "Jane Alexander's Anti-Anthropomorphic Photographs," 80.

One of the more prevalent arguments in the recent writings on Alexander accounts for the figures' strangeness in terms of a critical disturbance of conventional humanist structures of knowledge. Consequently, as Mercer argues, they also critically disturb all binaries based upon that singular human/animal hierarchy: nature/culture; rational/instinctive; primitive/civilised. In a word, as this argument goes, Alexander's figures are "humanimal."<sup>26</sup> For Mercer, Subirós *et al*, the "humanimal" seemingly represents a category transgression that addresses nothing less than the relation between self and other, and does so beyond the known determinations of ontological essences and their clear-cut division between the human and nonhuman. Thus Mercer suggests that the hybridity of Alexander's figures offer a postcolonial and "posthumanist" reassessment of "what it means to be human."<sup>27</sup> They do so, he notes, by offering a humanimal "counterdiscourse" that, in blurring the boundaries between human and nonhuman, confuses distinct ontological spheres and so questions an Enlightenment heritage of racial thinking and its binaries.<sup>28</sup>

Such reassessment, however, seems rather illusory, for "the humanimal" remains, for example, in Subirós' argument, a deeply ontological construct that never stages "what it means to be human" as a question of species. It never, in fact, puts those 'known' ontological determinations into question. The discourse of "the humanimal," in other words, never questions the abstraction 'the animal' that sustains the "commonplace assumptions" of the 'who' called 'human' upon which the politics of the animalisation it purportedly contests is erected. Instead, the socio-political criticism thematised in the "humanimal" is in fact sustained by the abstraction of 'the animal' as the dehumanised residue of a 'fall'. Overwritten by what Bajorek terms an "anthropomorphic impulse," the "humanimal" proposes that Alexander's work is fundamentally about only one thing: *On Being Human*, as the title of the catalogue dedicated to her work suggests.<sup>29</sup> But what is 'human' is measured and secured against an always-known animality in

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<sup>26</sup> Subirós first uses "humanimal" as a shorthand for Alexander's interspecies combinatory aesthetic and "uncanny beings" in the 2009 exhibition catalogue, *On Being Human*, which he edited, and its usage is consolidated across most of the essays in his 2011 catalogue for *Jane Alexander Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)*.

<sup>27</sup> Mercer, "Postcolonial Grotesque," 32, 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

<sup>29</sup> Bajorek, "Jane Alexander's Anti-Anthropomorphic Photographs," 80. On anthropomorphism, see also Tom Tyler, "If Horses had Hands..." *Society and Animals*, 11 no. 3 (2003): 267-281.

which ‘the animal’ is synonymous with brutality, with an instinctual and base violence and negation and so, is available as a metaphor for human degradation and corruption. Thus, the fluid human/animal edge of the humanimal “epitomize[s] the human condition and human behaviour as an open multidimensional process... forever unfinished, occasionally on the verge of falling back into the animality upon which it is built.”<sup>30</sup> Given the anthropocentric rhetorical frame of the “humanimal” and the anthropomorphic desire to see the hybrid in terms of so-called ‘human qualities,’ the discourse of the “humanimal” proposes that Alexander’s work already knows what it means to *be* human even before the ‘being’ of ‘being human’ is made into an ontological question.<sup>31</sup> Maren Stange, for example, writes that while Alexander’s works unseat expectations, they “never deny conventional responses to and long held ideas about human and Other categories of being,” and Subirós, drawing on Mercer, asserts that Alexander’s “poetic monsters” show how “our most refined intellectual and moral capacities are ...enmeshed with ...visceral instincts and passions”.<sup>32</sup> This idea reaffirms a limit that stabilises an answer, even one seemingly as precarious as, in Subirós’ words, “the fragility and uncertainty of becoming-human.”<sup>33</sup> However, it is worth pointing out that this “becoming” is neither uncertain nor fragile, but, in fact, static, predetermined, steadfast and engaged by ontological limits and biological divisions. Instead of any sense of interspecies being-with that would lead to Mercer’s “new possibilities for mutual exchange” and an “ethics of difference,” this “humanimal” ‘becoming human’ favours a humanist commonality of empathetic identification whose return to the self-sustaining subject is etched in speciesist terms. For example, in this version, the trait of endured suffering that gives the figures their pathos binds to ‘us’ only if ‘we’ accept that vulnerability is, as Subirós puts it, a “distinctly human trait, rooted in the body, in its constant exposure to the care and violence of others.”<sup>34</sup> As such, the construction of the other in the concept of the “humanimal” suggests that, rather than “posthumanist,” it remains firmly in the tradition of humanism. The concept

<sup>30</sup> Subirós, “On Being (and Becoming) Human,” 14.

<sup>31</sup> Stange, “Reassembling the Visible World,” 37; on allegory in Alexander’s work, see Ashraf Jamal, “Lost Marsh: Scandalous Presence” in Subirós (ed.) *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 57-62.

<sup>32</sup> Stange, “Reassembling the Visible World,” 37; Subirós, “In Africa and Beyond,” 22.

<sup>33</sup> Subirós, “On Being (and Becoming) Human,” in Subirós (ed.) *On Being Human*, 22. Also Subirós, “In Africa and Beyond,” where this sentiment is rephrased as “the indefiniteness or rather the undefinability (sic) of being (and becoming) human, that ambiguous, open-ended form of animal life, a form in permanent reconfiguration with no pre-established destination” (24). At the same time, however, this reconfiguration is then anchored by “a precarious balance between ...sociocultural values, needs and constraints and our animal needs and impulses” (24).

<sup>34</sup> Subirós, “In Africa and Beyond” in Subirós (ed.), *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 23.

of the humanimal does not disturb or trouble the parameters of the West's frame of the human simply because its vision of a socio-political critique that allegorises the colonial encounter and its legacy of violence functions by separating out a dehumanised inhumanity from a human vulnerability and leaves the binary of which this division is constructed, in place.

If the notion of "the humanimal" dilutes Alexander's aesthetic of uncertainty to a 'known,' albeit mutant, universe of ontological determinants, Lize van Robbroek's psychoanalytic approach to the radical otherness of Alexander's art locates their haunting somewhat differently. Her reading of the radicality of Alexander's otherness delves into what she terms the "psychotopography" of the postcolony in which that which is disavowed as fundamentally different (primitive/uncivilised/animal) is, rather, all too familiar. In a veiled acknowledgement of Freud's assertion that the *unheimlich* is unhomey because it is too close to home and presents the return of the repressed, van Robbroek locates the uncanny effect of Alexander's work in relation to the psychodynamic formation of the subject. Drawing on Kristeva's analysis of abjection, van Robbroek argues that Alexander's nightmarish visions present the "retrieval of the indigestible core" of the West's project of modernity, and therefore unravel the liberal humanist rational subject. This unravelling operates through the use of familiar objects, which, in the manner of symbolic displacement, make available "contents unpalatable to the conscious mind."<sup>35</sup> She suggests that Alexander's art acts as a confrontation and immersion in the abject, in which the uncanny provokes a crisis of the limits of the self.<sup>36</sup> In Kristeva's terms, this unravelling produces the "scorching moment of hesitation between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death" (P 155). The other in Alexander's art reveals itself to be a difference that is "always-already residing within" and which cannot be assimilated, which has profound consequence for the humanist subject of reason. This alien kernel within, she argues, points not only towards the existence of Kristeva's "semiotic preconscious" but to a notion of a foundational abyss in which man is mastered by his unconscious.

Using Francis Burger's (unpublished) analysis of radical alterity in South African art, van Robbroek links this abyss to the Lacanian Other that exceeds signification,

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<sup>35</sup> van Robbroek, "Harbingers of the Night," 39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 40.

domestication and comprehension in the Symbolic. Burger relates this version of the Other to the Lacanian Thing/ *Das Ding* that emerges in Slavoj Žižek's critique of Lévinas' ethics. In his "Plea for Ethical Violence," Žižek argues that Lévinas' account of ethical responsibility fails to leave open a place for the "inhuman within the human."<sup>37</sup> Alexander's work, according to Burger, is the materialisation of this notion of the inhuman within and therefore produces a confrontation with what Žižek calls "the Other qua Real, the impossible Thing, the 'inhuman partner,' the Other with whom no symmetrical dialogue is possible."<sup>38</sup> There are obvious distortions in the above reading of Lévinas' ethics before ontology – the face of the other, for example, is never supposed to initiate a symmetrical or reciprocal relation (its excess is precisely why the subject is hostage to the other) – yet these are distortions van Robbroek inadvertently affirms. Through her endorsement of Burger's reading of Žižek's critique of a Lévinasian ethics, she lands up separating otherness from the ethical and locating the concept of alterity psychoanalytically. However, this evacuation of ethics from her framework of otherness points towards a withdrawal of the relational, which will have serious consequence for the understanding of abjection in her argument. Van Robbroek argues that Alexander's art is abject first and foremost because in its human/nonhuman dynamic it makes palpably 'real' the very instance of the Žižekian "inhuman within the human."<sup>39</sup> Following Žižek's account of the Lacanian subject of the Symbolic, who comes into being in a language and structure of signification that pre-exists and exceeds him, and in which no signifier can be his 'own,' she suggests that Alexander's work exposes the rational humanist subject to be nothing but "an originary void" and therein lies the power of its haunting and what she terms its "deconstructive effect."<sup>40</sup>

While van Robbroek's analysis of abjection certainly displaces the mastery of the rational subject, it does not appear to deconstruct it, at least, not as I understand Derridian deconstruction in relation to the animal question. Instead, this subject-as-void reinstalls the fiction of 'the animal' within the Enlightenment fantasy of 'the human' as a placeholder for the traumatic Real. Without access to signification, and thus barred from conscience, reason or authority, liberal humanist man is remade as animal: mute,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 42.

powerless and abject. In addition, van Robbroek's approach to abjection as the return of the empty core of the posthumanist subject installs absence and negation where, in fact, in Kristeva's version, there is only relation; or more accurately, there is only an unresolved relational exchange that produces the subject-in-process/on-trial. As I argued in chapter one, Kristeva's abjection both institutes and besieges the boundaries of the subject-in-process/on trial not because it presents the final return of the now-purged and evacuated subject of the Signifier, but because it signals the ever-possible eruption of its unfinished sacrifice of substance: namely, the material/maternal stain of human animality.

Owing to abjection, the subject inhabits the Symbolic only as an unfinished site of struggle. Thus the bounded edge between self and other, human and animal, is shown up to be thickened, multiplied and always-already crossed. The subject is plagued by an originary contamination the remaindered surplus of which it wants, finally, to jettison, but cannot. To put this foundational and relational ambiguity of abjection another way, the surge of uncanniness that emerges in abjection functions both as a torment and as a mechanism of self-defence, and in this ambivalence, lies its structure of haunting. Abjection, Kristeva writes, is the projection outwards of those destructive drives which the subject cannot contain, yet which, like an "inescapable boomerang" circles back to "place the one haunted by it literally beside himself" (P 1). The subject in the grip of abjection experiences only a "vortex of summons and repulsion" (P 1). The effect of this displacement produces what for Freud is the most *unheimlich* of all things: a ghost haunted by its own terrifyingly intimate foreignness. For, as Freud's analysis teaches, the *unheimlich* is the return of that repression that haunts in the place where one thinks one is at home. The *un* of the *heimlich* thus marks a body unhomed, "beside itself," as if to enact the psychoanalytic equivalent of the semantic proof through which Freud finds the frightening, hallucinatory and perplexing (*unheimlich*) concealed within and at home with the native, the intimate and the domesticated (*heimlich*). So proximate is this unhoming principle that Freud cites ghosts as the most exemplary of all of the *unheimliche* instances he lists – the one, he surmises, he ought to have begun his study of "The Uncanny/*Das Unheimliche*" with, but which would have been "too gruesome" to do so.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Freud, "The Uncanny," 148.

Estranged from itself, this uncanny foreign body is compelled, like all ghosts, to return to where they think they are ‘at home,’ and to repeat this returning as an estranging of the logic of the familiar. In the substitutional logic of the uncanny, each unnerving repetition is also a displacement enacted to protect the limits of the self that it also threatens.<sup>42</sup> As Nicholas Royle puts it, the foreign body is uncanny because it worries the foundation on which notions such as ‘foreign’ and ‘at home’ is thought.<sup>43</sup> The familiar strangeness of the uncanny disturbs because it presents a crisis of the proper and the self-identical: in Royle’s succinct formulation, the uncanny affects an “experience of oneself *as* a foreign body.”<sup>44</sup> In this deconstructive and psychoanalytic suspension of what is proper to the self, the foreign body, Royle writes, “could indeed be called (or recalled as) ‘death’.”<sup>45</sup> *Recalled* because, death, for Kristeva (and for Freud), is that originary violence or “inaugural loss” that haunts the living self as an identity formed in difference (P, 5). *Recalled* too, for Derrida, since “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come back.”<sup>46</sup> Neither living nor dead, the spectre’s incarnation is only experienced as repetition.<sup>47</sup>

Rather than any mediation on the frailty of being human, whether framed as a vulnerability (critical, humanimal or transcendent) or as the return of the Real that resists the Symbolic, the uncanny, as I show in relation to *Security with traffic*, functions to produce a sense of a disarticulating “originary spectrality.”<sup>48</sup> This foundational ambiguity is the reason her figures appear to hover as “distressed or distressing ghosts,” that disturb the unity of time, space and narrative as well as any straightforward sense of a threshold. This is also the reason why to think with the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. The deconstructive effect of return is also produced at a textual level in the following readings: Hélène Cixous, “Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimliche* (The “Uncanny”).” *New Literary History* 7 no. 3 (1976): 524-548, 619-645

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0028-087%28197621%297%3A3%3C525%3AFAIPAR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-E> accessed 2 April 2012. See also Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995, 150.

<sup>44</sup> Royle, *The Uncanny*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Royle, *After Derrida*, 150.

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 123.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 207.

<sup>48</sup> The phrase derives from Derrida although the quotation is taken from Peggy Kamuf, “Violence, Identity, Self-Determination and the Question of Justice: on *Specters of Marx*,” in Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (eds.) *Violence, Identity, Self-Determination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, 274.

uncanny in her work does not begin by posing the ontological question of ghosts as means to locate and stabilise the locus of the human. Rather, to address Alexander's work in terms of the uncanny is to wrestle with an alterity that is opened by a constitutive violence and staged through abject and animalised constructions of the foreign – an aspect that has not been sufficiently addressed in readings of her work as liminal. To do so here is to pose the ethical as a political question in ways that challenge conceptions of difference and identity, including self-identity, in her art.

If I insist on a more thoroughgoing reading of the spectral interworking of abjection, violence and deconstruction it is not because I want to invalidate other approaches to Alexander's work or proclaim their blanket dismissal. That would not only be unfair to their analysis of the works as well as the questions those authors set out to answer. It would also come close to proposing an orthodox reading which serves only to close down criticality. My insistence, rather, persists because something remains of the uncanny in those readings that resists all attempts to domesticate it, and consequently, troubles the theoretical claims they make within the frame of an interspecies interrogation of the human. Alexander's uncanny visual language is difficult, but I am arguing that this difficulty takes "hauntological" aim against an ontological treatment of the human/animal distinction in her work rather than facilitates it.<sup>49</sup> *Ghost*, then, is not only at the centre of *Security with traffic*, but is also a metaphor for a mode of spectrality that vexes her work. Visually, this translates into the repetition of individual figures and paraphernalia across several works. *Ghost* also appears, for example, in *Frontier with ghost* (Fig. 12, 2007), as does the arrangement of sickles, machetes, fences and red gloves. All of the figures from *Security with traffic* reoccur in *Yield* (Fig.14, 1997-2010), as do the by now familiar combination of 1000 sickles, 1000 machetes and red industrial gloves. The latter also occur in other works such as *Harbinger with barge and imperial landscape (North Sea)* (2006), as well as in the installation in Durham Cathedral, *On Being Human* (2009). But this generalised spectrality is also born through in the formal similarity between *Ghost* and another figure whose repetition haunts many of her tableaux, *Harbinger*. In *Yield* (Fig. 14), for example, *Harbinger* (the figure with walking sticks) is positioned almost in front of *Ghost*, announcing, in both name and visual effect, a link between what is to come and

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<sup>49</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10.

to come back.<sup>50</sup> Given that the same figures and paraphernalia recur differently each time, every repetition contains a non-self-identical remainder of what has gone before. Objects and figures recirculate but never return intact – they are never ‘done with’ or ‘used up’ but remain to be used again. The circulation of Alexander’s motifs is such that each instance is made impure by non-presence: as Lawlor writes, this minimal repeatability produces the spectre in which nothing is ever in itself but, instead, contains the traces of what is belatedly not yet – already past and still to come.<sup>51</sup>

In its metonymic repetition, as well as in its singular, almost totemic, instance, *Ghost* presents an indeterminacy that seems to mean too much and say too little. This indeterminacy contaminates the viewing encounter with an unease that comes not only from not knowing how to address this figure and its reoccurrences, but from *Ghost*’s address to a form of not-knowing, to a dis-location of the known and the complication of presence by a non-presence. For Derrida, as I will show, it is this spectral dis-adjustment of the known that produces a “time out of joint” that unseats the self-identity of presence and the certainty of the known.<sup>52</sup> A “time ...out of joint,” Derrida suggests, is not a broken time but one that, through the mode of spectrality, contains within itself the very monstrous unpredictability without which the ethico-politics of the future cannot happen.<sup>53</sup> “Identity,” as Peggy Kamuf notes, “is always haunted by this disadjustment.”<sup>54</sup> Royle describes this mode of interruption as “the articulation of a logic of the foreign body,” in which what is known is inhabited by what it cannot tolerate, assimilate or acknowledge.<sup>55</sup> I want to think through the ways in which such a originary spectrality produces this untimely, mal-adjusted logic of the foreign body as a limitrophic dis-articulation of the limits of the ‘own and proper:’ a dis-adjustment that not only corrupts its supposedly immune sites of sovereign formation, but bears witnesses to the abject violence of its own constitution.

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<sup>50</sup> This proximity is also underscored by the fact that *Harbinger* is dressed as *Ghost* in *On Being Human*. The repetition of figures and items suggests a more thorough going link between the concerns of *Security with traffic*, *Yield*, *On Being Human* and *Harbinger with barge*. I have separated them here because, while I think that these works all speak to the uncanny and to conditions of violence – colonial, imperial and, in the Durham work, the violence of the Christian ‘civilising’ mission – *Yield* and *Security* broach the condition of violence within a framework that opens ambiguity to an uncanny economy of the monstrous unpredictability of the future.

<sup>51</sup> Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>54</sup> Kamuf, “Violence, Identity, Self-Determination,” 272.

<sup>55</sup> Royle, *After Derrida*, 154.

### III. Foreign bodies

In this section, I set out the critical necessity of thinking the uncanny logic of the foreign body alongside abjection, violence and the animal question. As in chapter one, my argument draws on deconstruction, psychoanalysis and Haraway's relations of "significant otherness," in order to respond to Mbembe's call to imagine otherwise the conditions of sovereignty and the politics of life in the postcolony. I link species, violence, and alterity to the reading of the foreigner as uncanny that Kristeva proposes in her *Strangers to Ourselves*. My focus in this chapter is triggered by the problem of the foreigner in contemporary South Africa or, as Mbembe puts it, the crisis of "the stranger in our midst."<sup>56</sup> As Derrida writes in *Aporias*, the Greek 'problēma' signifies both protection and projection.<sup>57</sup> My strategy in linking the uncanny logic of the foreign with difference framed as a problem, and thus, remade as a question of species, is to conjure both senses of the word. The problem of difference as a question of the foreigner therefore summons both "that which one throws in front of oneself" and that behind which one seeks shelter: it is both a shield (at once rhetorical and psychoanalytic) as well as a means for dissimulation.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, in the latter sense, it is also fevered retreat from "something unavowable," perhaps even spectral.<sup>59</sup> For questioning itself, Derrida argues, necessarily engages a "battle against [the] ghosts" it fears even as it invokes them.<sup>60</sup> And this nowhere more evident than in relation to the most risky of ontological questions: the problem of an authentic, own and proper self, in which being and belonging are authenticated along divisions in which alterity and animality are held to be consonant. This problem turned deadly in the so-called xenophobic riots of 2008 when impoverished neighbours turned on so-called 'African' immigrants in their communities.

Violence against so called 'foreigners' in South Africa has increased in the years following the end of apartheid style border restrictions (the so-called influx controls).

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<sup>56</sup> Mbembe, "Democracy as a Community of Life," 5.

<sup>57</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 207. Revised translation, quoted in Kamuf, "Violence, Identity, Self-Determination," 279.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 176.

An increase in migrants from the rest of Africa, including refugees and illegal or undocumented immigrants has led to increased competition for employment, resources and further entrenched poverty.<sup>61</sup> While by no means isolated, the attacks of 2008 are notable for the sheer number of casualties (many of whom were South Africans mistaken for foreigners) and the collective, destructive and murderous nature of the nationwide campaign.<sup>62</sup> But when what is called foreign in this discourse is both over determined and unclear it not only produces a rhetoric that renews the currency of animalisation but renews its links to sovereignty as well. As Rosalind C. Morris reports, in this eruption of xenophobia, the abstraction termed ‘animal’ is double-coded and mobilised to refer both victim and perpetrator. As a Somali survivor of an attack put it in a newspaper report: “They are animals. They treat us like animals.”<sup>63</sup> In her analysis of South Africa and the discourses of animality, xenophobia and indigenous (Khoi San) belonging, Morris attributes this doubling of ‘the animal’ in terms of “a kind of being that lacks compassion” and thus, neither suffers nor comprehends suffering.<sup>64</sup> Extrapolating from this, the trope of the foreigner-as-animal encapsulates a form of violence that crosses the debasement of so-called ‘human’ values with the perpetuation of non-criminal death.<sup>65</sup> More than that, this violence signals that the distinction

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<sup>61</sup> See Belinda Dodson, “Locating Xenophobia: Debate, Discourse, and Everyday Experience in Cape Town, South Africa.” *Africa Today* 56 no. 3 (2010): 2-22 DOI:10.1353/at.0.0106 accessed 10 March 2012; Ransford Danso and David A. McDonald, “Writing Xenophobia: Immigration and the Print Media in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” *Africa Today* 48 no. 3 (2001): 115-137.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187436> accessed 3 June 2008. So much part of popular culture is the problem of the foreigner that a 2012 television advertisement for Nando’s restaurant and fast food addresses xenophobia, albeit in keeping with Nando’s satiric approach to its South African brand identity. The advertisement was subsequently withdrawn and banned by the national broadcasting authority for inciting intolerance. The voice over begins with “What’s wrong with South Africa today is all you foreigners (you Nigerians, you Kenyans, you Portuguese, you British, you Chinese, you Zulus, you Xhosa ...)” and proceeds to unravel the concept of the belonging that sustains such a division. Clearly its irony either failed to find its edge, or found it too sharply. <http://www.channel24.co.za/News/Local/New-Nandos-ad-Whats-wrong-with-SA-20120601> accessed 1 June 2012. On the contested status of the South African and the citizen, see also Ivor Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of the People*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007.

<sup>62</sup> For news reports on the 2008 riots, see for example, [http://www.news24.com/Content/SouthAfrica/Xenophobia/1067/fc451352dd52460e968c80ef7c487e13/2-05-2008-09-07/No\\_name\\_-\\_just\\_a\\_horror\\_image](http://www.news24.com/Content/SouthAfrica/Xenophobia/1067/fc451352dd52460e968c80ef7c487e13/2-05-2008-09-07/No_name_-_just_a_horror_image) accessed 22 May 2008. [http://www.news24.com/Content/SouthAfrica/Xenophobia/1067/78a68f79dbda406182a44e3ec9e97dd6/0-2-06-2008-09-58/The\\_tension\\_is\\_there\\_for\\_war](http://www.news24.com/Content/SouthAfrica/Xenophobia/1067/78a68f79dbda406182a44e3ec9e97dd6/0-2-06-2008-09-58/The_tension_is_there_for_war) accessed 23 May 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Rosalind C. Morris, “Crowds and Powerlessness: Reading //kabbo and Canetti with Derrida in (South) Africa,” in Anne Emmanuelle Berger and Marta Segarra (eds.) *Demographies: Thinking of Animals after Derrida*. New York: Rodopi, 2011, 167. Morris’s approach to the politics of animalisation and xenophobia addresses the question of ‘who is the other’ through Thabo Mbeki’s “I am an African” speech, Elias Canetti’s theory of crowd violence and the mythological tradition of Khoi San belonging.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 167.

<sup>65</sup> [http://www.news24.com/Content/SouthAfrica/Xenophobia/1067/fc451352dd52460e968c80ef7c487e13/2-05-2008-09-07/No\\_name\\_-\\_just\\_a\\_horror\\_image](http://www.news24.com/Content/SouthAfrica/Xenophobia/1067/fc451352dd52460e968c80ef7c487e13/2-05-2008-09-07/No_name_-_just_a_horror_image) accessed 7 September 2008.

between humanity and animality is an aftereffect of a foundationally speciesist division between lives that matter and bodies that do not.

That this violence of foreigner-as-animal is not only performative, but excessive and theatricalised is exemplified by the killing of a Mozambican man, Ernesto Nhamuave. On 18 May 2008, Nhamuave was beaten and set alight by the crowd of the Ramaphosa informal settlement, Reiger Park in front of the police and media.<sup>66</sup> His death was captured in photojournalist Haldon Krog's so-called "flaming man" photograph, which shows Nhamuave, head bowed, dying as flames consume him.<sup>67</sup> It is an image that encapsulates all of that violence which Derrida terms "the worst": the violence, in fact, that is named 'the animal' and which is put into question through his neologism of *animot*. 'The animal' carries the sacrificial logic that gives the lie to any ethics that does not re-imagine the subject from within the terms through which death can be distributed and lives come to matter. So many traces of death without life mark the still pressing terms of my focus on the abject and deconstructive interrelation of animality and alterity in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa. The flames that burnt Nhamuave and stripped him of his too-dark 'foreign' skin separated him not simply from his neighbours but from the neighbourhood of the human. As if any more evidence were needed, the image of Nhamuave burning testifies that alterity and animality are bloodily and bodily linked, and points to the imperative to think alterity and species as intersecting vectors in the deconstructive violence of difference. The status of animality sets the border between 'man' and 'his' others: it announces a limit on the discourse of 'the human' that remains not only inadequate, false, abusive and unethical, but incontestable so long as 'the animal' sustains a notion of a self that can return to itself in a fullness that can enforce the pretence of the exclusion of difference.

The silenced question of 'the animal' thus haunts the emancipatory humanist narrative of post-apartheid South Africa as a problem of the foreigner. As Mbembe argues, and the political cartoon by satirist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) pointedly conveys (Fig. 13), this problem is widespread. Dated 30 May 2013, Zapiro's image renames South Africa

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<sup>66</sup> Reiger Park is on the East Rand of Johannesburg. Nhamuave's death was even more gruesome than I can describe here. Various household items (for example, a mattress) were added as fuel to the fire in which he burned.

<sup>67</sup> The photograph is available online <http://www.halden.co.za/www.halden.co.za/NEWS%20PG9.html> accessed 20 April 2014.

and its political capital to mark the extent of both intolerance for difference and the denial of responsibility: one that is as much ethical as it is political. More than that, however, the speech bubble that pronounces hostility to the foreigner from the seat of President Zuma's government (the Union Buildings in Pretoria) suggests, paradoxically, even provocatively, that such distaste for the unassimilable is, in fact, internal to the frame of democratic South Africa. This stated intolerance for being with others is all the more ironic given the opening statement of the Constitution which declares that South Africa "belongs to all those who live in it, united in our diversity."<sup>68</sup>

The cartoon also suggests that what makes this alterity named 'foreign' so disturbing is that it operates not as a question of being, but rather as a condition of displacement, disruption, dis-identification, dis-articulation of being. What is foreign signals the unbinding of the same or the exposure of a difference within – of a heterogeneity that is internal, risky and at risk. The foreign body is thus a fitting figure for the inappropriate/d: inappropriate, improper but also non-appropriable, surplus, excessive. The off-hand comment that shifts the burden of accountability to the victims of brutalising violence suggests that to encounter the foreign is to expose the generic universal that calls itself 'human,' 'man,' 'master,' 'subject,' 'self,' 'autos,' to an alterity that is not simply out of place, but untimely, unhomed, *unheimlich* and unavailable to presence. The foreign body, in other words, is a risk to the authority and unity of presence, to sovereignty itself. As Derrida points out, the history of the rights of men who call themselves human is the perpetuation of a self-returning movement of thought. There can be no concept of democracy or of sovereignty without the concept of a deciding, stable and coherent self-identity, without autonomy, homogeneity or the power of "autotelic" capacity that he names "ipseity". Yet there can be no concept of democracy without all that sustains an *other* notion of the democratic, namely, the heterogeneous "no matter who,' the indeterminate 'each one'."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The "Preamble" of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 108 of 1996 [Date of Promulgation: 18 December 1996 Date of Commencement 4 February 1997] declares the following: We, the people of South Africa, Recognise the injustices of our past; Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/a108-96.pdf> accessed 12 November 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Sanford: Sanford University Press, 2005, 10, 14-15: "...beginning with the right to recognise oneself as a

In Kristeva's thesis on the foreign/er, what is foreign inherits that profound ambivalence in the concept of the 'own and proper' which she explored in her work on abjection. However, despite the centrality of the psychoanalytic frame of the uncanny for her argument and her prior claim of the emergence of uncanniness in abjection, the abject is exiled from any relation to the foreign in Kristeva's discussion. Instead, the ambivalence of the foreign in *Strangers to Ourselves* exceeds the subject in ways that turns "'we' into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible."<sup>70</sup> The foreign puts the boundaries of the self and community into question precisely because, she writes, the foreigner is already 'at home,' "within us, the hidden face of our identity."<sup>71</sup> The relation between the decentred psychoanalytic subject and a fractured group identity is at the core of the political and ethical intervention Kristeva seeks to make with *Strangers to Ourselves* – an intervention that asks how 'we' can learn to live "as others, without ostracism but also without levelling."<sup>72</sup> In framing the foreigner as internal to the subject's own constitution, Kristeva relocates displacement from geopolitics to psychoanalysis. But she does so by explicitly positioning psychoanalysis as an ethics which is fundamentally political in that it concerns not only a critique of violence but an elaboration of a non-violent way of being with others. Situating herself in opposition to the "fascinated rejection" of the other – the fear driven by "the other of death, the other of woman, the other of uncontrollable drive" – she argues that it is only in the mutual recognition of our originary estrangement from ourselves that we learn neither to "suffer" nor joy in the foreigner.<sup>73</sup> After Freud, she writes, "uncannily, foreignness is within us; we are divided."<sup>74</sup> Thus the Freudian split subject bears witness to the foreigner as the symptomatic trace of his own "improper past:" the aim is not to integrate foreigners but to recognise the shared foreignness of the speaking subject, forever alienated from a maternal plenitude. By recognising the foreignness that we all

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man by returning to oneself in specular, self-designating sovereign and autotelic fashion (11)... By ipseity I ... wish to suggest some 'I can' ... the power that gives itself its own law, its force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign and reappropriating gathering of self in the simultaneity of an assemblage or assembly, being together, or 'living together,' ...." (12). See also Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 141; Michael Naas, "'One Nation...Indivisible': Jacques Derrida on the Autoimmunity of Democracy and the Sovereignty of God." *Research in Phenomenology* 36 4 (2006): 19-23.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156916406779165818> accessed 22 January 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 191, 125.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 191.

share, she argues, we are spared from expelling, abjecting or projecting the foreigner outside of ourselves. In other words, if the foreigner arises through “consciousness of difference,” he also “disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, amenable to bonds and communities.”<sup>75</sup> Kristeva’s aim is not to integrate the foreigner but to alleviate the anguish and incoherence his difference creates by internalising it as the recognised, shared origin of speaking beings: “If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners.”<sup>76</sup> Thus reconciled to our own uncanniness, she continues, a “paradoxical community” of “extreme individuals” would emerge: one based on, to borrow John Mowitt’s description, “a democracy of transnational self-alienation.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, Kristeva asserts, the psychoanalytic question of the foreigner elicits “a journey into the strangeness of the other and oneself, towards an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable.”<sup>78</sup>

On the one hand, Kristeva’s use of the Freudian uncanny as the pivot of her argument points towards the contaminative excess of a repressed and corrupted origin. In her prior work on abjection, this excess was named in the concept of a heterogeneous ‘subject-in-process/on trial.’ On the other hand, despite her account of the self who is exiled by the abject and who, bereft of his bearings and having strayed into animality, asks, not “*who* am I?” but “*where* am I?” – Kristeva nowhere explicitly employs abjection and its related subject-in-process/ on trial in this study of the foreigner.<sup>79</sup> The absence of abjection in her argument is all the more remarkable given the extent to which the uncanny, in her words, presents a “destruction of the self:” in confrontation with the foreigner who both attracts and repulses ‘me,’ “I lose my boundaries....”<sup>80</sup>

However, her prohibition on ‘my’ enjoyment of the foreigner’s exteriority (which I cited above) serves to distance abjection from her argument. In part, this is because abjection, as she writes in *Powers of Horror*, is more violent than the uncanniness it

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 192.

<sup>77</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 192. John Mowitt, “Strangers in Analysis: Nationalism and the Talking Cure.” *Parallax* 4 no. 3 (1998): 50 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/135346498250118> accessed 3 December 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 182.

<sup>79</sup> See “An exile who asks where?” in Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 187.

produces. But it is also because there lies within abjection's ambiguity what she calls "a failure to recognise its kin," and this form of estrangement runs contrary not only to the humanist tradition of the subject that she upholds in *Strangers to Ourselves*, but the book's curative alignment of ethics and politics – the purported "paradoxical community" of the always already 'unhomed.'<sup>81</sup> *Strangers to Ourselves* is a text shadowed by an ameliorative aim: to locate, account for and, ultimately, intervene in nationalist xenophobia, particularly in anti-immigrant politics in France. Her formation of kinship is thus strictly rooted in the *principle* of universal human dignity ("the Faith of the Enlightenment") as bequeathed by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789), even though she alters its content in accordance with a post-Freudian subject bound by the unconscious.<sup>82</sup> Her insistence on the continuity of a principle of transcendental, trans-national dignity within the psychoanalytic speaking subject not only affirms 'the human' within an inherited discourse of inalienable rights, but does so to heal the "scar" of the foreigner that emerges in the Enlightenment's distinction between man and citizen.<sup>83</sup> That is, the belief that "one can be more or less a man to the extent that one is more or less a citizen."<sup>84</sup> Thus her psychoanalytic subject who finds himself uncannily 'at home' only through the forfeit of his "unitary and glorious self," that is, only in his universal homelessness, still retains the "fully symbolic notion of humanity" as a condition of the "psychic law" of civilisation.<sup>85</sup>

Extrapolating from this contradiction then, if the foreigner does not belong and is not a man (and therefore not a subject), then the animal and the foreigner occupy the same place of within the logic of sacrificial death. While this opening to the discourse of 'the animal' accounts for the language of xenophobic violence and opens the door to any politics of animalisation, Kristeva's anthropocentric focus on speaking beings turns the dread of the foreigner into a welcome of difference, but only if that difference has already expelled, abjected, contained 'the animal.' By retaining a "fully symbolic notion of humanity," Kristeva's "paradoxical community" of self-alienated subjects is bound by a kinship structure that does not recognise other modalities of difference and

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<sup>81</sup> The quotation is from the distinction she draws between uncanniness and abjection in *Powers of Horror*, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 152.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 97.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 97-98.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 2-3; 189.

remains rooted in the disavowal of kinship with animal others.<sup>86</sup> Kristeva's thesis relies on a totalising ontology of otherness that, in promising an opening to alterity that excludes no one, paradoxically does violence to the possibility for an ethical response to the irreconcilable. Not only does it presume to know in advance that the other is always and only human, but the lack of explicit discussion of abjection in this project of intersubjective harmony leaves open the idea that being with others requires the abolition of all violence. Without this radical, foundational formation of difference that produces a subject who is never settled in their own identity (a subject-in-process/on trial), the effect of the uncanny is remade into plea for individual tolerance. I am not suggesting, however, that Kristeva denies the necessity of difference: she advocates a community based on "consciousness of its unconscious – desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible," which "sets the difference within us in its most bewildering shape ... as the ultimate condition of our being *with* others."<sup>87</sup> But I am suggesting that her relational frame militates against the violence of difference that is provoked by the foreigner, or for which the foreigner becomes symptomatic, because it assumes that that difference is knowable in its sameness, and therefore non-threatening. If we are all different in the same way, we need not fear the other, only welcome them in the knowledge that we are all others to ourselves – Kristeva's move towards an "ethics of respect for the irreconcilable."<sup>88</sup> This suggests that alterity can, indeed, be reconciled – that an ethical openness for the other who is human in the same way as I am can be attained because it is constitutionally built into the fabric of my being. Yet alterity, to reiterate, is neither an ontological condition nor a form of knowledge in advance of a decision – it does not imply that by virtue of my status as a speaking being, I can recognise the constitutive humanity of another speaking being. Rather, as in the deconstructive logic of the contaminative foreign body, as well as in the processual torment of abjection, alterity marks the impossibility of anything being in itself: what is

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<sup>86</sup> Other writers who link Kristeva's uncanny foreigner to her thesis on abjection include Noëlle McAfee, "Abject Strangers: Towards an Ethics of Respect" in Kelly Oliver (ed.) *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*. London: Routledge, 1993, 116-134; and Norma Claire Moruzzi, "National Objects: Julia Kristeva on the Process of Political Self-Identification" in Oliver (ed.) *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, 135-49. McAfee reads Kristevan abjection alongside Heidegger's 'the nothing' (being-toward death) in order to probe an "ontological possibility" for an ethical subjectivity (117). Moruzzi offers a critique of Kristeva's account of racism and objects to her fall-back ethical position of universal humanism since it is incompatible with abjection.

<sup>87</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 192. Emphasis in original.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

at stake in an ethics of alterity, as Martin Hägglund writes, “is the primordial opening to corruption and dissimulation.”<sup>89</sup>

#### IV. The problem of difference

Underpinning Mbembe’s call to deal ethically with difference is the question that Kristeva asks of the uncanny: in effect, how to address the ghost in life – not only of the other but of oneself. Mbembe’s “Democracy as a Community of Life” is an urgent question *of* the future and *for* the future, but it is also a symptom of a crisis around the notion of a regenerative politics of life for the present. For Mbembe, this crisis addresses the very status of difference in a society still riven by seemingly intractable inequality: the unequal access to resources, wealth, and thus, to sustainable life in the fullness of the living present. This failure of the promise of democracy, he asserts, finds its home in the gap between the blue-print for post-apartheid society, the Constitution, and “the ghosts” of unfulfilled lives of so many.<sup>90</sup> The ghost here signals a life of annulled self-determination. For Mbembe, this is not simply to live in privation. Rather, to live as a ghost is to experience non-life, non-being; it is to be no-thing, except not yet dead. It is to endure a living death, a death in life.<sup>91</sup> Seen thus, to reduce the sovereign subject to a spectre is to enact violence against the very concept of the human as “some ‘*I can*’.”<sup>92</sup> To be a ghost in Mbembe’s sense is to be excluded as a self in full possession of rights to presence, possibility, life and the law. It is to be denied personhood and identity; cast as unequal in relation to the sovereignty of the one who, in the carnivorous organisation of the subject, claims the power to distribute non-criminal death to those others he deems nonhuman or not ‘human’ enough. To be a ghost in this sense is to be outside the necropolitical circuit of anthropocentric power and thus to be shut out of the politics of human life and sovereignty. Or as Mbembe puts it, the ghost is the return of human life to the abject “history of waste” created by racial, political and economic oppression and exploitation.<sup>93</sup> To be turned spectral,

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<sup>89</sup> Martin Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Lévinas.” *Diacritics* 34 no.1 (2004): 49.

<sup>90</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>92</sup> On the subject as a subject of rights and its enforcement as the origin of politics (of right and law), see Derrida, *Rogues*, xi-xii. Emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 6. For Mbembe, to be a ghost is to endure “the pain of disappointment, and the sharp existence of defeat, of palpable powerlessness and dashed hopes.”

Mbembe suggests, is to be abjected, animalised and made expendable. To endure spectrality is thus to suffer the violation of *ubuntu* – the principle that underwrites the founding document of democratic South Africa, the Constitution – and thus to be excluded from all that Mbembe calls a “community of life.”<sup>94</sup>

The concept of community in *ubuntu* upholds a commitment to an Africanist notion of mutual relationality that refuses the idea of an autonomous self. Instead, *ubuntu*, a term and concept shared in Bantu languages, establishes that the subject emerges not in relation to a self-asserting right to sovereignty, but instead, in relation to a community that bears witness to its humanity through the recognition of a shared mutuality.<sup>95</sup> Commonly written as “a person is a person through other people,”<sup>96</sup> *ubuntu* cements the Constitution’s principled adherence to a mode of African “rehumanization” that took aim, Mbembe writes, against the inhuman legacy of apartheid’s investment in the “politics of separation.”<sup>97</sup> *Ubuntu*’s emphasis on mutuality promises a commitment to human equality in which, as Mbembe puts it, “democracy and the political” is aligned with “the ethical and the just.”<sup>98</sup> Yet, the persistence of the ghost in the life of so many begs the question whether *ubuntu* can withstand what Mbembe describes as “the old question of difference.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, he writes that democracy has not solved this ‘problem’ but merely displaced it, and thus “raises questions about the way in which the ‘quality of being human’ *as such* is instituted in a globalized society.”<sup>100</sup> In other words, difference in this sense operates not as a limitrophic multiplication and deferral (as *différance*) but as a consolidation of the ontology of the same, an ontology which the ghostly “stranger[s] in our midst” comes to threaten. Difference as a problem is therefore fuelled by an anthropological crisis in the determination of ‘the human.’

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>95</sup> John Hailey, “Ubuntu: A Literature Review.” Report commissioned by the Tutu Foundation, London 2008. [http://www.tutufoundationuk.org/documents/UbuntuLiteratureReview\\_JH\\_Dec08.pdf](http://www.tutufoundationuk.org/documents/UbuntuLiteratureReview_JH_Dec08.pdf) accessed 12 January 2014.

<sup>96</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969, 108. Mbiti’s definition of *ubuntu*’s guiding principle declares “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.” Richard Bell points out the echo and inversion of Descartes in Mbiti’s formulation. Richard H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Contemporary Issues*. London: Routledge, 2002, 60.

<sup>97</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life” 2-3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 1, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Although not available at the time of writing, this question is one of driving motors of a new book edited by Leonhard Praeg and Siphokazi Magadla, *Ubuntu: Curating the Archive*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014. The relation between ubuntu and companion species is one that I would like to research further.

<sup>100</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 5. My emphasis.

Hence Mbembe's insistence on the urgent need to reassess the term. But since Mbembe declares that "the 'human' is another name for the future," his reassessment of the so-called proper name of the subject is nothing less than the revitalisation of the potential for a meaningful human life. His is a desire to put ghosts in their place, so to speak. Mbembe's focus is resolutely on the reorientation of the principle of human dignity for the living, with all the attendant exclusions his mode of Africanist humanism implies.<sup>101</sup>

But this is where, I think, these ghosts prove so troubling. Mbembe's rhetorical ghosts, while animalised and abjected, prove not to be disposable, and thus cannot be quietly buried. They remain foreign, restless and alien but also, all too seemingly commonplace. For if to be turned into a ghost is to be abjected and excluded from meaningful life, then, just as for 'the animal,' *ubuntu* does not apply.<sup>102</sup> This is not just a matter of a constitutional violation of human rights.<sup>103</sup> It suggests instead a profound failure to recognise the value of life that does not come in human form, and thus, in that failure, that these ghosts in life are also cut off from the possibility of the future. In Mbembe's argument, the ghost in life can only be the terrible repetition of an unjust past, each time fated to return in a displaced attempt to gain access to human life. Framed differently, the uncanniness of the ghost makes it immune to any ontologising programme of democratic rehumanization. While this presents an opportunity to rethink the anthropocentric concept of mutuality that *ubuntu* puts forth, Mbembe's question of a "radical future-oriented politics" announces, instead, what he fears. That is, the existence of so many ghosts in life seemingly forecloses a performative politics of democratic social transformation: the ghost thus points to the recession of a future 'to come,' or what he calls the weakening of "the possibility of the Event."<sup>104</sup> The

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<sup>101</sup> I refer to a sub-Saharan orientation of *ubuntu*'s communitarianism as nation-building, which Jean-Paul Martinon distinguishes from a Rwandan philosophical framing of *ubuntu* as generosity. He links the latter (via Lévinas and Lyotard) to a concept of life-giving (creativity and maternity) as the matrix of the ethical. See Jean-Paul Martinon, *After "Rwanda." In Search of a New Ethics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013.

<sup>102</sup> The question of the animal does not seem to enter discussions of *ubuntu*. Though she does not deal with *ubuntu* but with the concept of an African Renaissance, Morris' "Crowds and Powerlessness" interrogates the place of animality in this argument. Even a richly philosophical text such as Martinon's *After Rwanda*, which draws on Derrida in order to render 'thinkable' the atrocity of genocide, does not address the link between the excess of genocidal violence and the inability of the humanist tradition to "sacrifice *sacrifice*." (EW 278)

<sup>103</sup> On the inadequacy of a human rights discourse to address the problem of collective violence, see Leonhard Praeg, "The Aporia of Collective Violence." *Law And Critique* 19 no. 2 (2008): 193-223. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10978-008-9028-8> accessed 17 May 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Mbembe, "Democracy as a Community of Life," 6.

consequence of this failure is marked, he writes, by “politics of expediency rather than principle:” driven not by *ubuntu* but by a weariness of waiting for a future that does not come. In his framework, the Event can be actualised and marshalled into the order of the “masterable-possible.”<sup>105</sup> With the ghosts signalling death in life, the future cannot be brought into being *as such*. It therefore remains, in his version, elusive, weak, dizzying, blighted and threatened by the abject ghosts of the unresolved question of difference. Hence, Mbembe asks, “under what conditions can this project of human mutuality result in a broader and more ethical *commensality*?”<sup>106</sup>

## V. Eating together

Alexander’s uncanny visual language offers, I think, one possible response, but to follow it I must develop Mbembe’s question in the direction he does not follow: towards a non-anthropocentric, inappropriate/d subject. “Commensality” is an interesting word to think with: read through a “metonymy of eating well,” it contains within it an ethico-politics of possibility that shifts its terms from the ontologised “being-in-common” to the relational becoming-with of Haraway’s companion species. Derived from the Old French *commensal* and Medieval Latin *commensalis*, ‘commensality’ combines *com* (with) and *mensa* (table) to mean “eating together at the same table.”<sup>107</sup> Etymologically tied to *how* we eat rather than *whom* or *what* we eat, ‘commensal’ also has a biological meaning rooted in the logic of the foreign body.<sup>108</sup> Unlike parasitical relationships, commensal relations describes an interspecies association or symbiosis in which one partner benefits while the other (the host) remains unharmed, though constitutionally ‘more than one.’ Commensal relations reconfigure the self as already impure and multiple. Commensality, in other words, foregrounds ‘eating together’ as an asymmetrical pattern of relating across differences in which, to

<sup>105</sup> The term is Simon Morgan Wortham’s. See Simon Morgan Wortham, *The Derrida Dictionary*. London: Continuum, 2010, 48. Mbembe’s understanding of the event appears to be contrary to Derrida’s.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>107</sup> [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=commensal&searchmode=none](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=commensal&searchmode=none) ; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Commensality> accessed 14 April 2014;

<http://www.chambers.co.uk/search.php?query=commensal&title=21st> accessed 14 April 2014.

See also Claude Fischler, “Commensality, Society and Culture,” *Social Science Information* 50 no.3-4 (2011): 528-548. Fischler locates commensality in terms of Western eating cultures, nutrition and obesity. <http://ssi.sagepub.com/content/50/3-4/528.abstract> accessed 19 April 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

borrow Haraway's formulation, neither partner precedes the becoming.<sup>109</sup> Commensality as 'eating together,' like Haraway's derivation of companion from *cum panis* (with bread), puts messmates at the same table to risk indigestion in the entangled forms of "learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat" (EW 282).<sup>110</sup> That is, precisely because it is the same table, eating together is subject to the 'one must' of 'eating well' that makes crossing orificial thresholds into an address to the other whom one eats and is eaten by (EW 282). It is because one never eats alone, and never the same way, that negotiating difference is not only violent but necessary and fundamental. But this is a thinking of violence that is tied not to the sovereign capacity to enforce the self-identity of the same, but to its interruption.

Reconceiving difference not as an obstruction to be overcome but as a condition of an ethico-politics of possibility is the deconstructive point that I am following along with the spectres of this chapter's title. It is the troubling question of how to deal with ghosts that makes negotiating the violence on the menu all the more urgent. Urgent, because, as I noted before, Mbembe's ghost consolidates a notion of the other that is excluded from a liveable life. His call to re-imagine the subject, therefore, always already takes the form of a violence that animalises. It responds to the delineation of killable lives with a desire for a regeneration of abjected others, but only as long as those others are already recognised as "fundamentally human".<sup>111</sup> While Mbembe seeks to redress colonial and apartheid conceptions of difference as separate and unequal, his argument can only do so by validating a "community of life" organised as a being-in-common. This mutuality of sameness supports the idea of a generic universal human even as it seeks to distance itself from the inheritance of its received Western incarnation. In effect, it suggests that in order to be ethical, a radical future-oriented politics depends on the recognition of shared ways of being human *as such* (even if it takes issue with the Western concepts of the 'human' and 'humanism'). To do so, however, is to protect the sameness of those at the table. The ghost that marks every violation of that meaningful life in Mbembe's argument is not the promise of a "democracy to come" but the abject trace of its failure. But this begs the question: is community formed only of the like and

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<sup>109</sup> Haraway does not discuss commensality but her description of companion species nonetheless seems to describe it. *When Species Meet*, 17.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>111</sup> Mbembe, Mongin, Lempereur and Schlegel, "Postcolonial Thought Explained to the French," [http://www.jwtc.org.za/the\\_salon/volume\\_1/achille\\_mbembe.htm](http://www.jwtc.org.za/the_salon/volume_1/achille_mbembe.htm) accessed 2 March 2012.

the living? And moreover, as Derrida writes, “‘what is a like, a compeer,’ ‘someone similar or *semblable* as a human being, a neighbour, a fellow citizen, a fellow creature...and so on?’”<sup>112</sup> Is responsibility, or what Mbembe would call the alignment of democracy and the ethical rather owed to difference or to the non-living?

Mbembe’s ghost can only be the abjected embodiment of a withering future-oriented politics if the condition of its animalised exclusion is left unchallenged. To do so, however, would be to fail to engage with the spectre of the animal that haunts the discourse of the stranger, the foreigner, the other, whether human or not, living or non-living.<sup>113</sup> It would also be to ‘forget’ that the uncanny’s source in abjection, and thus, in the death-bearing non-ego, means that the spectral can never be separated from the living. The trope of the foreign body incorporates not only the problem of a difference that refuses a definite excluding limit, but also an ethical, political and psychoanalytic problematic of an origin that presents itself as, simultaneously, heterogeneous to itself, and, in its darker frame, as Kristeva describes it, as “the intrusion of the *other* in the homogeneity of the group.”<sup>114</sup> Here, in other words, is both the promise of the *animot* and the return of the worst violence of ‘the animal.’ Phrased differently, here is the undecidability of alterity that opens up the possibility for a decision, only one that cannot be separated from the violence that inscribes exclusion within the frame of identity and self-determination. Pursuit of this problematic requires, as Royle observes, an “animalogical” following of the uncanny logic of the foreign body in which the putting into question of the opposition of the human and animal begins with the “impossible identification” of the ‘who’.<sup>115</sup> Impossible, because at issue in the alterity of the spectral is the suspension of the ontological ‘who/what’: or rather, its prior infection by what Derrida calls the “hauntological.”<sup>116</sup> And it is with this sense of the spectral as an interruption of the sacrificial economy that conditions the ‘proper,’ or

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<sup>112</sup> Derrida, *Rogues*, 11.

<sup>113</sup> Neill Blomkamp’s 2009 science fiction film *District 9* deserves mention here. In the film, the spectre of the animal is aligned with the foreigner, the illegal and the strangely embodied. The plot set up entails displaced extra-terrestrials who, unable to return to another planet, are confined to a designated squatter camp outside Johannesburg and kept under apartheid-era style restrictions of movement and freedom. The aliens’ animalised foreignness has them called “prawns” by the humans who attempt to master them and their bio-technological weaponry. The frames of the animal, the illegal alien, apartheid and the ghostly in Mbembe’s sense are given carnophallogocentric focus and deny any legitimacy or sovereignty for non-human life. This denial is underscored as human man turns into weaponised alien ‘animal.’

<sup>114</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 41. Italics in the original.

<sup>115</sup> Royle, *The Uncanny*, 250.

<sup>116</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10.

more precisely, the property and presence of that self called ‘human,’ ‘citizen’ and ‘subject’ that another, future-oriented logic of the ghost emerges – one that “wagers,” as Derrida writes, that “thinking will never have done with ghosts” – ghosts, always more than one/ *plus d’un*.<sup>117</sup>

## VI. *Security with traffic (influx control)*

In the brief description that I have already offered of the nine figures/figural groups in *Security with traffic (influx control)* (Figs. 8-11), I suggested that the work’s form stages a contested limit that is multiplied in each individual figure’s interspecies intermixture. *Security with traffic (influx control)* is a site-specific work installed in the courtyard of the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona in 2007, together with the wall-mounted floodlights and surveillance cameras. The latter, combined with the double-fenced enclosure topped by razor wire, turns the contestation of borders into the issue of security set out in the title. The close-circuit television cameras in the courtyard relay live feed to a monitor inside the centre on top of which *Custodian with surveillance* (2005) sits. This figure is the double of the *Custodian* figure positioned on a platform over the ‘gate’ of the perimeter area that surrounds the inner fence of the enclosure. Inside the Centre de Cultura, *Custodian with surveillance* watches over viewers who watch the live feed from the monitor, and who, in turn, watch over those viewers who walk around the work outside. In part, the monitoring takes place because of the proliferation of machetes and sickles in the installation, both of which are tools of labour as well as proficient makeshift weapons. But it is really the performance of security that is at issue. Other site specific works that deal with similar themes and which use the visual rhetoric of machetes, sickles and red gloves, include security guards as component parts: *Danger Gevaar Ingozi* (2004), for example, exhibited in Oude Warande in Tilburg, the Netherlands, incorporated South African Loyiso Qanya, who was then a student at Michaelis Art School in Cape Town, to pose as a South African private security guard complete with uniform and baton.<sup>118</sup> All three versions of *Security* (São Paulo, 2006, Göteborg, 2007, and Johannesburg, 2009), employed five

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 207.

<sup>118</sup> *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 100.

men to stand guard around the installation wearing South African private security uniforms.<sup>119</sup>

With its language of surveillance and control, *Security with traffic (influx control)* is bound to violence, or at least, to the illusion of the forced containment of the threat of violence. In this context, the red industrial gloves are at once signifiers of labour, intimations of bloody ground and forms of prophylaxis, all of which suggest that the territory enclosed in the installation is a no-man's land. The work's focus on territory is also a focus on traffic. *Ghost*, caged in the inner enclosure, is the bearer of multiple machetes, sickles and gloves (signifiers of labour and, potentially, harm) and as such, suggests the spectral movement of multiple unnamed foreign bodies. The extent of this insurgent foreignness is underscored by Alexander's specification that the knobkerrie *Ghost* wears on the front of his overall is made of "alien wood." The skinned caracul, or, in Afrikaans, *rooikat*, attached to the front of *Ghost*'s clothes is another indicator of potential territorial incursion: *rooikat* is the name of an armoured fighting vehicle used by the South African Defence Force and deployed for the purpose of combat reconnaissance, military support and deep cross border penetration.<sup>120</sup> The theme of border violation continues with such figures as *Convoy (Trade)*, *Scavenger*, *Custodian* and *Official*, all of which lurk in the perimeter zone that surrounds *Ghost*, but are nonetheless sealed within a zone of exclusion.

*Security with traffic (influx control)* was commissioned for the exhibition "Apartheid: The South African Mirror" by its curator Pep Subirós. The exhibition's stated aim was to bring together contemporary art and documentary material that addresses the "origins, manifestations and new forms of racism."<sup>121</sup> The demarcation of the permeability of the border is heralded in the title's own parenthetical separation: *Security with traffic (influx control)* stages the politics of border management. 'Influx control' is the term used in apartheid legislation to control and restrict the free passage of black

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 120. The names of these men, Brazilian in the first instance and African in the second and third, are listed in the catalogue together with the installation's media, though in Sweden, the participants chose to withhold their names.

<sup>120</sup> It is common for SADF transport to be named after indigenous wildlife – various forms of militarised transport include *ratel* (Afrikaans for badger), *eland* (Afrikaans for antelope) and *shongololo* (Zulu and Xhosa for millipede). *Rooikat* armoured vehicle information derived from SADF Living History Group. <http://www.sadfgroup.org/2011/223/> accessed 25 May 2014; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rooikat> accessed 25 May 2014; <http://www.army-technology.com/projects/rooikat/> accessed 25 May 2014.

<sup>121</sup> *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 127.

Africans across South African borders – this included the movement of black South Africans relocated to the so-called homeland states of KwaZulu, Boputswana, Swaziland, Venda, Transkei, Ciskei. Established under British colonialism as the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, but properly part of the racist stripping of land ownership formalised under the (Native) Land Act of 1912, influx control as a policy of separation and exclusion was part of a network of punitive measures aimed at those South Africans it deemed non-citizens, or foreign bodies within South Africa.<sup>122</sup>

Although repealed in the Abolition of Influx Control Act of 1986, the incorporation of the policy of influx control in the work's title points towards the persistence in the contemporary of its ideology of an inviolable border. *Security with traffic (influx control)*'s reference to border politics is not only tied to the ghosts of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past. Rather, *Security with traffic* refers to a contemporary European culture of separation and surveillance, and by extension, to an imaginary in which the West can safely police the limits of belonging and being. In particular, the work's fenced construction recalls the measures taken to seal off the Spanish enclave of Melilla in North Africa. Funded by the European Union, Melilla's fifteen kilometre fence aims to protect Europe from unwelcome African migrants. The fenced zone comprises of an estimated eight-metre triple fence topped with razor wire and with a *sirga tridimensional*, or system of crossed cables between the zones. The *sirga tridimensional* reportedly prevents injuries to those who jump the fences, but it was designed to, if not prohibit all attempts to breach the barrier, then to trap or slow down those who penetrate the outer fence. On the Moroccan side, the cables are angled to make ladders difficult to use and also, to make the top of the fence unstable. Any pressure on the cables triggers an offsite alarm that in turn activates the fence's lighting and surveillance system. Movement also sets off the pressurised water and pepper spray system. The entire operation is designed to discourage attempts to break into Europe, and to disorient and capture any foreign bodies that gain access through the

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<sup>122</sup> This is a very truncated account of this history. Part of the entrenchment of apartheid as a totalising system of governance owed to the intersectional operation of its legislation. Influx Control was initiated through the successive Native Land Acts but was enforced through, amongst others, the Pass Laws (before they were scrapped) and the Group Areas Act. For more detail, see, for example, William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

cable system.<sup>123</sup> The outer fence is also bound by a five-metre ditch which is patrolled by the Moroccan army.<sup>124</sup>

In its use of a remote surveillance feed inside the building, surveillance cameras, flood lights, a doubled fence with a perimeter patrol, exposed courtyard setting, zones of containment and a viewing situation that makes the viewer complicit in its spectacle, *Security with traffic (influx control)* reproduces Melilla's topography of paranoid exclusion. The quotation of Melilla presents the re-entrenchment of that border put under duress in the globalised traffic of forced and voluntary migrations. *Ghost*, the machetes, sickles, industrial gloves, as well as the 100 inner tubes scattered amongst them, all connote technologies of artisanal violence which, in the language of xenophobic distrust, turn the presence of the labouring foreign into a veiled threat to self-determination. In its totalising organisation, *Security with traffic* summons the becoming world-wide of a carnivorous market liberalism that both feeds on and sequesters its outsiders, yet at the same time, marks the fraught limits of national sovereignty. It is no wonder then that in the outer caged area, the stooped figures of *Convoy (trade)* seem to be directed by the *Official* behind them and follow the *Scavenger* that, in turn, trails the *Hobbled Ruminant*: this closed circuit is a predatory one that separates out consumable difference from that which it finds unpalatable.

And in this arrangement, it appears that *Ghost* is the most unpalatable, the most threatening, of all. Neither human nor animal, *Ghost* is instead a body that ambiguously bears the death-infected signs of its labour (the skinned rooiakat, the machetes). *Ghost* disturbs because he tantalisingly suspends faith in the distinction between humanised and animalised as well as that between vulnerable and menacing. It is not even simply a question of saying that the figure embodies a 'both/and' logic (as in human and animal, threatening and victimised, quarantined and exposed etc.) Rather, it is that, in its animalised proximity to that which we think we recognise as clothes-wearing, tool-using, technology-bearing upright humanness, there is something non-appropriable, sorrowful even, and profoundly discordant that cannot be contained by the appearance of the taxonomic non-normativity. There is an almost mournful air to this surplus, as if

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<sup>123</sup> <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2006/03/21/sociedad/1142959451.html> accessed 1 December 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Subirós, "Security with traffic (influx control) 2007," in Subirós (ed.), *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 126-127.

this figure of the spectre is haunted by the dis-adjustment of its own haunting. As if, in other words, at least in part, *Ghost* presents that mode of non-being that Mbembe's ethics of mutuality is geared to recover. Or rather, that the presentation of *Ghost* testifies to that mode of mutuality that resurrects life by separating it from the ghosts of unliveable lives. Moving towards a seeming dead end, it is as if *Ghost* is shackled to a life of poverty, violence and literally burdened by so many traces of death, literalised principally by the dead rooikat pinned to his chest. If 'the animal' is synonymous with the place of violence and death, then the attempted separation of the *Ghost* as the one who is animalised presumes to know what life is, and therefore, to stabilise its relation to death. But as Derrida and Kristeva might put it, nothing is less certain or more abjectly uncanny than the place of death. To separate the animal from the 'living who' is, in fact, to pronounce death in the name of the value of human life. It is to define life as fully present because of its proximity to a structure of animal death; it is a restatement, in other words, of a necropolitical being-towards-death in which humanist exceptionalism resides in the noncriminal death of the (animalised) other. It is sacrificial logic writ large. The ominous enigma that haunts *Ghost* is thus turned into a metaphor for the reaffirmation of the value of human life but only at the expense of its relation to the continuum of animal life.

Shoring up its defences, *Security with traffic* seems to corral the spectral in the name of common humanity in which a stable and completed relationship with death conditions the living human present in ways that allow the "egological body" to confirm a carnophallogocentric economy.<sup>125</sup> This denial of the ghostly possibilities of so called animal life does not only confirm anthropocentrism's privilege. It also declares an anxiety that seeks to ontologise the spectral in order to reassure itself that the dead cannot come back. In this sense, *Ghost*'s ash grey pallor renders him cadaverous: a foreign body entombed in a place excluded from the lives of those who watch over it. Mourning, Derrida asserts, begins with this desire to identify and contain this strange but familiar threat: in order to exorcise the spectre of the foreign, one has first to conjure it. But to summon the ghost in order to be done with it is to attempt to put the dead in their place, in a safe place, firmly outside of life.<sup>126</sup> To localise the spectre,

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<sup>125</sup> The quotation is from Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 157.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 120.

Derrida writes, “[o]ne has to know it ... to know is to know *who* and *where*.”<sup>127</sup> To know is to eliminate doubt, uncertainty – and thus also to set aside risk and possibility – for nothing could be more dangerous to the desire to know than the unpredictability of a ghostly return. Or indeed, nothing can be more threatening to knowledge than the haunting materiality of the ghost itself: nothing, because, as Derrida writes, one does not know what the ghost “*is*, what it is presently.”<sup>128</sup> This not-knowing is not due to a lack of knowledge. Rather, it is because the spectral as a non-normative or foreign body does not belong to an order of knowledge that can be ontologically determined in the present. As I noted in relation to the question of alterity and the interspecies embodiment of *Ghost*, the body that is the spectre – and the spectre, Derrida points out, requires a body, some body, the body of *someone* – incites the question ‘what is it’ but cannot provide an answer.<sup>129</sup> It cannot answer because the spectral *is* not: it is not a mode of being but a mode of repetition. Almost unnameable, between something and someone, *Ghost* hauntologically troubles the question of ‘the who’ at the same time as it provokes it. Since the ghost arrives only by coming back – Derrida writes, “a specter [sic] is always a *revenant*” – any question of a spectral presence of being is always already haunted by its impossibility.<sup>130</sup> As Derrida argues, the ghost as that which is ‘to come’ uncannily comes back from that which is yet to arrive, and thus exceeds the present: that is, the spectre *is* only inasmuch as it points to a mode of becoming in relation to “what is no longer or not yet.”<sup>131</sup>

*Ghost* literalises this hauntological corruption of the notion of being as an identical self presence in the animalogical language of interspecies disruption. Furthermore, if every instance of *Ghost*’s haunting is a unique event, his spectral form is also infinitely repeatable (and available for use in other works). Thus, not only does the spectral have difference at its root, but iteration is internal to its every occurrence. Its repeatability opens up the necessity of thinking ‘life’ not in opposition to the non-living, death and non-presence, but as internally conditioned by its very possibility. Thus *Ghost*, or the spectral uncanny, engages a foundational “articulation of a logic of the foreign body”:

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 9. Derrida addressed the spectre through Hamlet’s ambivalence before the ghost of his father. Emphasis in original.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 11, emphasis in original.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 123.

not only is the known constitutionally inhabited by that which it cannot tolerate, assimilate or acknowledge, but it shows that the radical violence of *différance* is always already prior to an imagined and impossible fullness of presence.<sup>132</sup> Contained within the fenced interior of the installation, *Ghost* also suggests that knowledge of this radical violence, this foundational fracturing of *becoming* rather than *being*, produces an anxiety that is bound up with the undecidability of the “more of one/ no more one [*plus d’un*].” Before I set out the ways in which *Security with traffic* engages the political and psychoanalytic registers of this anxiety by staging the violent negotiation of the “impossible one,” I want to say more about the hauntological as a radically unmarked thinking of the limit – one that not only gives its ontological refusal of the order of knowledge its ethical dimension but opens its politics to thinking mutuality without an anthropocentric privilege.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida elaborates the ethico-political problem of haunting through a deconstruction of Hamlet’s phrase “the time is out of joint” and the notion of “originary spectrality” that follows from it.<sup>133</sup> Though it can be variously translated and Derrida tracks the different emphases of a number of these translations, Hamlet’s phrase refers both to the temporality of time as well as that time which temporality makes possible: “the world as it turns,” and thus, “our world today, our today, currentness, current affairs.”<sup>134</sup> In terms of Shakespeare’s play, “the time is out of joint” is often understood as a violent rupture that has thrown society’s founding political and moral principles off-track: the murder of King Hamlet for example, announced by the appearance of his ghost, is the trigger here. This framework therefore suggests that a disjointed time is a perversion of that which is somehow seamlessly ‘in joint,’ harmoniously aligned, and which it is Hamlet’s task or torment to once again “put right.”<sup>135</sup> As Derrida points out, in relation to the concept of pervertibility “it is easy to go from disadjusted to unjust,” especially since “our world today” so often turns “badly.”<sup>136</sup> It is in this context that he draws up a “black picture on a blackboard” – a blacklist – of ten plagues that throw the becoming worldwide of Western models of

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<sup>132</sup> Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 22. Royle, *After Derrida*, 154.

<sup>133</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 20-23.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 22, 96.

democratic progress and emancipation into doubt.<sup>137</sup> Some of the list resonates with the objects and the thematic of *Security with traffic*. Very briefly, the list includes unemployment, forced migration, economic refugees, neo-colonial protectionism, third world debt, industries of warfare, inter-ethnic wars, the power of cartels and the international dominance of powerful nation-states.<sup>138</sup> So “out of joint” is the state of things, he asserts, that “never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and humanity.”<sup>139</sup> After this statement he declares, “provisionally and with regret” that, while he cannot pursue it in this text, the question of the animal is “massively unavoidable” and remains internal to all he says about the ghost.<sup>140</sup> In fact, Royle argues that the question of the animal is the ghost that haunts *Specters of Marx*.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, the ghost as the return of *some* body, but *who?* is the uncanny question that makes available all that Derrida says about a non-ontological formation of violence and alterity in this book. For Derrida’s deconstruction of “time out of joint” – and thus its ethico-political inflection – does not set what is twisted, beside itself or off-track against the “good direction of that which goes right” according to the law.<sup>142</sup> Violence and the dis-adjustment of the unjust are not opposed to an ethical ideal of the good as the upright or as that which cannot be eaten.<sup>143</sup> Unlike Kristeva, here is no regulative ideal of non-violence to separate out the disadjustment that makes available a relation to the other from a total appropriative consumption of the other. Rather, there is the ethical imperative to “eat well” and given that no eating is without relation, how to eat remains the question that is made possible by this figure of undecidability.

In Derrida’s argument, the “time...out of joint” forms the leitmotif for the trace structure of the impossibility of any indivisible presence: it signals the process of divisibility and deferral that produces the violence of *différance* which exceeds any thinking in which presence returns to itself in a self-identical or full presence. This temporal discontinuity testifies at once to a disordering and an opening: as Derrida

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 96-106.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Royle, *The Uncanny*, 245.

<sup>142</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 23.

<sup>143</sup> I am thinking here of Derrida’s unpacking of Lévinasian ethics of “Thou shalt not kill” in “Eating Well” in which consequences follow on consequences and one is prohibited not only from harming one’s neighbour but also eating him, “even a little bit.” (EW 279).

writes, a time that is ‘out of joint’ signals a continuity that maintains itself disparately “only in the dis-located time of the present.”<sup>144</sup> Moreover, this temporal dislocation is not the sign of a negated or dysfunctional time but rather of an alterity in which time is “without *certain* joining or determinable conjunction.”<sup>145</sup>

The “non-contemporaneity of the present with itself” makes available, in other words, the condition of undecidability without which no ethics or politics can happen.<sup>146</sup>

“[W]ithout *certain* joining and determinable conjunction” means, in fact, that not only is decision more necessary and urgent than ever, but that no decision can be safeguarded by the singular knowledge of good conscience.<sup>147</sup> In short, no decision can be without the violence of exclusion, nor can it be known in advance what the outcome of the decision will be. All decisions remain necessarily violent which is why the ethico-political question of *how* to eat well remains carnivorous (EW 282). In Derrida’s terms, the injunction to ethics and politics is itself “out of joint.”<sup>148</sup> In this “irreducible excess of disjointure,” undecidability opens a relation to alterity that is both a chance and a threat.<sup>149</sup> Yet without this opening and its risk, there can be no address to the other as other, nor indeed, to the other as mortal.<sup>150</sup> As Lawler and Hägglund point out, since there can be no non-violence within the ethical logic of deconstruction, what is at stake in the thinking of temporal alterity is what Derrida terms “the least possible violence.”<sup>151</sup> Since this violence is the unmarked violence of *différance*, it is not bound to the sacrificial affirmation of the “anthropological limit” but to the limitrophic violence that Derrida signs by way of the *animot*.<sup>152</sup> The temporal alterity that initiates what Hägglund calls the “non-ethical opening to ethics” means that alterity is not conditioned by species difference but by the impossibility that anything can be in

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<sup>144</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 20.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 20, 26.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>149</sup> Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 52.

<sup>150</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 32. Hägglund calls attention to Derrida’s *Memoires for Paul de Man*, in which Derrida writes “the other as other, that is, as mortal for a mortal.” Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, 39. See Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 52.

<sup>151</sup> Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics” in *Writing and Difference*, 130; Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 24; Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 52.

<sup>152</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 41; Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29. On the “ragged autograph” of limitrophic violence and its intersection with species and sexual difference, see Lynn Turner “Insect Asides” in Lynn Turner (ed.) *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, 54.

itself.<sup>153</sup> Spectrality, in other words, conditions everything that happens.<sup>154</sup> Thus, the temporality of the haunting that precedes and corrupts ontological certainty it is not harmoniously synthesized and then disturbed: the foreign body of the ghost does not arrive fully formed and intrude from the outside. Rather, in the interruption of presence, there is always already more than one. In the interruptive incision of *differance*, there is radical alterity: a “fault line” of self and other, and this other is within me.<sup>155</sup> A foreigner at home: spectrality, and thus the abject trace of its uncanny return, of death and repetition, is there from the start.<sup>156</sup> The spectral uncanny – the experience of oneself as a foreign body – can be thought of as the habitus of the inappropriate/d: the dis-articulation of what is “no longer and not yet” is nourished by the trace of an interruption that performs what Haraway, citing Trinh T. Min-Ha, frames as the “critical difference from myself.”<sup>157</sup>

The foreign body of *Ghost* is the sign and seal of its own anxious ontological questioning: as a discourse of interspecies union, it is ridden with an unease that infects the imprint of ‘the animal’ in the model of being human it tries to stabilise. Put another way, the centrality of *Ghost* in the installation marks out the abject territory that the ghostly as a problematic of the border elicits, though can never resolve. And it cannot resolve it because, as the exemplar instance of the economy of the “time ... out of joint” of the uncanny, the ghosts haunt precisely where they are deemed foreign by “those who think they are at home.”<sup>158</sup> If the human-nonhuman animal hybrid figures in *Security with traffic* are productive of a haunting uncertainty, it is not simply because, in the manner of its commissioning exhibition’s title, they stage the neo-liberal return of an apartheid-style racial violence and its animalising modes of degradation. Rather, it is because the installation’s relation to the spectre, and to the radical haunting of an originary spectrality that it subsequently plays out, disturbs the ontologised stability of all the borders thus far elicited (between living and dead, human and nonhuman, ego and ghost, strange and familiar, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, inclusion and exclusion). At stake in this disturbance is the political and psychoanalytic implication of the uncanny

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<sup>153</sup> Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 47.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 58.

<sup>155</sup> Lawler, *This is Not Sufficient*, 22.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>157</sup> Haraway, “Ecce Homo,” 93.

<sup>158</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 33.

that summons *Ghost* even as it tries to exorcise it. How this plays out in relation to abjection and the double register of “more of one/ no more one [*plus d’un*]” is what I turn to next.

## VII. Ghosts, more than one

As if testimony to this dis-adjusted “world ...going badly,” *Ghost*’s sickles, machetes, gloves and the alien wood walking stick also contract within them a number of associations that speak of economic exploitation, famine, inequality and a brutality that leaves the ground on which *Ghost* stands, barren.<sup>159</sup> With a stockpile of used machetes, gloves and sickles, *Ghost* implicitly summons many more ghosts of the un-homed, subjugated, excluded, victims and aggressors – revenants of those who are already dead or not yet born, but also those whose lives are animalised so as not to matter. It summons more and more traces of death. The inner cage, with its extra high fences, is a zone of seemingly absolute containment and restriction: the used red gloves speak of both protection and the possible contamination it guards against. Its prophylactic intent is perhaps the reason for gloves on *Custodian*’s watch tower, positioned near the main gate facing the exterior fence. The red gloves however seem always already blood-stained, as if the form of protection is also the source of the threat of violence. With this in mind, the presence of gloves on *Custodian*’s platform suggests that the first violence of the law of segregation is visual – a demarcation of the foreign in which the viewer is complicit (Fig. 11). There is also an uncanny sense of having seen this before – the forced internment of the non-normative prompts the question of who/what is being protected from whom? *Security with traffic* risks a spectral engagement with a kind of totalitarian violence the horrors of which punctuate all the cries of ‘never again’ that accompany the desire for purified inclusion and absolute exclusion. It summons a thematic of war and scapegoats in which, Derrida asserts, both are “equally terrorized by the ghost, the ghost of the other, and its own ghost as the ghost of the other.”<sup>160</sup> Since there can be no ghost without corporeality, without some/body that returns, the unsettling ambiguity of the position and address of the ghost (not only ‘who?’ but also ‘where?’) prompts the installation’s double-movement of aggressive internment and

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 177. “War and Scapegoats” is a chapter title in Lawler, *This is Not Sufficient*.

fearful strangeness. This fear before the ghost of the other who is terrifyingly unfixed suggests that *Security with traffic* is principally about insecurity: about the problem of the spectres it summons.

*Security with traffic*'s set up tells us that it is not just the secure delimitation between inside and outside that this spectral foreign body puts at risk but being in common. The territorial exclusion played out in *Security with traffic* is emphasised in the contrast between the courtyard's stone floor and the installation's earth-covered ground. This separation enacts what John D. Caputo describes as the defensive fortification of self-determination that underpins communitarian belonging: from its Latin roots, community links 'communio' ('the common,' and thus also 'the one' and 'the same') and 'munis,' which is also the root of munition.<sup>161</sup> To be in common in this sense is to be defended against the incursion of forces from without, to be immunised against the foreign body, and to properly expel that difference which cannot be assimilated, tolerated or acknowledged. Translated into *Security with traffic*'s visual terms, this immunity is bound by a policed relation between being and belonging that stabilises the authority necessary to patrol and regulate the border itself. The sovereign boundary, marked in wire fencing and stone and strewn with red gloves and machetes, appears forged in conceptions of "native blood and soil."<sup>162</sup> This notion of community of the same is driven by what Derrida terms "ontopology."<sup>163</sup> Derived from the combination of the ontological and the topological, "ontopology" links the "value of being-present" to the stable realisation of the locality of self.<sup>164</sup> In the fiction of this absolute stability is the desire to set up a precise, cohesive and pure manifestation of community: to make the most one, *plus d'un*, that excludes more and more "without limit."<sup>165</sup> This "worst violence" is not only an absolute expression of the division between self and other but also, paradoxically, the expression of both absolute life and absolute death. In the search for a completely present life through the expulsion and sacrifice of the ghost as

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<sup>161</sup> John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 107.

<sup>162</sup> I borrow this phrase from Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 102.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Lawler, *This is Not Sufficient*, 23.

the externalised other, the violence that is without limit excludes all possibility of difference, and thus the opening to possibility and the future.<sup>166</sup>

The installation literalises this yearning for a pure relation in material terms, but also puts it at risk. The list of *Security with traffic*'s media specifies that twenty cubic metres of "European earth" be used as ground cover, but also that 100 grams of "African earth" be added to it.<sup>167</sup> Although it is a trace amount given the scale of the work, the addition of this "African soil" pollutes the claim to totalised sameness, but does so from within. The native soil, the sovereign body, the fenced territory – all the markings of the proper domain of the self, citizen, the "most one" who belongs – all *that* is compromised by a foundational inability to tell the difference between what is native and foreign, an inability over which the *Ghost* presides. As Kristeva would say, the intrusion of the foreign/er that is all too at home triggers both identification and anguish. And it is this all too 'properly human' capacity to master the porosity of the border and prescribe a totalised unity of one that *Security with traffic* both stages and renders impossible.

This is not, however, to suggest that the spectral foreignness the work performs contrasts autochthonous ontological belonging and alien haunting. Rather, as Derrida argues, the ontopological is itself "a primitive conceptual phantasm" or a manifestation of originary spectrality that (re)launches the notion of stabilised identity with every memory of the displacement that initiated it. In other words, the haunting of originary spectrality behaves like abjection, in which the own and proper that is the property of self or socius (community or nation) is constituted and besieged by that which it expels, abjects and rejects. It puts Kristeva's idea that "[s]trangely, the foreigner lives within us" into practice but it only works as abjection: that is, without her caveat of non-violence that this knowledge of the paradox at the core of her concept of a communal ethics of difference is supposed to effect. Since every identity is a product of the 'time out of joint,' haunted by that which it excludes but also dependent on the incision of 'more than one' for its formation of self, the ghost violates any firm division between inclusion and exclusion. Or rather, it is inside only as the embodiment or reinscription

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>167</sup> Description of media, *Security with traffic (influx control)* (2007) in Subirós (ed.) *Jane Alexander Surveys*, 126.

of the thickened limit or, in Butler's terms, "constitutive outside," through which what is own and proper seeks out its confirmation.<sup>168</sup>

Read through Kristevan abjection, Butler's concept of the "constitutive outside" refers to the domain of "unthinkable ...unlivable bodies," which, denied access to subjectivity themselves, form the exclusionary zone through which of the subject is formed and which "haunts the ...[subject] as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility."<sup>169</sup> Bounded by abjection, this exclusionary zone remains vulnerable to dissolution and thus requires its anxious renewal. However, as *Security with traffic's* circuit of surveillance suggests – that is, the one overseen by the two *Custodian* figures, one positioned overlooking the entrance gate as well as the one atop the monitor in the gallery who watches those who watch the CCTV feed – those who maintain the limit, feed the limit and watch over it, are also within it: caught up in a relational web in which there is no outside, and no mastery of 'species being': there is only, in fact, relations of unequal exchange in which becoming is in common, though no less violent. For it is never certain what the visitation without invitation of the other, or of the other within the self, will bring: it may produce the violence of "the worst," or think itself a "lesser violence," which may indeed still be "the worst" as the genocidal campaigns for purity of the greater good testify.<sup>170</sup> There is no dialectical opposition here – only a responsibility without limit, hence the ordeal of undecidability that necessitates a decision in which a welcome to the other may bring both opportunity and harm.

This ambivalent is the chance and threat of *plus d'un*, its hauntological promise, and what drives the inappropriate/d relationality of the figures as *animot*. In the *il faut* of decision, the question of the animal that inhabits the neologism of the *animot* never leaves behind the question of the living in general, more especially since Derrida describes his concept of *animot* as not only a "monstrous hybrid" but also "a multiplicity of relations between the living and the dead."<sup>171</sup> Thinking of Alexander's figures as figurations of Derridian *animot* that open onto an ethics of mutuality hauntologically unbound by a species hierarchy and ontology suggests that in the co-

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<sup>168</sup> See this thesis' chapter one, 39-40.

<sup>169</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, xi; 3.

<sup>170</sup> Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 23.

<sup>171</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 41.

implications of becoming, an ethics of mutuality that is responsible to the living in general does not mean a mutuality that embraces only the life of the living, or only the human living. It means rather, that there can be no thinking of responsibility as ethical, to borrow Derrida's words, that does not reach "beyond all living present," whether human or not, in order to address "those others who are no longer ... whether ... already dead or not yet born."<sup>172</sup> It is in this sense that, for Derrida and for Mbembe, 'we' can never be 'done with' ghosts but need to learn how to address them, always more than one. As Derrida points out, "everyone reads, acts, writes with *his* or *her* ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other."<sup>173</sup> A "paradoxical hunt," this uncanny enthrallment to the spectre makes of the ghost a "diabolical double" of the self: something against which to oppose the self, to separate from its frightening proximity. For the identity of the ghost, as Derrida reminds us, is "precisely the 'problem'" (both the question and the shield): both same and an other, the ghost is an uncanny reminder of the "same that is each time another."<sup>174</sup> It is a relation that links haunting and hunting to the uncanny return.

The hauntological subject is both defined and threatened by the return of those uncanny doubles it tries to exclude but cannot, either through exorcism or reintegration. The imprint of *plus d'un* here signals a violent self-division in which the auto is irreducibly "origin-heterogeneous."<sup>175</sup> The subject as in process/on-trial is thus marked not only in abjection but in the aporia of the hauntological: any relatively stabilised concept of self must also endure the paradox in which what makes the 'auto' of auto-affectation possible at the same time makes it impossible to be 'in itself.' It must endure it despite the "panic-ridden fear of the ghost in general" that searches for a body through which to contain or ontologise the spectre of the other and the other within the self. But the (always already impossible) exorcism of an originary spectrality issues a death warrant to the autoaffective and self-sustaining conception of the subject of absolute life or full presence, and thus also to any formation of communal plenitude predicated on the notion of absolute exclusion, either in the mode of the purified self or through transferential projection onto a scapegoat. Even if we do think of the foreign body of

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<sup>172</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xviii.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 175.

<sup>175</sup> Lawler, *This is Not Sufficient*, 31.

*Ghost* as a scapegoat, reduced to a sacrificial animal and burdened with all the traces of traces of death in life and cordoned off outside the social space of the communal courtyard, it is worth remembering that, given the foundational violence of originary spectrality and abjection, no such expulsion of death can take place. This is what Kristeva means when she declares that the foreigner is not a scapegoat, and when she insists that the recognition of our own uncanny strangeness “cannot be enjoyed from outside” but instead produces an ethics and politics of “respect for the irreconcilable.”<sup>176</sup>

In the *animot* that I am and who/what I follow, and in relation to the spectres I conjure and pursue, there can be no taking back property of the egological self as “owner and creator,” the “I-me” or ‘the who’ that is properly ‘mine’ without some originary remainder.<sup>177</sup> What the importation of abjection to Kristeva’s conception of the uncanny foreignness of the self suggests is that the attempt to exorcise or totally re-appropriate the spectre by intern(alis)ing it aims not just to form a human mutuality of the living – even one that is without the privileged assurance of Enlightenment reason. It aims instead to enact a narcissistic disavowal of loss in order to deny that the living ego contains within itself the possibility of its own death.<sup>178</sup> Thinking the uncanny *animot* responds to the trace of death in life rather than its exclusion, and thus not only makes place to address the ghost but also makes it ontologically impossible not to do so. So much so, in fact, that Derrida suggests that “the figure of the ghost...is perhaps the hidden figure of all figures.”<sup>179</sup> Always innumerable and one too many, the ghost is supplementary, surplus and prosthetic.<sup>180</sup> This supplementarity is not only, as Haraway would put it, “artifactual,” in that it points to the generative undecidability of what counts as life;<sup>181</sup> it is also visual, given the register of the repeatability that infects Alexander’s figures and their uncanny return with all the undecidable mutability that it promises. To think the uncanny is thus to not only to acknowledge the abject, impure and unstable origins of the bounded subject but to think of a self that is always already heterogeneous to itself, beside itself, contaminated and unsettled by, as Derrida would

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<sup>176</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 182.

<sup>177</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 177.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 177.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 150.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 161.

<sup>181</sup> Donna J. Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, 1992, 295-7.

put it, “repetition, *différance*...so many figures of death...all of which begins with language, before language.”<sup>182</sup>

This constitutive estrangement is the abject, violent and radical condition of Alexander’s figural language of haunting (*es spukt*). But it is also more than that: as Derrida observes, the German translation of it haunts, *es spukt* (literally, it ghosts, or spooks) presents a verb without a subject who acts. Without a subject and in suspension of an object, *es spukt* condenses the abject enthrallment of the uncanny’s repetition compulsion to a quasi-machinic “automaticity.”<sup>183</sup> The supplementarity of the spectre suggests, as Michael Naas affirms (following Derrida), that ‘life itself’ in order to survive (*sur-vie*, to live on) requires non-life: repetition, the trace, its constitutive erasure and thus, death.<sup>184</sup> It requires, in other words, recognition that the phantom I call a self – the *animot* that I am – is a body of ghosts, a “haunted community of a single body:” as Derrida writes, “‘I am’ would mean ‘I am haunted.’”<sup>185</sup> And in being haunted, the body (whether of the self or the social body) as a body of ghosts, is turned in advance to welcome that which comes: expectation, promise, the future, death. Contrary to Mbembe’s thinking, the spectre’s return is not symptomatic of the foreclosure of a “radical future-oriented politics.” Rather, it is its condition – precisely, its promise or its monstrosity.

### VIII. *Yield*: “monstrous arrivant”<sup>186</sup>

If every arrival of the spectral is a return conditioned by anticipation – both *recalled* and *predicted* – if, in other words, the arrival of the ghost is paradoxically both belated and forward looking, then *Yield* marks this return of the revenant as the very condition of a future mutuality that is not simply human.

*Yield* (Fig.14, 1997-2010) is, as was the case with *Security with traffic*, an installation in two parts. The first is an installation of 11 figures arranged in a room. These are *Cadet*

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<sup>182</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 177.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>184</sup> Naas, “‘One Nation...Indivisible,’” 23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156916406779165818> accessed 22 January 2012.

<sup>185</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 166.

<sup>186</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 33.

(2008/9), *Ghost* (2007), *Official* (2007), *Convoy* (2006/7), *Scavenger* (2006), *Monkey Boy* (2006), *Harbinger with protective boots* (2004), *Bird* (2004), *Hobbled Ruminant* (2003/4), *Small Beast* (2003), *Harvester* (1997/8), together with 1 000 machetes, 1 000 sickles, industrial strength gloves, high-explosive anti-tank ammunition boxes from the Angolan-South African War on which *Lamb with stolen boots* (2002-4) stands, and a ground cover of “Bushmanland earth.”<sup>187</sup> The arrangement is watched over by a security guard and a CCTV camera. The second part of the installation consists of a monitor which plays the CCTV feed and on top of which sits *Custodian with surveillance* (2005). Made for the exhibition “This is our Time” at the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, *Yield*’s arrangement repeats many of the elements found in *Security with traffic* but with an important difference. The entrance to the room installation fixes its orientation so that all the figures appear to stop mid-action and address the viewer who walks into that room. What is staged in that encounter, which at first seems an immediate confrontation with “this time” that is “ours,” is, rather, that the question of who/what arrives – whether that arrival is of the viewer into the space of the work, or of the figures into the viewer’s experience of that space – cannot be known in advance of its coming. Or rather, cannot be known in advance of its coming back. This uncanny return is of course literalised in the repetition of the figures and components which carry their multiple returns with them in the temporal span of the work’s date (1997-2010). All of the elements in this work have been used before – the monitor in *Security with traffic*, the security guard, even the anti-tank ammunition boxes (from *African Adventure* 1999-2002), the gloves, the machetes. Nonetheless, this reassembling is also unique, singular and an event in which this sense of rootedness is made material in the importation of “Bushmanland” earth. While foreign to the gallery space, the earth called “Bushmanland” carries with it an ontological residue that is indeed spectral. Long since displaced and pushed to an inhospitable desert corner of South Africa’s North West province by Bantu tribes and colonial settlers, Bushman (also known as San/Bushman) are widely held to be the only form of human belonging indigenous to South Africa. The “Bushmanland” on which all the figures stand is thus the sign of a disinheritance in which the question of the ‘who/what’ that is “this time” that is “ours,” is riddled with an originary loss. In its haunting interruptions and uncanny doubles, *Yield*’s address to ‘us’ takes place on the shore where not only the

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<sup>187</sup> Stevenson Gallery Cape Town, “This is Our Time,” 3 June-24 July 2010.

illusionary fullness of presence breaks, but does so as an experience of the past that arrives from the future only in the mode of coming back. This limitrophic encounter with the threshold takes advantage of the punning reference Derrida makes to *la rive* (shore) in his use of the present tense of the French verb *arriver* ('to come,' 'to happen' or 'to arrive').<sup>188</sup> Since this mode of hauntological arrival is interminable return, the question of who/what arrives must necessarily be a radical address to an unpredictable future. For Derrida, such a figure of the future is "heralded by a species of monsters."<sup>189</sup> This figure of the unknowable *animot* announces the monstrous undecidability of the stranger which arrives before it, the neutrality of which Derrida remarks with the term "*arrivant*."<sup>190</sup> Literally the one that arrives, the *arrivant* is neither defined nor expected at the horizon of its arrival. What is on show in *Yield* and addressed in the frontal encounter where 'who' it is that arrives (or strays) is held open and unresolved, is precisely the way in which the uncanny economy of what Derrida calls the "monstrous arrivant" opens the future-oriented politics of possibility that Mbembe feared the interruptive presence of ghosts would close.<sup>191</sup>

As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen observes, the monstrous here is structured as both "construct and a projection."<sup>192</sup> This is a border problem without a singular frontier, not even one of critical displacement, for what is monstrous produces an ethico-politics of possibility that requires both attention to its thickening edges and the vigilant (but impossible) endurance of its aporia. The monstrous in Derrida's thinking is not a form of negation; it is not simply horrifying or heinous, though it is no less violent, nor is it simply the unorthodox combination of heterogeneous bodies.<sup>193</sup> Instead, the monstrous, in Derrida's words, "shows itself:" an invention or deformation that exceeds any determining programme, any prior knowledge, and therefore, any singular delineation of good conscience or prescribed ethical imperative.<sup>194</sup> In this figure of the "monstrous arrivant," which is tied both to the logic of haunting and to the foreignness of bodies, the ethical and political question of the border turns not only limitrophic but aporetic.

<sup>188</sup> Turner, "Insect Asides," 66. Also Derrida, *Aporias*, 35.

<sup>189</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Passages: From Traumatism to Promise," in Elizabeth Weber (ed.) *Points...: Interviews, 1974-1994*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf and others. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, 387.

<sup>190</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 33.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.) *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 4.

<sup>193</sup> Derrida, "Passages: From Traumatism to Promise," 285. See also Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 106.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* 385.

Thus Derrida's "monstrous arrivant," the 'who/what' that arrives without and prior to any announced "invitation... call... nomination, or ... promise" both affects and makes possible "the very experience of the threshold".<sup>195</sup> The singularity or arrival of the unexpected does not define any movement or traversal across a line, even if that movement is a critical displacement. Instead, it is an interruption or contradiction in which the possible is edged by the experience of the impossible and undefined by an indivisible line. Derrida keeps the problematic of the border as shield in tension with the concept of the aporia. Hence the hyperbolic nature of Derridian ethics: there can be no responsible decision – no ethical, and thus no political, negotiation of borders – that does not endure the aporia or the ordeal of undecidability that forces the singularity of the decision to interrupt each of its repetitions.<sup>196</sup>

Inasmuch as the monstrous is not ontological but relational, it is an invitation to yield. For Derrida the monstrous arrival of the future is always now, untimely, "out of joint." Thus an encounter with the monstrous recalls us to an interruptive powerlessness in which responsibility is rooted in the injunction to decide, to assess and to act in the unknowable 'to come.' This is also to say that an encounter with the monstrous recalls us to an in-capacity, a non-power, or non-virility, before which we tremble or hesitate.<sup>197</sup> Herein lays its violence, alterity and its uncanny return, but also its undecidability, which Derrida calls the opening of the "passage... from traumatism to promise."<sup>198</sup> The monstrous is thus not only an invention of the unexpected but an intervention of the unanticipated, the non-appropriable and the inappropriate/d. *Yield* describes a "species of non-species" in which what is impossible is nonetheless possible and appears available in all the registers of *plus d'un* and on every horizon of expectation without limit.<sup>199</sup> Not only is the possibility of the future that *Yield* describes one in which the encounters with *animot* do not legislate a self-sustaining necropolitics of human sovereignty, but the terms of welcome to the foreign body of the other and the other within the self is not drained of the foundational violence of difference. The ghosts that populate Alexander's "mutant universe" do not, to borrow (and slightly

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<sup>195</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 34.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 12-14, 17, 21.

<sup>197</sup> Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 112. Derrida, "Passages: From Traumatism to Promise," 385.

<sup>198</sup> Derrida's conception of traumatism is in keeping with the sense of interruption and rupture that is the condition for anything to happen, at least as the monstrous concerns the singularity of the event.

<sup>199</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 370.

reorient) Hägglund's words, "overtake an already constituted subject."<sup>200</sup> Instead, they make available that alterity, impurity, heteroaffection and the monstrous possibility of death-in-life, which is also the spectral arrival of the future 'to come,' is there from the start, as an experience of the self as a foreign body. Read through Derrida, Kristeva and Haraway, this promise of monsters enacts precisely the opening to any ethico-politics of decision in which not only the uncanny, interspecies aesthetic and the incipient violence of Alexander's works make sense, but also her lexicon of messengers, portents, watchmen, custodians, cadets: ghosts, more than one.

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<sup>200</sup> Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 52. The description of "mutant universe" derives from Subirós, "On Being (and Becoming) Human," 13.



**Figure 15 Elizabeth Gunter, *Rou I* 2009. Used with permission from Elizabeth Gunter 2015.**



**Figure 16 Elizabeth Gunter, *Rou II* 2009. Used with permission from Elizabeth Gunter 2015.**

### Chapter three

## Towards an Ethics of Mourning: Touching with Elizabeth Gunter's *Rou*<sup>1</sup>

“This other heart self-touches you [*toi*] only to be exposed to death.”<sup>2</sup>

Derrida

### I. Touching mourning

Elizabeth Gunter's *Rou* (2009) depicts a reclining female dog, repeated over two large scale drawings (100 x70cm). Her eyes are closed in both and her body is extended. In *Rou I* (Fig.15) she appears in three quarter view, her torso and head slightly flopped to the side in the direction of one of her front paws. The other paw is foreshortened and rests on her chest. Her hind legs pull back and expose her fleshy underside, as if she is in mid-stretch. *Rou II* (Fig.16) shows her on her side, front paws stretched out and slightly splayed, hind legs tucked in underneath her. While these appear to be simple, understated studies, they are also a record of attentive, nuanced detail. Her features, though mostly in shadow, are individuated and each pose, each position, is carefully wrought. These drawings are a product of careful looking and studied making: of subtle, gradated marks or facture that are hatched across the surface to swell her shape and describe her volumes. Both versions of *Rou* are studies of one of Gunter's dogs and have something of the air of a drawing exercise about them.<sup>3</sup> Although in places highly detailed, they also profoundly exceed such descriptive and technical study and seem instead intensely personal explorations of an individual life. Yet, to suggest an illustrative content or a mimetic and narrativised reading of the poses such as a portrait

<sup>1</sup> In loving memory of all my dog friends – those who have passed and those yet to come.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*. Trans. Christine Irizarry. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, 289.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Gunter teaches in the Fine Arts department at the University of Stellenbosch. She has done several series of dog drawings. One of which, *Wit Hond*, is a series of thirteen drawings modelled on one of her own dogs, as is *Rou*. In the series *Keep*, however, her tactic is different. *Keep* is a three drawing series that depicts a dog created through visual cross breeding. In my visit to her studio in 2009, Gunter described this technique as a mixing of a bit of ‘this,’ with the body of a ‘that,’ and the face of another. I noted that it is a drawing equivalent of the hybrid intermixtures or ‘pavement specials’ as these dogs are colloquially known in South Africa (my own Frankie (RIP), Sophie (RIP) and Maggie (RIP) were all such dogs). It is a drawing tactic that opens onto all the discourses of purity and origin that haunt the question of life and the living in South Africa. In this chapter, my focus is on this haunting, though I do not address through *Keep*, nor do I focus on strictly racial terms (as apartheid's inheritance might suggest). Rather, my focus is on touch as a mourning that precedes death in order to complicate an anthropocentrism that determines which life can be subject to mourning.

or, more prosaically, a description of a sequence of a dog's stretch and turn, for example, would be to reduce the complexity enfolded in the work of looking and touching these drawings communicate. It would be to fail to respond to their stillness, or to their unguarded intensity. They are arresting images, and, despite their size, intensely intimate. Though they appear quiet in mood, almost meditative, the play of light and dark across the surfaces makes these drawings seem quite animated. The tonal gradations that make her features, her feet, and contours emerge from the background and accent her folds of flesh and fur also make her disappear into a velvety blackness that itself varies in intensity. The images pulsate with this contrast. The gentle roundness of her slightly bulging belly, the soft creases of skin at the top of her legs, at her underarms, around her neck, the bristling punctures of whiskers around her mouth, the loose jowls, her almost cocked and semi-alert ear, the sinew-and-vein tracings of her legs, her articulated limbs, the sturdy padding and defined nails of feet still to be grown into: all are palpable, tactile. *Rou I* and *Rou II* realise a body that bristles with life, with the intimacy of proximity and contact. In their mode of looking and making, in its tactile evocation of flesh and mark, these drawings speak to a haptic sensibility that takes in and touches both the picture surface and the singular body it reveals – it is a looking that affects itself in the way that it touches on the body of another. It is a touching that is both literal and figural, or one that marks the impossibility of a firm delineation between them. In so doing, it points towards an interspecies intimacy between dog and human that unfolds as an encounter in a metonymy of touch among Gunter, myself ... and you.<sup>4</sup>

‘And you’: the familiarity of the second person address is not out of place here. It meets the intimacy of the interspecies relating implied in the works’ tender looking and in the way the modulated marks caress both the surface and the dog’s form. It also describes something fundamental about that impossible delimitation that its mode of touching invites. An elusive formulation, this intimate mode of touching complicates the locus and material presence of touch in ways that resist all decidability, which is also to say that what is at stake in this discourse on touching is not a question of *who* touches, but rather, *how* one touches and is touched by the other (for the question, as

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<sup>4</sup> The intimate address of touch that engages a “you” is the subject of Section 13, “And to you,” of Derrida’s *On Touching*, 281.

Derrida puts it, always comes to me from the other).<sup>5</sup> The tactility marked by the *Rou* drawings not only enacts an injunction to touch ethically but materialises the kind of contaminative interrelating that is at issue when species meet. *Rou*'s form- and flesh-defining tracery demands a relational thinking that responds to, as well as compounds, the ethical, political and psychoanalytic stakes that are opened up in Haraway's question: "whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?"<sup>6</sup>

Haraway's question, one of the founding frames of her praxis, points to a thinking of touch in which what she calls the "aesthetics of human-animal life" is pressured by politics, histories and ethics that are bound "like it or not, flesh-to-flesh and face-to-face," in the inter- and intra-action of relating.<sup>7</sup> It is a notion of contact in which contours are not smooth and discrete but knotted, nodular and layered. The contiguity that Haraway's figure of touch offers calls attention not to a Lévinasian priority of "the face" over "the flesh" (for there is no pre-programmed 'value' of life based on species hierarchy), but to the fleshy situated-ness of "mortal world-making."<sup>8</sup> Touch in her argument describes not simply an action, consequence or affect, but a "material-semiotic" practice in which bodies and meanings co-shape one another.<sup>9</sup> The "whom and what" of Haraway's question then refers not to ontology but to ways of becoming, or rather, to the indivisible materiality of the web of relations in which being is always a "becoming with."<sup>10</sup> In this worldly network of becoming-with, we cannot but touch,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 2. Also Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (eds.) London: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 46.

<sup>6</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 4. My embedded reference here is to Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 183-201. In terms of Lévinas' notion of "the face" as the locus of ethics before ontology, I refer here to the question of whether an animal (a dog, a snake) has a "face" that can make an ethical demand. The question troubles Lévinas's interview with Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Lévinas". Trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamra Wright in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds.) *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*. London: Routledge, 1988, 168-80. While Lévinas admits that he does not know if the face translates across species, he also admits that his focus is on the human as the strongest manifestation of the ethical demand contained within this metaphor of faciality. "The face" is that which embodies the ethical call of the other, which comes from the other and in response to which one is constituted as a self. On Bobby, the dog that started the debate, see Emmanuel Lévinas, "The Name of the Dog, Or Natural Rights" in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Trans. Séan Hand. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 151-153. Also Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, and Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (eds.) *Re-Reading Lévinas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 97, 4.

impinge, respond and “inherit” each other, “in the flesh,” as Haraway puts it.<sup>11</sup> Given that for Haraway response and inheritance are inextricable from the messy, violent politico-histories of becoming, these always impure relations are not expressions of an auto-affective immediacy – a self-presence or self-possession – but heterogeneous instances of co-imbrication that intensify obligation, accountability and responsibility. In other words, how we inherit, take hold of, take in or encounter the other-in-touch inevitably returns the ethico-politics of the decision to the porosity “at the edge of the orifices (of orality, but also of the ear, the eye – and all the ‘senses’ in general)” that conditions the “metonymy of ‘eating well’” (EW 282). Touch, for both Haraway and Derrida, is not only fundamental to the living but fundamentally in question. How we think we touch ourselves and the others with whom we become, and by whom we are necessarily (and sometimes unwillingly) touched, calls attention to the entanglements – at once ethical, political and psychoanalytic – that attend to every relation.

Touch is, moreover, a process that offers nothing ‘in itself’ but what Derrida, in his text on touching, calls the “tactful” co-implication of contact and interruption.<sup>12</sup> Or more accurately, a contact that occurs only by way of interruption: one that, as he writes, “abstains from touching so as to touch itself.”<sup>13</sup> For Derrida, the principal locus and figure of this touch that touches itself by withholding contact – in effect, by spacing itself out through opening and closing – is the mouth.<sup>14</sup> In particular, it is the buccal mouth, that is, a mouth fuelled by a primitive orality.<sup>15</sup> As I argued in chapter one, this is an orality that is prior to the acquisition of language and the Law, yet is inextricable from its oral onset whether thought through Freud’s anthropophagous primal feast or Kristeva’s abjection of the edible mother. This bio-social mouth complicates the carnophallogocentric transition from cannibalism to carnivorousness.<sup>16</sup> Derrida’s thinking of touch by way of the mouth, in other words, puts at risk the relational frontier where the “conception-appropriation-assimilation of the other” takes place, and does so by disturbing the animal sacrifice and the sacrifice of animality that grounds these

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 97, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 229.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 34. See also 47.

<sup>14</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary online edition, touch and taste share a derivation in the Old French *tast* (noun), *taster* (verb) meaning ‘touch, try, taste.’ <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/taste> accessed 11 January 2013.

<sup>15</sup> On the mouth as buccal, see *On Touching*, 21-35; also Guyer, “Buccality,” 77-78.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to this thesis, chapter one, especially 68-71.

identifications (EW 282). My argument thus takes place there where the metonymy of touch meets and disturbs the mournful ingestions of incorporation and introjection. Instead of securing the division between real and symbolic death, an orificial touch means that to think ethically about how we touch the dead and are touched by them is, in fact, to endure what Derrida calls (drawing on the work of post-Freudian scholars Abraham and Torok), the “executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse” (EW 282).<sup>17</sup> It is, moreover, an ordeal that is aporetic, for within a sociality dependent on the appropriative consumption of the dead, it refuses the carnophallogocentric guarantee that shapes sovereign self and killable other.

Such “tactful” touching foregrounds a relationality that is simultaneously indigestible, intangible and heterogeneous to itself. It is by way of this “im-possible” touching that Derrida links the irreducible and non-appropriable remaindering of ex-appropriation to a form of mourning that resists totalising subjectivisation, especially in relation to the interiorisation or “quasi-literal devouring” that Freud calls “the work of mourning.”<sup>18</sup> It is this relation between an “im-possible” touching and an “im-possible mourning,” and the alterity it produces – one that, Derrida writes, is “ahuman, more than human, prehuman, different from the human” – that I am exploring across the hatched surface of *Rou*.<sup>19</sup> I see in these drawings a “tactful” marking that takes-in-as-it-touches and points not simply to the mortal fleshiness of finitude that binds across species but, as I will argue, to a foundational mourning that exceeds the Freudian economy of mourning, and refuses its sacrificial animal displacements. The ‘and you’ that the drawings’ large-scale intimacy invites is thus not simply an address to the viewer to touch, to use Haraway’s wonderful metaphor, with “fingery eyes,” and track the intimate caress of graphic form and volume over depth and surface.<sup>20</sup> It is also an opening to read the

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<sup>17</sup> As Turner points out in footnote 31 of her “Animal Melancholia: on the scent of Dean Spanley,” a text that grapples with mourning, animality, orificality and Derrida’s difficult reading of Abraham and Torok, Derrida had already published “Foreword: *Fors*: The English Words of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok,” trans. Barbara Johnson, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolfman’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986 prior to the publication of the “Eating Well” interview. His use of terms associated with Abraham and Torok (“introjection and incorporation”) in “Eating Well” both summons and complicates their work (EW 282). See Lynn Turner, “Animal Melancholia: on the scent of Dean Spanley,” in Laura MacMahon and Michael Lawrence (eds.) *Animality and the Moving Image*. Columbia University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 34. See especially Derrida, *On Touching*, 192. On ex-appropriation, see also EW, 270.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 192.

<sup>20</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 5.

unassimilable inscriptions of touch through the phantomatic trace of the hauntological, which I introduced in chapter two. For ex-appropriation returns the mark, touch and alterity to a spectral belatedness which is neither present to itself, fully present, nor self-identical, and in which the trace is constitutively under erasure.<sup>21</sup>

The relation between touching and mourning in my argument is not, however, only theoretical. In both form and content, *Rou* brings the closeness of touch and all its hauntological complications (of the impossibility of presence, absolute contact and self-presence) into proximity with mourning. Both versions of *Rou* suggest more than they show, or rather, what they show belies and unveils a complexity that the title only hints at. For ‘Rou’ is not the name of the dog, as one might assume; rather, ‘rou’ is the Afrikaans word for ‘mourning.’<sup>22</sup> If with this disclosure, the dark ground that makes the dog appear so tangible becomes, instead, more obscuring, more nocturnal, and the contrasts that serve to enliven her contours render her intangible, haunting even, this ambiguity serves not only to make her repose unreadable but to “spectralize touch,” as Derrida elsewhere says.<sup>23</sup> The ambiguity that shadows *Rou*’s depiction of ‘rest’ – is the dog asleep, or is she dead? – signals that it is not only touch that is in question but mourning as well, and, moreover, the kind of mourning that is at stake in interspecies friendship and love. And *Rou* is about nothing if not about love for Bella (Gunter’s dog) and the practice of attentive looking, and both are traced through the soft touch of pencil, charcoal and Conté crayon.

How we touch and mourn the friend whom we love is an expression of, to borrow Butler’s terminology, bodies that matter.<sup>24</sup> As her more recent work attests, it is this frame of who/what matters that feeds the determination of which lives count as worth loving, and thus, worth grieving.<sup>25</sup> Building on Butler’s framing, James Stanescu observes that the line between killable and grievable lives runs firmly through the

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<sup>21</sup> Leonard Lawlor, “Jacques Derrida,” *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/derrida/> accessed 21 August 2014; J. Hillis Miller, “Trace” in Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan (eds.) *Reading Derrida’s Of Grammatology*. London: Continuum, 2011, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Gunter’s first language is Afrikaans. Although this work is simply titled *Rou* and not *Rou/Mourning*, some of her works are titled in both English and Afrikaans.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 274.

<sup>24</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> On the ethics and politics of the production of grievable lives, see Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004, and Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2009.

human/animal binary.<sup>26</sup> While this is true of the industrial slaughter that supplies the meat-filled deli context of Stanescu's article, the divide between the killable and grievable is much more ambiguous, fraught even, when the body that matters is that of the dog that is welcomed into the home and family, and loved and mourned. Nonetheless, Stanescu's point, and that of Butler before him, is that mourning is a political and ethical act with ontological conditions in which that life designated as animal does not require mourning.<sup>27</sup>

However, even when animal love and death is recognised, as in the case of the domesticated animal, its acknowledgement is far from straightforward. In "Pet Grief" Laurence Rickels remarks that the expectation of surviving the death of the pet is built into the relationship. The pet typically dies first. Yet, he argues, while the domesticated animal is the exemplary embodiment of "the brevity of life," at the same time, the "animal medium" of this grief remains unmournable.<sup>28</sup> Side-lined by his Freudianism into a compensatory kind of re-pet-ting/ repeating that insures against a more devastating primal loss, Rickels' model of the liminal zone inhabited by the dead beloved animal is matched by the interspecies and interfamilial border policing function of the pet in Marc Shell's argument regarding the family pet.<sup>29</sup> In the psycho-sexual sociality of the family pet, the loved animal is considered both human and not human, and as an inedible animal, becomes the placeholder for the taboos against cannibalism and incest. The family pet, Shell asserts, reminds us not to eat or have sex with familial kin, even those not of the same kind.<sup>30</sup>

Set against the above arguments, the kind of discourse that *Rou* invites seems all the more remarkable, for what is so singular about these drawings is their insistence on this 'this-ness' of the dog, of Bella's unsubstitutionability. Although I only know her name because Gunther told it to me, the tenderness and materiality evoked by the graphic marks convey that this is a friend unlike any other. While the nexus of touching-eating-mourning means that it is useful and necessary to think through the psycho-politics of

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<sup>26</sup> James Stanescu, "Species Trouble: Judith Butler, Mourning, and the Precarious Lives of Animals." *Hypatia: a journal of feminist philosophy* 27 no. 3 (2012): 567-582.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 568.

<sup>28</sup> Laurence A. Rickels, "Pet Grief" in Adam Budak and Peter Pakesch (eds.) *Diana Thater GorillaGorillaGorilla*, exhibition catalogue. Cologne: Walter Koenig, 2009, 71.

<sup>29</sup> Marc Shell, "The Family Pet," *Representations* 15 (1986): 121-153.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

dog love and death alongside the arguments on pet grief and familial love presented by Rickels, Shell, as well as by Alice Kuzniar and Marjorie Garber, Derrida's and Haraway's thinking about touch and an originary heterogeneity offers space to think about what these other writers do not. Reading Derrida and Haraway alongside each other is not meant to annul their differences, but it does mean that I can offer a limitrophic and non-anthropocentric reading of touch as a relation of "significant otherness" that has mourning at its heart.

If the *Rou* drawings are about the way temporality and affect touch mimetically and metonymically across a surface, they are also about what Haraway would call an instance of "non-mimetic sharing" that confounds the regulative, hierarchical division of species.<sup>31</sup> This non-mimesis is non-reciprocal – in other words, thinking it as the ground of an ethics of mourning requires the negotiation of what Derrida calls the "aporias of tact."<sup>32</sup> But to think how we touch the dead and what ethics are at stake in this touching requires attention be paid to the connection between the untouchability of touch, the "certain inhumanity" of the trace, *différance*, ex-appropriation, and indeed, an "interminable," "im-possible," "absolute," "pre-originary" or "originary mourning" – all of which initiate and remainder every relation, starting with the other that is the self.<sup>33</sup> I want to think about mourning as an ethical decision which is always already political, implicated and contaminated: an ethics of mourning that is necessarily an impure ethics without end, without clear-cut political lines and without ontological conditions. This is to think touch, mourning and the mark as traces of traces of death in life, and to do so, moreover, through the figure of the dog as that liminal animal that makes the question of hetero-affective intimacy and proximity across species so 'touchy.' This prickliness is not only because of the anthropocentric archive on touching and mourning that Derrida and Haraway position themselves against, but also because recent remarks by South African president Jacob Zuma subject human-canine friendship to a racialised politics

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<sup>31</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 75. For Haraway, non-mimesis becomes a means to negotiate the kinds of calculations that are necessary to grapple with the incalculable demand to be ethical to the other with whom one is significantly entangled, albeit in unequal relations.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 131.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 192. I will address the range of terms and how they interrelate below, but all of them refer to the inassimilable alterity of the other (including the other to the self) that precedes "actual death." See J. Hillis Miller, *For Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2009, 273, 306-326 (especially 318-321). In prefiguring death 'as such,' Saitya Brata Das argues that these terms are "dis-figures of death." See Saitya Brata Das, "(Dis)Figures of Death: Taking the Side of Derrida, Taking the Side of Death." *Derrida Today* 3 no.1 (May 2010): 6.

of species hierarchy. Before I explain what I mean by an interspecies touching that initiates an originary, impossible and absolute mourning, one inextricably tied to ex-appropriation and thus is, as Derrida writes, “greater than my heart in my heart,” I want to convey just how necessary and timely such a thinking might be.<sup>34</sup>

## II. No touching

At a political rally on 26 December 2012, in an instance of democracy’s infinite pervertibility, caring for a domestic dog became the ontologically calculable (and hence unethical) measure of ethics in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that the pet is not already a political object in terms of the rhetoric of ownership that regulates its normative framing; nor indeed, that proximity to the kin that is not kind does not already skirt the regulatory limits of Oedipal kinship. But it is to say, as well, that given the imbrication of the political in the ethical that the question of ‘whose life matters’ elicits, the idea of loving dogs as a trope of kin that is not kind produced a rupture that cuts to the core of what is at stake in a post-apartheid politics of subjectivity, and more especially, of what is proper to, and not simply property of, the subject. Like the controversy that surrounded Mntambo’s *Rape of Europa*, the comments made by President Jacob Zuma expose species as the hierarchized ground on which the question of the human is made to matter.<sup>36</sup> And what matters in this space where species meet is about as far away from Haraway’s notion of companionship as it is possible to get. Zuma’s racially-charged pronouncement on dogs is quite basic, both in the sense of seemingly straightforward and politically crude. It needs to be taken seriously though as, at its heart, is a dangerously purist anthropocentric ‘subject’: in this case, an ‘authentically’ ‘African’ ‘subject.’ Very simply, Zuma announced that keeping dogs as part of the family is “part of white – not African – culture,” adding that “people who

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<sup>34</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 290. Hillis Miller, *For Derrida*, 322.

<sup>35</sup> There have been several studies on the role of dogs in pre-colonial, colonial and apartheid South Africa. Lize van Robbroek, “Speaking Dogs: Undoing the Human in Art.” *Art South Africa* 6 no.1 (Spring 2007): 48-53, explores dogs in art and their relation to apartheid brutality in, for example, Jo Ratcliffe’s *Vlakplaas*, Willie Bester’s sculpture, *Dogs of War*, amongst others. Lance van Sittert and Sandra Swart, “Canis Familiaris: A Dog History of South Africa.” *Southern African Historical Journal* 48 (2003): 138-173, adopts a more historical and sociological analysis. See also Deborah Posel, “Vulnerabilities” in Jay Pather (ed.) *Spier Contemporary 2007*. Cape Town: Africa Centre, 2007, 25-27. Posel’s essay includes a brief analysis of the fragility of flesh (and hints at something like an ethical exposure to the other) in another dog series by Gunter, *Keep*, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> See chapter one, “Eating at the Origin.”

spend money on buying a dog, taking it to the vet and for walks belonged to white culture.”<sup>37</sup> In response to Zuma’s contention that ‘Real Africans don’t love dogs,’ South Africans of all races took to social media to post images and comments challenging his view on both grounds.<sup>38</sup>

“[C]aring for dogs” was not the only apparently ‘unAfrican’ emulation of so-called ‘white culture’ that Zuma castigated. His speech’s dog comments were followed by a chastisement of those who “apply any kind of lotion and straighten... [their] hair.”<sup>39</sup> While a generous reading of Zuma’s appeal would find in it a rhetoric that desires the rehabilitation of the ‘Africanness’ denigrated in the colonialist and apartheid era, its essentialism is also deeply problematic, if not dangerous, and not simply in its promotion of a mythically pure and unified ethnic identity seemingly lost in the adoption of Western habits of behaviour, dress, lifestyle and political economies.<sup>40</sup> Zuma’s drive for authentic identity is shaded by the very hierarchical humanism that fuelled the racism it attempts to answer. Zuma’s perspective seeks to consolidate that renewal of the black subject that makes space not simply for the admission of black ethnicity to the canon of humanity, but for a kind of Fanonian self-acceptance.<sup>41</sup> Hence presidential spokesman, Mac Maharaj, argued that Zuma had merely spoken out to underscore the “need to ‘decolonize the African mind’” so that “the previously oppressed African majority ...[will] appreciate and love who they are and uphold their

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2012/12/27/zuma-s-dog-comments-meant-to-decolonise-the-african-mind-says-maharaj> accessed 27 December 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Twitter protestors included Congress of South African Trade Unions’ General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, who posted pictures of himself and his four dogs. Also, a photograph of a young Nelson Mandela (pre-Robben Island) patting his Rhodesian ridgeback in front of his Soweto home was re-tweeted several times. See <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2012/12/27/zuma-s-dog-comments-meant-to-decolonise-the-african-mind-says-maharaj> accessed 27 December 2012.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/content/zuma-calls-dog-ownership-unafrikan/1573859.html>  
<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Zuma-comments-cause-canine-chaos-20121227>  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/9767644/Jacob-Zuma-says-owning-a-dog-is-not-African.html> accessed 27 December 2012. Another layer of the debate that social media posts raise, but which is not part of my focus here, is the loaded issue of the ‘white African.’ That is, the contested question of the possibility of legitimate belonging for white South Africans, given their privilege under apartheid and their status as descendants of nonindigenous settlers.

<sup>40</sup> On Twitter, no further reference cited in report: “Zuma says owning dogs is un-African. Unlike those old African traditions of owning German cars, Italian suits, and Irish whiskey.”  
<http://www.africareview.com/News/Howls-of-protest-greet-Zuma-dog-remarks/-/979180/1652536/-/vvyxwf/-/index.html> accessed 31 December 2013.

<sup>41</sup> See for example, Fanon’s account of the black subject’s self-alienation in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

own culture.”<sup>42</sup> In his defensive clarification, Maharaj suggested that Zuma’s target was not something as supposedly ‘inconsequential’ as the familiar and familial dog but instead, the human subject of African democracy.

While a politics of post-apartheid subjectivity is indeed at issue, Maharaj’s trivialisation of the dog as a nodal point and problem is as disingenuous as it is serious. It restates a telling intersection of sex, species and race that cannot be separated from the question of the subject. Although not quite the local version of Deleuze and Guattari’s declaration that “*anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool,*” Maharaj’s comments press a similarly skewed perspective in which the domestic dog is bound to a gendered politics of subjection.<sup>43</sup> However, whereas Deleuze and Guattari argue for the heroic pack over the purportedly feminised and Oedipalised domestic dog, in the South African dog debacle, the sexual, racial and species politics of dog-human domesticity is appropriated to the racialised virility of the masculine normative.<sup>44</sup> Zuma’s use of what Maharaj called the “well-known example” of the way in which dog love is tied to white culture is instructive here. The politics of separation this example speaks to is related not so much to the concept of, in Haraway’s phrase, “fantasy children in fur coats,” but to an imaginary inherited from the colonial-apartheid history of racial animalisation.<sup>45</sup> According to Maharaj, Zuma’s speech was directed at the attitude of white people (or more pointedly, some reports state, at white farmers) who sit with their dogs alongside them in a ‘bakkie’ or truck while a black worker sits in the open at the back, whether in pouring rain or extremely cold weather. Despite the racial focus of his remark, Maharaj was at pains to point out that Zuma’s point is not racist, nor did he advocate cruelty to dogs. Rather, he claimed, these comments make clear that caring for a dog, or rather, showing preference to a dog over a human, threatens *ubuntu*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Zuma’s dog comments meant to ‘decolonise the African mind,’” *Mail and Guardian*, 27 December 2012 <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-12-27-zumas-dog-comments-meant-to-decolonise-the-african-mind> accessed 27 December 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 240. Their conviction is underscored by italics in the original. For the necessity of the pack, see chapter “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible,” 232- 309.

<sup>44</sup> For Haraway’s searing critique of their ageism and misogyny, see *When Species Meet*, 27-29.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, the BBC report of Maharaj’s comments: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20851036> accessed 31 December 2012. On the infantilisation of pets, see Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20851036> accessed 31 December 2012.

Although, as I noted in chapter two, the concept of *ubuntu* was popularised as a discourse, ethics and practice in relation to South Africa's post-apartheid period, it also, as Christian B.N. Gade writes, has a complex historical trajectory in which its history, origin and usage is contested.<sup>47</sup> However, while the literature on *ubuntu* might argue over its provenance and attribute it variously to the Nguni (or isisXhosa, or, in some texts, more generally 'African' or 'Bantu') proverb '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*,' there is agreement over its concept, which translates loosely as "a person is a person through other persons."<sup>48</sup> Broadly defined as an ethics of African humanism or as a version of African socialism, *ubuntu*'s politics are both interpersonal as well as hierarchical. Yet, as Maharaj's claim indicates, *ubuntu* also has a potent political valency that extends its humanism to legal discourse.<sup>49</sup> While circulated in pre- and post-liberation Kenya, Senegal, and Zimbabwe, the version of *ubuntu* that was popularised in South African discourse post 1993 is, as Mbembe notes, synonymous with a notion of a politico-ethical community based on compassion, kindness and a shared responsibility for humanity or 'humanness.'<sup>50</sup> In her 1993 edition of *Philosophy for Africa*, Augustine Shutte defines the "identity belief" that underpins *ubuntu* communitarian principle as that of a family "beyond parents and children."<sup>51</sup> Politically, this extra-familial kinship fosters a shared sense of responsibility that can broach reconciliation: the Epilogue (after Section 251) of *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993*, for example, records that the Constitution enacts a "historic bridge" between a past marred by brutal discrimination and a future brightened by democratic freedom.<sup>52</sup> This Epilogue also quotes from the Interim Constitution (on which it was based), in which this bridge is characterised by a "need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Christian B. N. Gade, "The Historical Development of the Written Discourses on *Ubuntu*," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 30 no. 3 (2011): 303-329.

<sup>48</sup> Gade, 303-311, 313, 318. His analysis charts how *ubuntu* remained largely undefined till their more specific deployment in the transition from minority rule in Zimbabwe and South Africa. See also Mbembe's understanding of *ubuntu* in chapter two.

<sup>49</sup> On *ubuntu*'s influence on Constitutional Court rulings, as well as on findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see Gade, 311.

<sup>50</sup> As I argued in chapter two, Mbembe's "Democracy as a Community of Life" reads *ubuntu* as the epitome of the spirit and promise of the post-apartheid Constitution (104).

<sup>51</sup> Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa*, (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1993), 157.

<sup>52</sup> Gade, 311.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

*Ubuntu* is thus heralded as the very principle of reconciliation – it is communality built on the necessary acknowledgement of the shared frailty of human beings and the mutuality of responsibility. In its traditional adherence, it is not without a structure of deference to a hierarchy of ancestors, elders, community leaders. But its stretched relations of extra-familial responsibility only goes so far, and while *ubuntu* offers a notion of kinship beyond consanguinity, these bonds do not transgress species kind. Thus, despite the recognition of a kinship network in which interrelating is always already at work, *ubuntu* is not and cannot be relational in Haraway’s sense. Inasmuch as it is tied to a rebuilding of society through a mutual recognition of dignity, its notion of the subject and of respect and kindness is one that can only be given and received by humans, lest its nation-building politics be degraded. If, as Maharaj claims, choosing proximity to the domestic animal over another human is tantamount to violating *ubuntu*, it is because, rather than rethinking the subject, *ubuntu* imports the species hierarchy on which humanism as a sacrificial politics is based. In this model, the dog in the front seat in Zuma’s example acts as the guarantor of the mastery of (white) Man: the extension of the self-certain virility that determines the racial and gendered difference between ‘man’ and ‘not man’ enough to be ‘human.’ It is for this reason that the issue of canine-human proximity becomes so loaded, and that Maharaj’s attempts to diffuse Zuma’s remarks become more worrying than the mere tongue-tied political spin it no doubt is. Rather than inflame racial tension, Maharaj contends, Zuma’s words offer a social corrective: as a “warning against loving animals more than human beings,” they sound a cautionary note so that “black people [do] not behave in a way that is detrimental to creating a ‘caring African society’ in South Africa”.<sup>54</sup> Cautionary though it may be, for Maharaj and Zuma this is also an urgent warning, for not to heed it is to fail “to protect each other and our culture.”<sup>55</sup> However, despite their claims, Zuma’s and Maharaj’s attempt to ontologically resurrect the humanity of the subject through a restored Africanism clings to a kind of species apartheid that not only separates human from animal but imagines such a distinction *can* and *must* remain inviolate and untouched. Since the question of being in the politics of post-apartheid ‘becoming

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20851036> accessed 27 December 2012.

<sup>55</sup> The BBC news report quotes Maharaj: the President “emphasised the need not to elevate our love for animals above our love for other human beings. Some people do not hesitate to rush their dogs to veterinary surgeons for medical care when they are sick while they ignore workers or relatives who are also sick in the same household.” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20851036> accessed 27 December 2012.

human' remains so closely dependent on importing humanist economies of mastery, it is no wonder that making space for the domestic dog in the 'driving seat' becomes a political as well as ethical problem.

To think about canine-human relationality in terms of mutually inflecting co-drivers – or as companion species caught in a process of becoming rather than a hierarchy of being – is to think interspecies kinship beyond the affirmation of mastery that a single defining difference would ensure. It is to think of companion species as a “contact zone” in Haraway’s sense, for it complicates and risks the historical, racial, sexual and ethico-political relations that bind the extended bonds of kin and kind.<sup>56</sup> In Zuma’s apparently postcolonial discourse is not only the recognition of the complexity of the dog as a vector in the sexual, species and familial negotiation between kin and kind, but something more opaque, and indeed, mournful (for it is rooted in loss, or rather, as I will show, in *différance* and an originary heterogeneity). Zuma’s polemic is not a diatribe at the anthropomorphism of some dog owners. Instead, underlying the idea that “people who love their dogs more than people lack humanity” is a panicked defence against the intimate proximity to the impurity of the *animot* that ‘I’ am.<sup>57</sup> If interspecies friendship is understood to threaten the very fabric of society, it is not because it violates some regulatory division of species along the chain of “humanised human”/ “animalised animal,” but rather, because, in its liminal zones, it betrays the political construction of the grid of species itself.<sup>58</sup> Zuma’s humanised Human, it seems, only acquires representation in the humanity of the postcolony through immunisation against contact with the ‘Animal,’ a category it institutes at the same time as it disavows. The dog as ‘Animal’ thus authorises and polices the conditions through which the renewed humanity of Africanist ways of being can take place. Yet, if the line between Human and Animal is tainted by the “humanised animal,” embodied in the so-called Western familial love for a pet, then, it makes the frightening return of the “animalised human” all the more possible.<sup>59</sup> If it is possible to see Zuma’s anger about the dog lover’s suspected priority of humans over animals as a defence against the return of a racist past, his reaction is also, at the same, evidence of a desire to stabilise and validate the

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<sup>56</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Zuma-comments-cause-canine-chaos-20121227> accessed 27 December 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Wolfe and Elmer in Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 100.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

very logic that underwrites that ontology of racial purity. It is telling in this context that the adjective that Haraway uses to underscore the messy contact she narrates is “miscegenous.”<sup>60</sup> It is a heterogeneous touching from the outset: one that, as she writes, “peppers partners with attachment sites for world making.”<sup>61</sup>

Zuma’s dog debate is rooted in a resurgence of species trouble at an all-too-fragile border; it is symptomatic not of a sense of political outrage as much as of political anxiety. All the justifying statements and qualifying clarifications seem so much like attempts to fix a perceived breach in the family of humankind, one embodied by the familiar dog (*Canis Familiaris*). This is an attempt to make impermeable that boundary by turning proximity to the dog into the assurance of a racially equal mastery of self-presence: it is not really a question of a prohibition on contact with the canine other as much as it is a denial that there is a canine other. It is this denial of nonhuman alterity, and more worryingly, the idea that such a prospect threatens ‘our humanity’ – whatever that is – that turns touch from an encounter in which the relational ambiguity of whom and how I touch and am touched is in question to one in which touch is buffered by the certainty of limit and secured by prohibition. It is to restage the encounter between the Animal and the Law in the attempt to re-secure the carnophallogocentric boundaries of the subject, but it does so using the very animal that magnifies just how limitrophic those boundaries are.

Zuma’s and Maharaj’s insistence on the negative impact of caring for dogs on the relative humanity of the citizenry does not simply turn on the dog as a racialised repository for conflicting affective and cultural investments, powerful as those may be.<sup>62</sup> It also returns to the ambivalent place of the domesticated dog in human sociality, and thus, to Shell’s argument regarding the psycho-social politics of the family pet, and Rickels’ thesis of the substitutional role of pet grief. To put it in terms of an ethico-politics of touch that opens onto mourning, Zuma’s statements might well be recast as a

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<sup>60</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Some of this conflict has historical roots in the instrumentalisation of dogs to police and suppress racial conflict, but it is also resurrected in the plaintive cries of xenophobic victims who echo an attitude of denigration towards dogs through the phrase “they treat us like dogs.” For the animal in the discourse of the foreigner, see chapter two of this thesis. Morris’ “Crowds and Powerlessness” analyses this dual affective investment in the structure of animalised violence (in Berger and Segarra (eds.) *Demographies*, 166-212).

profound denial of the dog as a body that matters, of the possibility of a nonhuman subject, and thus, as a prohibition against the intimacy of touching and mourning that which is not human.

As Susan McHugh makes clear, the questions of kin and kind that living with dogs provokes are complicated by the way in which the dog can be simultaneously an embodiment of degraded animality and the most ennobling form of trusted companionship.<sup>63</sup> This duality is mobilised in both the metaphoric and metonymic aspects of species interaction, even, or more especially, if, for Marjorie Garber, “dog love is love” – a presumed model distillation of all the ‘best’ qualities that make us human.<sup>64</sup> “Dog love,” she writes, “is local love, passionate, often unmediated, virtually always reciprocated, fulfilling, manageable.”<sup>65</sup> In her analysis, “dog love” is constant, compassionate and devotional, unfettered by the ambiguity of sex and desire that attends to human emotional and psychological development. For this reason, it is, she writes, simpler and easier to love a dog than a spouse.<sup>66</sup> While this notion seems to contradict Zuma’s idea that loving dogs comes at the cost of loving humans, it is an opposition that sets up a strange dialectical continuum. If, for Zuma, dog love compromises a love for humanity, for Garber, dog love is an ideal love – unquestionably stable and faithful – and consequently, shows up inter-human love to be frail, less easily sustainable, subject to the vacillations of desire, and sullied by sex, prejudices and ideology. In a sense, Garber’s version of dog love sets up interspecies affection as a kind of assurance of ontological stability: the dog as (hu)man’s best friend teaches ‘us’ about giving love just as surely as it shows up the impossibility of humanity ever being constant enough. Yet however admiring, symbolic or nuanced this model of dog love is, it is still predicated on a relatively clear species boundary. If Zuma’s understands pet love as a substitute for love of humanity and posits an essentially combative relation between them, Garber argues that dog love is not substitutional but ideal. That is, instead of a threat to humanity, the politics of Garber’s argument suggests that dog love offers a model to which human love and acceptance might aspire.

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<sup>63</sup> Susan McHugh, *Dog*. London: Reaktion, 2004, 173-74. See also Susan McHugh, “Bitch, Bitch, Bitch: Personal Criticism, Feminist Theory, and Dog-writing.” *Hypatia: a journal of feminist philosophy* 27 no. 3 (2012): 616-635.

<sup>64</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Dog Love*. New York: Touchstone, 1997, 14-15.

<sup>65</sup> Garber, *Dog Love*, 14.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 1.

However, this underlying distinction between substitutive and ideal in relation to dog love becomes murkier the longer one dwells in it. This is not only because all love after the dyadic bliss of the maternal bond is formed in substitution, but also because sexual interest in the pet, while taboo, is not foundationally written out of the relation (otherwise, as Freud is wont to say, it would not be taboo). Indeed, the whole institution of pethood, from the term ‘pet’ itself, is authorised, as Shell’s argument unpacks, by the prohibition against ‘petting’ through which the psycho-politics of ‘being human’ is mediated by the taboos of bestiality and cannibalism.<sup>67</sup> While Garber’s book length study does not avoid the question of sex and species taboo, her concept of dog love retains, like Shell and Rickles, a distinctly placeholder function in the human economy of selfhood. As Lynn Turner writes, Garber’s critical essay, “Heavy Petting,” published in the same year as her anecdotal *Dog Love*, suggests that pet love is simply an anthropomorphising extension of transference.<sup>68</sup> Although, as Turner notes, while on the one hand Garber sounds like she is dismissing pet love as unworthy, on the other, she admits that all love is based on transference.<sup>69</sup> That is, as Freud terms it, transference enacts a “new edition of an old desire.”<sup>70</sup> However, as Turner points out, since Garber does not question the framing of “the *anthropos*” that she draws on, her notion of an animal transference is really just one-way traffic.<sup>71</sup> Her version of dog love as an exemplar of love ‘itself’ thus not only retreats from the alterity of each dog but also from the co-contaminating complexity of an interspecies relationality that typifies Haraway’s understanding of companion species. Before I address the implication of this retreat and the substitutional place of the loss of the dog in the work of mourning, I want to say more about the difference that Haraway’s thinking of love as interspecies co-constitution stakes out. Ultimately, the contaminative ethos of Haraway’s thinking feeds into the limitrophic disturbance of contact that Derrida’s idea of an interminable mourning produces.

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<sup>67</sup> Shell, “The Family Pet,” 137.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Lynn Turner, “Animal Transference: a ‘mole-like progression’ in C. J. Cherryh.” *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature* 44 no. 3 (2011): 166-167. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mosaic/v044/44.3.turner.pdf> accessed 15 February 2012.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 167.

Haraway points to the workings of a fleshy and unruly co-constitution when she characterises her ‘becoming with’ her dog, Cayenne Pepper, as a “nasty developmental infection called love,” that is, as a serious, complex and life-altering relational exchange without pre-defined limits or immunity.<sup>72</sup> The concept of non-hierarchical relating that underpins the impurity of Haraway’s framing of companion species preserves rather than diminishes the question of alterity. For what is so unflinching about Haraway’s taboo-skirting description of the “oral intercourse” (conversation and kisses) that she shares with Cayenne is not only that her threshold through which “[t]o be one is always to *become with many*” is the mouth, but her insistence that this becoming is ongoing and unpredictable.<sup>73</sup> In other words, that the formation of these material-semiotic nodes of becoming is not only without prior ontological foundation – hence, as she writes, “the partners do not precede their relating” – but that the interaction, the transmission, indeed, the transference engaged by this “becoming with” is also unpredictable: indeed, even untimely, hauntologically out-of-joint.<sup>74</sup> As Turner argues in “Animal Transference,” reading Freud after Derrida means that, rather than the implicit stasis and unidirectionality of Garber’s concept of dog love, transference must also admit the possibility that partners might relate, transmit and transfer at different rates, that substitutions might fall short, that psychological identifications and investments might be delayed.<sup>75</sup> Rerouted through Haraway’s companion species, it suggests that the concept of “messmates” implicitly recognises that appropriative consumption, the processes by which, to borrow Derrida’s metonym, “one eats and lets oneself be eaten,” shares a border with the processes through which not only identifications, but relations, are formed. Although Haraway writes across the biological, historical, socio-political terrain of naturecultures and Derrida through deconstruction’s critical relation to psychoanalysis, I want to call attention to the corruption of the notion of the self as impermeable or discrete that occurs in both these framings of relational exchange and taking-in-the-other. I do so not to shoehorn one theory into another, but to point out that the difficulty of drawing a clear distinction between literal and figural messmates troubles not only the division between physical and psychological relating, but also the possibility of any direct and pure contact or presence.

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<sup>72</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 16.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 16, 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>75</sup> Turner, “Animal Transference,” 163.

### III. Appropriative consumption/ the work of mourning

In order to interpret *Rou* as an instance of a tactful touching, and thus, as an opening to an im-possible mourning, I return here to the Freudian argument Rickels' puts forward in "Pet Grief" where animal death's transferential function hangs between protection against paternal death and replaceability. I consider too how this unmournability manifests in Kuzniar's Kristevan-informed analysis of mourning in *Melancholia's Dog*. In calling both arguments instances of animal unmournability, however, I do not mean that the loss of the loved animal is not recognised or is ignored. Rather, I mean that the event of the animal's death is *made* inaccessible and displaced, denied, substituted or appropriated. This sense of inaccessibility bears witness, albeit paradoxically, to Derrida's assertion that "there can be no *true mourning*" – an assertion that refers as much to the impossibility of knowing, naming and defining mourning *as such* as it does to thinking of mourning as an ontological capacity or power to mourn.<sup>76</sup> In this section I outline the ways in which both animal substitution and a notion of proper mourning delimit not only the relation of alterity to the devouring work of mourning, but interspecies friendship as well.

Following Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, which I discussed in chapter one, Rickels argues that mourning begins at the primal feast and is anchored by the internalisation of paternal authority through the sacrifice of the totem animal. Essentially domesticating the transferential place of animal death within carnophallogocentrism, he argues that the death of the pet and eating animals protect against the pain of the loss of the father by offering a controlled exposure to mortality.<sup>77</sup> If, for Rickels, the death of the pet is always the ghostly replay of the loss of the father, it vaccinates against a melancholic response (what Freud describes as "pathological mourning") to that loss by substituting for it and being swallowed by it.<sup>78</sup> Hence he writes, the animal, because it signifies the brevity of life together, remains the vehicle for "proper mourning" but not its substance – eminently transferable, the pet is replaceable but its loss is remains as part of "our

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<sup>76</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Mnemosyne." Trans. Cecile Lindsay, in Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 29.

<sup>77</sup> Rickels, "Pet Grief," 71.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. See also Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, edited by Adam Phillips. London: Penguin, 2006, 310-326.

ongoing relations with the unmournable dead” against which “proper mourning,” in turn, (carnophallogocentrically) inoculates.<sup>79</sup>

The contrast Rickels proposes between “proper mourning” and the assimilable, but unmournable, body of the dead object draws on Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.” Dividing *Trauerarbeit* (the work of mourning) into two distinct processes, Freud’s text concerns both the outward manifestation of grief and its psychological processes of interiorisation. Although careful to distinguish between the two, Freud repeatedly suggests that mourning and melancholia are related in that both seek to take in or internalise the loss, and (as in the primal feast) to cannibalise the dead other. Both modes share too feelings of dejection, despair and attachment to the lost object. However, his concept of mourning proposes that this attachment to the lost object can be worked through by way of symbolic identification and gradually overcome, so that the ego is left intact and free to seek new and compensatory object attachments. In “pathological mourning” or melancholia, on the other hand, the ego knows “whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.”<sup>80</sup> Unable to recognise the loss, the ego holds onto the lost object in the psyche and identifies with its abandonment. Since this identification marks a return to the narcissistic ambivalence of the oral phase of libidinal development, the ego wants to keep hold of the lost object by “devouring it.”<sup>81</sup>

However, the orality and the sacrificial animal in Rickels gains its currency also through Abraham and Torok’s work on mourning, and its reputed failure in melancholia, especially given their emphasis on processing the dead through the mouth. Drawing on Freud as well as on Sándor Ferenczi, Abraham and Torok’s “Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation” proposes that internalisation of the lost object proceeds in two ways.<sup>82</sup> In mourning, the lost object is taken in metaphorically through introjection. It is metonymically consumed and circulated through “a communion of

<sup>79</sup> Rickels, “Pet Grief,” 72. Turner describes Rickels as “rhetorically maximising his own ambivalence regarding pet death” in “Animal Melancholia,” forthcoming.

<sup>80</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 313.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 316. In his later work in the *Ego and the Id*, the Freud of the death drive incorporates this act of primary identification and loss into the structure of the subject. Tammy Clewell, “Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud’s Psychoanalysis of Loss.” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 52, no. 1 (2004): 43-67.

<https://www.apsa.org/portals/1/docs/japa/521/clewell.pdf> accessed 17 October 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok. “Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation,” (1972) in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis Volume 1*. Edited and translated by Nicholas T. Rand. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 125-138.

empty mouths” by way of the substitutional economy of language.<sup>83</sup> In melancholia, however, this metaphorisation is rejected, and the lost object cannot be linguistically assimilated. Rather, they argue, the lost object is literally incorporated into the psyche. Unable to be digested in language, the dead object is deposited ‘alive’ in a secret “crypt” in the psyche, or, in Derrida’s evocative paraphrase, the other is “vomit[ed]... inside” the self.<sup>84</sup> In incorporation, Abraham and Torok assert, the death of the other is both kept at bay and denied.<sup>85</sup> The “fantasy of incorporation” enacts the reversal of the “oral vacancy” that results from the substitution of word for breast.<sup>86</sup> The mouth that would have metaphorically been filled with words through which the loss of the love object could be shared, seeks instead to hold onto the object in a demetaphorised refusal to reclaim that part of ourselves that is lost in loss.<sup>87</sup>

Like Abraham and Torok, Rickels’ division between edible and inedible animals holds mourning apart from melancholic eating. His thesis of an animal vaccine against a melancholic reaction to the loss of the father, lays bare the cost of its substitution of one “mouth-work for another.”<sup>88</sup> If the inedible animal’s death is unacknowledged and swallowed by eating the edible, its death does not signify and what he calls the “responsibility to the other specific to mourning” is voided.<sup>89</sup> Yet, in an ambivalent closing sentence that re-entrenches animal death as unmournable, he suggests that it is only by literally eating animals we can sever the substitutional operation of the animal in mourning and “face the animal as other.”<sup>90</sup> Yet, it seems that precisely because of his argument’s division between literal eating and metaphorical displacement, this “facing” the animal other “as other” is endlessly delayed – the death of animal is, after all, merely the “medium” or the meat, never a singular experience of a unique loss.<sup>91</sup>

While for Rickels, the silence of the animal’s death signals the empty place of their substitutional function, and thus, unmournability, for Kuzniar, the beloved animal’s silence both conditions the love we have for it, and besieges its death. We separate

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>84</sup> Derrida, “Fors,” xxxviii.

<sup>85</sup> Abraham and Torok. “Mourning *or* Melancholia,” 128-129.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 128.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>89</sup> Rickels, “Pet Grief,” 65.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 71.

from the animal, she argues, but yearn for closeness to it while also, being shameful of this yearning.<sup>92</sup> Drawing on Freud and Abraham and Torok, as well as Kristeva's *Black Sun*, Kuzniar's chapter on "Mourning" in *Melancholia's Dog* focuses on representation as either countering an inability to separate from the lost object, and thus, an inability to mourn, or rehearsing it.<sup>93</sup> The pet's muteness, she argues, renders the animal love object unquestionably unavailable. As an "absent object," she writes, the pet is a surrogate that compensates for the loss of archaic maternal plenitude: transposed from a living being to an idealised identification, the dog thus functions as a "shield against forsakenness."<sup>94</sup> The dog as substitute for maternal love, she continues, generates excessive attachment, hence the intensity of the pain of its loss.

For Kuzniar, representing this intensity (and thus, resisting the shattering silence of melancholia) produces "metonymic and fetishistic signs."<sup>95</sup> The former entails the gradual acceptance of separation, while in the latter, loss and absence are disavowed and the fetishistic sign instils "recovery" of the lost object through replaying the mechanism of the subject's entry into language.<sup>96</sup> However, Kuzniar argues, rather than admit the symbolic replacement of the sign for the lost love object, the fetishistic sign negates the loss and resurrects the object, mimetically, in "representation," restoring the intensity of presence to the lost object.<sup>97</sup> Fetishistic or melancholic representation, she asserts, "reconjures the dog;" metonymic representation, on the other hand, "recognises its absence" and redirects its investment of psychic energy from the lost object to the recovery of self.<sup>98</sup> This form of representation, she argues, interrupts the mimetic resurrection of a "real-life model" to assert the inadequacy of its difference: it is this acceptance of an inferior substitution that propels acceptance of loss.<sup>99</sup>

In Kuzniar's Kristevan-inspired curative model, this introjection sublimates the loss so that, by assimilating the death of the animal into a creative response to it, it affects detachment from the object and a restoration of self that is in essence, auto-affective.

<sup>92</sup> Alice A. Kuzniar, *Melancholia's Dog*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 12.

<sup>93</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

<sup>94</sup> Kuzniar, *Melancholia's Dog*, 38.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. See also chapter one of this thesis for Kristeva's theory of primary repression.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 143.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 143. Emphasis in original.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 142-144.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 144.

This effects a conclusion to mourning and militates against the ‘social shame’ of sentimental attachment to an animal.<sup>100</sup> But while Kristeva’s concept of an aesthetic response to death and grief carries with it both the ambiguity of abjection and symbolic language’s inability to fully compensate for maternal loss, Kuzniar’s concept of representation is much more concerned to delineate clear limits between absence and presence. However, since, for Kristeva, the “subject-in-process/on trial” is unfinished, its relations of mourning and loss are as well. Formed and maintained in the torment of an animal/maternal return in which affect disturbs the division between speech and silence, mourning for Kristeva is not only ongoing, but there from the start.<sup>101</sup> This suggests too that representation is not the burial ground for this deathly return but the unresolved territory of its negotiation. In contrast, Kuzniar maintains that “to represent something is to bury it.”<sup>102</sup> Although, she writes, such representation functions as a memorial to the dead other, it also “keeps the dead dead,” outside of life, and thus, defends the living from their haunting return.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, Kuzniar proposes, not only does this recovery of the self through the sublimation of animal grief into art lessen the social embarrassment of grief’s intense connection to an animal, but it also therapeutically avenges “the passivity one experiences in the face of death.”<sup>104</sup> However, while it claims to be bound to the intimacy we share with a beloved animal, Kuzniar’s model of mourning-through-representation works to displace and externalise both the proximity and intensity of the connection to the animal love object, as well as its alterity. Since, in her argument, the attachment to the pet is a repetition of a prior and originary maternal love object, if the animal ceases to be, the animal connection ceases to matter. Strangely dematerialised, the dog in her argument appears to be merely a cipher for substitutional love, whether caught within representation as a commemoration of its once ‘fully present’ life or in the displacement of its death.

In addition to denying the interspecies friendship, Kuzniar’s use of the dog as cipher posits both an end to mourning and a finality to representation. In this, it mirrors the fullness or over determination of the sign that Derrida calls attention to in his criticism

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>101</sup> Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 43.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 144-145.

of Abraham and Torok's "linguisticistic" reading.<sup>105</sup> As Turner points out, Derrida highlights the limitation of Abraham and Torok's emphasis on the mouth that fills-with-words as the privileged oral site through which introjection processes the emptiness of death.<sup>106</sup> He does so by asserting that any substitution is, as Abraham and Torok themselves note, a "progression of *partial* substitutions."<sup>107</sup> That is, Derrida reminds us that substitution is a "figure of presence" that "'speaks' through supplementarity."<sup>108</sup> While the oral passage from food to language (from the breast to word) that Abraham and Torok describe presupposes that presence is replaced by recognition of absence, the shared threshold at the mouth (what Sara Guyer describes as the "formal identity of incorporation and introjection") means that, as Derrida writes, the ingestion that facilitates the swallowing of identifications confounds the separation between literal and figurative eating, and thus, the strict separation between eating the living and the dead, and between edible and inedible bodies.<sup>109</sup> Recasting eating as a "metonymy of introjection," Derrida also marks mourning within it as a negotiation, a "giving and swallowing" in which, as Guyer phrases it, mourning sets out the "loss of self and other in eating and eating well" (EW 282).<sup>110</sup> The metonymy of "eating well" demands, in other words, that mourning recognises that in eating the self and the other, there is always 'more than one' (*plus d'un*). Mourning, therefore, as a "metonymy of introjection" opens every relation, even and especially, the relation of self as other, but it does so in recognition of the radical interruption that 'taking in' the other as *other* enacts: as Derrida writes in *On Touching*, "a metonymy is in mourning, at least, for a proper sense or proper name."<sup>111</sup>

Thus, if one eats to appropriate the other – to digest the other 'totally' and only to nourish the self (in short, to resolve a loss and be 'done with' mourning, or, as Kuzniar claims, to keep the dead out of life) – then one violates not only the singular ethics of 'mourning well,' but also the repeatability of the spectral trace that initiates "survival"

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<sup>105</sup> Derrida, "Fors," xxxvii.

<sup>106</sup> Turner, "Animal Melancholia," forthcoming.

<sup>107</sup> Derrida, "Fors," xxxvii, the emphasis is Derrida's.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Sara Guyer, "Albeit Eating: Towards an Ethics of Cannibalism." *Angelaki* 2, no.1 (January 1997): 68. DOI.101080/09697259708571916 accessed 9 July 2009. Turner, "Animal Melancholia," forthcoming.

<sup>110</sup> Guyer, "Albeit eating," 75.

<sup>111</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 17.

or “living-on.”<sup>112</sup> For, as Derrida points out and I followed in chapter two, there can be no ‘I am’ without the *es spukt* (“it ghosts”) that haunts the subject as an originary finitude.<sup>113</sup> This tension between fidelity to the singular and the hauntological repetition of the trace (that interrupts presence, and thus, inscribes and circulates absence before death), shapes not only what Derrida calls an “impossible mourning” but also, what he terms the “law of friendship.”<sup>114</sup> For it is the substitutability of the name as a technical prosthesis – as the trace which supplements presence – that anticipates the plurality of absences which precede the finality of death. While, for Rickels, it is human survival that conditions animal friendship, for Derrida, the “living on” of the trace, and of the mourning that it makes possible, is not reducible to ontology, nor is it restricted to the ‘reality’ of death, nor indeed, to appropriating that death to serve as the mouth piece for a carnophallogocentric rule. It is not reducible because the trace is not available to presence; it neither *represents* nor represents. And it is this irreducibility that, paradoxically, makes it possible not only to touch and mourn the other as other, but also to touch the other that is the self.

#### IV. Mourning touch

In adding touch to the metonymy of introjection, I want to return to *Rou* and to concept of a tactful or orificial touching – one that meets an im-possible mourning, one both originary and interminable or absolute. For Derrida, in *On Touching*, this limitrophy takes place through an heterogeneous relation of “touching-touched” that takes hold at the porous edges of identification, whether this touching is by hand, eye, mouth or technical prosthesis (pencil, charcoal and Conte crayon).<sup>115</sup> I want to stage this contaminative touching and its ethical injunction to *mourn-well* by way of *touching-well* and do so through the strange formulation that Derrida, after Nancy, calls “self-touching-you” [*se toucher toi*] and, which J. Hillis Miller translates as “touching oneself touching the other.”<sup>116</sup> It is a phrase that is central to Derrida’s notion of an intangible

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<sup>112</sup> Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, “To Reckon with The Dead: Jacques Derrida’s Politics of Mourning,” in *The Work of Mourning*, 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> See this thesis, chapter two, 133.

<sup>114</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*. Trans. George Collins. New York: Verso, 1997.

Quotation taken from Brault and Naas, “To Reckon with The Dead,” 1. Original page reference not cited.

<sup>115</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 191.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* 289; Hillis Miller, *For Derrida*, 308.

or untouchable touching: one that cannot touch *touch* (for it is not available to presence) but only touches on a limit that grows.<sup>117</sup>

This limitrophic notion of touch, the aporetic im-possibility of which Derrida also glosses as “touch, if there is any,” is set up in contra-distinction to what he diagnoses as a Western philosophical discourse in which self-touching or auto-affection secures its appropriative authority through the closure of auto-telic and auto-deictic autonomy.<sup>118</sup> In a collapse of cognition and sensibility that Derrida calls “haptocentrism,” this ‘*autos*’ “self-touches” in the material immediacy of presence, and as such, is made co-extensive with the metaphysical questions of human existence and essence.<sup>119</sup> In other words, touch is posited as actual, tangible and knowable, not only to sensible flesh but also to human consciousness and intention. In the humanist philosophical trajectory that Derrida describes, one that is “profound” in the sense of its refusal to “sacrifice *sacrifice*” at the altar of human exceptionalism, this “extensive” concept of touch (to borrow Claire Colebrook’s term) conjures a paradoxical framing in which touch is both the sense shared by all animate life – a common sense – and a uniquely human *ability* (EW 279).<sup>120</sup> Thus, in this tradition, as Derrida writes, it is not simply that all the senses function by way of contact with their stimuli and transmit this contact through the touching of organs of sight, sound, taste, hearing and bodily surface, but that “the hand,” as he writes, “the hand *as such*,” marks out the virile territory of an exclusively human ‘I can.’<sup>121</sup> In Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, for instance, touch’s privileged place as the foundation of the senses becomes too the foundation of “what nature puts within reach of the human hand, and only the human hand.”<sup>122</sup> As Derrida points out, for Kant as for Heidegger, the gift of the hand – *The Hand*, singular, or rather, “the hand of *man*” – manifests a carnophallogocentric appetite for totalising appropriation.<sup>123</sup> Derrida puns the speciesist foundation of this non-relational appropriative consumption (‘the hand,’ *singular*) in the neologism “humanualism.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 6.

<sup>118</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 29-30.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 40.

<sup>120</sup> Claire Colebrook, “Derrida, Deleuze and Haptic Aesthetics,” *Derrida Today* 2 no.1 (2009): 26. DOI:10.3366/E1754850009000360 accessed 22 May 2010. Colebrook contrasts an “extensive” concept of grasping with Derrida’s and Deleuze’s questioning or “intensive” approach.

<sup>121</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 40.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 39. See also Jacques Derrida, “*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger’s Hand,” 161-196.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

“Humanual” is the handy extension of the sacrifice of animality that Rickels affirms in displacing the animal from the possibility of mourning. It is this privation, too, that gives Kuzniar’s argument its impetus to be ‘done with’ mourning, to keep the “dead dead,” digested, assimilated and away from the living.<sup>125</sup>

In the relational complication that occurs in the ambiguity of “self-touching-you,” however, Derrida leaves open, in the aporetic structure of a non-ethical opening to the ethical, how we metabolise the dead. His phrasing of “touch, if there is any,” does not prescribe the kind of relation at stake, merely that this relation of otherness-in-touch exceeds knowledge and the determinable calculation of “introjection *versus* incorporation” and theorisations of the prescribed path of normal or prescriptive mourning.<sup>126</sup> For the ambiguity that inheres at the locus of this self-contact-by-interruption is what “spectralizes touch” and carries an impossible mourning at its heart.<sup>127</sup>

One of the reasons why I find the *Rou* drawings so seductive to look at and productive to think with, is the way in which their mark both materialises and dematerialises Bella’s contours and her corporeal substance. In so doing, it metonymises the process of touching as a ‘taking in’ that cannot grasp presence – that does not make contact, in other words, in a “tactilist” verification of the authority to take hold and delimit the figurative touch from the literal.<sup>128</sup> Gunter’s technique traverses a passage between a mimetic corporeality and shifting ground. It at once obscures and unfolds, so that with each fleshy fold, each evocation of musculature and sinew, each palpable claw and hint of whisker, there is also the sense of hallucinatory disappearance and a spectrality that resides within to disrupt any claim to representational essence. The effect of this tension seems to produce a visual and experiential field – a terrain of attentive and tactful touching – that both viewer and drawing co-constitute.

The ghostliness of *Rou I* and *Rou II* is accentuated by the image field’s resemblance to a darkened crypt, and this nocturnal opacity compounds the intimacy of the encounter but

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<sup>125</sup> Kuzniar, *Melancholia’s Dog*, 144.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 288.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 274.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

also renders indeterminate the experience of touching the other, especially in the “twilight space” of mourning (*rou*).<sup>129</sup> What is shown in *Rou*, is neither the presence of Bella nor her absence, but the textural recognition of the frailty of finitude and the co-constitutive vulnerability that we share as *animot*. *Rou I* and *Rou II* might seem like simple drawings, but they are records of a desire to hold Bella close, to keep her in the heart, to keep her from the erasure of death, for just a while longer.<sup>130</sup> This haunting tenderness touches as a mode of taking in that does return to the power or capacity to touch or mourn by appropriation.

An ethics of mourning begins there, Derrida suggests, in this internalisation of the knowledge of finitude, in the responsibility that exceeds this knowledge: in the “one must”/ *il faut* that mourns through carrying the memory of an other inside the self.<sup>131</sup> But in a paradoxical reading of Abraham and Torok’s thesis of internalisation, Derrida proposes that to introject the other as a part of the self in what they consider successful mourning, is to absorb the other within the self in a narcissistic return that loves the other but as an other that is now like me, in me as a part of me.<sup>132</sup> It is to absorb the other’s alterity – to ‘eat’ badly – and to nourish only the self. Conversely, Derrida argues, the supposed failure of Abraham and Torok’s “pathological” mode of incorporation manages to retain the alterity of the other by holding them within the self – depositing them and nurturing them as a foreign body.<sup>133</sup>

In an echo of the plurality of *plus d’un*, such an interiorisation of the *other as other* recognises that to be ‘one’ necessarily entails becoming ‘more than one’: to borrow Derrida’s words, “we are never *ourselves*.”<sup>134</sup> This realisation of an auto-hetero-affection comes not through the sacrificial death of the other. It is opened, instead, in the very possibility of originary mourning that precedes death and complicates incarnation: an opening, for example, like the mouth, which, in spacing itself out, eats the other, whether it takes in the breast, the word, or the corpse.<sup>135</sup> In the “metonymy of introjection” that is the experience of a non-totalisable subject, touching the other within

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<sup>129</sup> Jacques Derrida, “By Force of Mourning,” in *The Work of Mourning*, 142-164.

<sup>130</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 289.

<sup>131</sup> Derrida, “Mnemosyne,” 33.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 29; Derrida, *On Touching*, 29.

the self translates an 'I am' into "I am haunted."<sup>136</sup> This mode of eating does not only take in, it also expels, or, as Kristeva puts it, abjects: it has no interiority without an indigestible, untouchable difference.

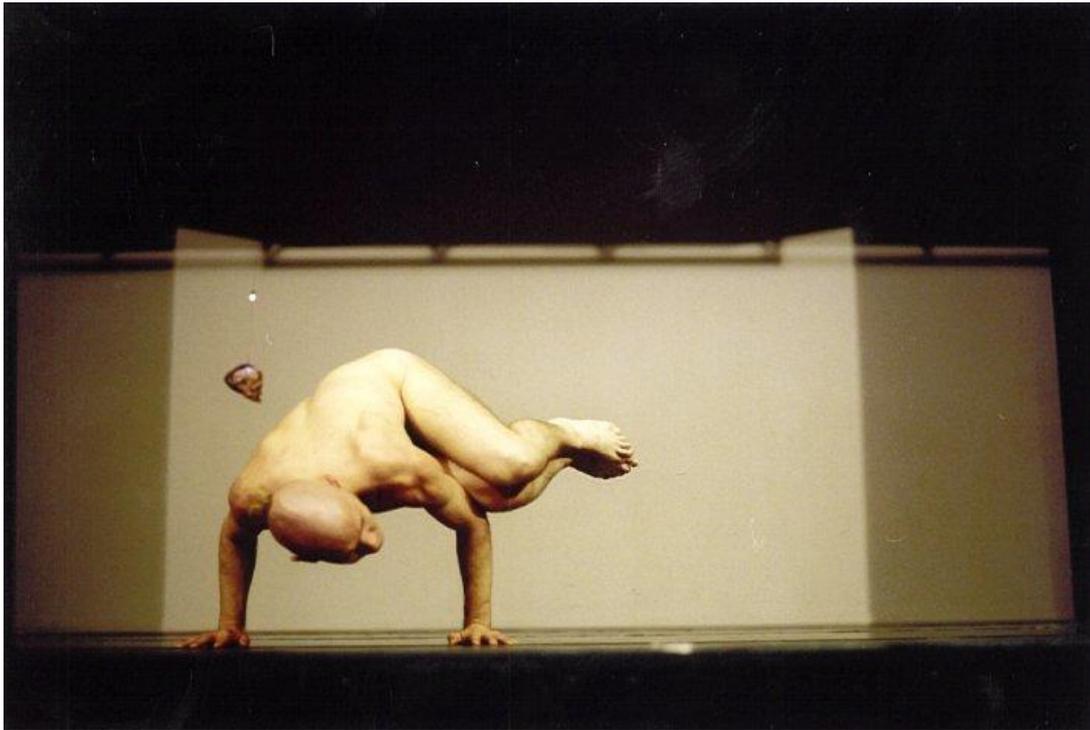
This is the passage that a relation of touch as a contaminative form of "self-touching-you" initiates: relation-in-touch which is always already heterogeneous at its origin. This touch as "significant otherness" suggests that in touching mourning, relationality begins with the non-identity to the self of that which is most 'mine': if "my heart is first of all the heart of the other," if it bears witness to an originary loss and also to the interminable and inconsolable loss of this singular mortal friend, then, "it is a heart in me greater than my heart."<sup>137</sup> Being 'touched well' by this mourning is thus an experience of being wounded, made inappropriate/d: it is to tremble before the asymmetry of the ethical demand "one must/*il faut*"... "*touché*."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 34. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 166.

<sup>137</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 290.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 371.



**Figure 17** Steven Cohen, *Dance With Nothing But Heart* 2001. © Steven Cohen and David Krut Publishing 2013. Photographed by John Hodgkiss.



**Figure 18** Steven Cohen, *Dance With Nothing But Heart* 2001© Steven Cohen and David Krut Publishing 2013. Photographed by John Hodgkiss.



**Figure 19** Steven Cohen, *Dance With Nothing But Heart* 2001. © Steven Cohen and David Krut Publishing 2013. Photographed by John Hodgkiss.

## Conclusion

### An Ethics of Mourning

...I am speaking here of very ‘concrete’ and very ‘current’ problems: the ethics and politics of the living. We know less than ever where to cut – either at birth or at death. And this also means that we never know, and never have known, how to *cut up* a subject.<sup>1</sup>  
Derrida

#### I. Introduction

...nourishing indigestion, a necessary physiological state for eating well together.<sup>2</sup>  
Haraway

In both the theoretical archive and visual analyses of this thesis, I have plotted a critical questioning of the sacrifice of animality and of ‘the animal’ in works that bear witness to the ruptures of post-apartheid democracy and the possibilities for reimagining the subject that these make available. As I have shown in relation to the animalised intersection of race, sex, gender and species in works by Mntambo, Alexander and Gunter, these moments unfold defensively as a crisis of definition in which the ‘who’ of the humanist subject is shown up to be inadequate to the monstrous promise of the future-to-come. For Mbembe, this interruption, as he writes in *On the Postcolony*, is framed by the spacing and temporality of “not yet.”<sup>3</sup> In short, Mbembe’s “not yet” is both ‘no longer’ and ‘to come,’ for it is, as I noted in chapter one, both death-infected and future-oriented. Or, put differently, the “not yet” cites a temporality and spacing in which an ethico-politics of possibility is, as Mbembe expresses it, simultaneously in “process of ‘being formed’ and of ‘being dissolved.’”<sup>4</sup> Remaindered and unavailable to presence, it bears uncanny resemblance both to the operation of abjection and the hauntological workings of the trace. Mbembe’s point in this politics of possibility is to mark self-constitution not only as a political and philosophical problematic of the life of the living but as “an ethics of mutuality.”<sup>5</sup> He does so not only in relation to an inherited Western philosophy of the humanist subject, but also in response to the

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida, “Eating Well,” 285.

<sup>2</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 300.

<sup>3</sup> Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 1. Also Mbembe in Höller, “Africa in motion,”

[http://www.springerlin.at/dyn/heft\\_text.php?textid=1195&lang=en#fussnoten](http://www.springerlin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1195&lang=en#fussnoten) accessed 21 April 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 1.

historical violence wrought by its “white mythology,” and continued appropriation in the formation of the humanist subject of the postcolony.<sup>6</sup> While his demand is for nothing less than a refoundation and reinvention of ‘the human’ from an African perspective – and thus, takes seriously the black body’s “anthropological embeddedness” in a “history of waste” – his approach rejects any notion of an authentic ontology of African subjectivity, and thus any concept of that which is proper to ‘the Human.’<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, given his anthropocentric focus, he does not engage with the deconstructive and animalogical implications that such an opening to rethink the subject as an ethico-politics suggests. In fact, he names alterity only as a history of the use of difference in an oppositional sense, and thus, as a justification for discrimination. The drive to re-write the subject as a subject of the postcolony, he argues, requires a philosophically informed “mode of self-writing” that “stylize[s]” the self “through a series of practices” that are neither self-identical nor stable.<sup>8</sup> Mobile, fluid and in process, Mbembe’s “self-writing” desires to wrest a non-essentialist concept of subjectivity (one, he writes, that responds to the “thickness” of a fractured temporality) from the “doomed” Western legacy of the ‘properly human.’<sup>9</sup> It is the latter’s devouring appetite or lustful “*commandement*” that drives the necropolitical and carnophallogocentric formations of sovereignty and the “meta-text of the animal” inherited from the West. It is this Mbembe writes against.<sup>10</sup>

However, as I have maintained throughout this thesis, such a mode of re-writing can only begin by troubling that speciesist script and its sacrifice of animality. It does so, in Derrida’s terms, through making limitrophic its singular opposition between what calls itself ‘Human’ and that which it designates as ‘Animal.’<sup>11</sup> As my use of Haraway’s, Derrida’s and Kristeva’s work demonstrates, species not only functions as the abjected intersectional ground on which the normative human subject (heterosexual, masculine, virile, carnivorous, and white) is totemically erected (the subject of the Law and the Name of the Father), it is also its alibi, its material (and maternal) object and its killable other. It is for this reason, Haraway writes, “[s]pecies reeks of race and sex,” and, in the

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<sup>6</sup> On the postcolonial aspect and Derridian foundation of the term, see Young, *White Mythologies*, 33-38.

<sup>7</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” 6; Mbembe, “African Modes of Self Writing,” 240-245.

<sup>8</sup> Mbembe, “African Modes of Self Writing,” 240.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 272-273.

<sup>10</sup> Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 29.

violence of animalisation, of death.<sup>12</sup> For, as Derrida's careful phrasing of the sacrificial structure of carnophallogocentrism makes clear, the constitution of the human subject "is a matter of *discerning* a place left open ... for a noncriminal putting to death"(EW 278).<sup>13</sup> This phrasing suggests, in other words, not only that the "opening" of this "place" is a matter of decision, but also that there is no pure exteriority – no place outside of this discourse – from which to make this decision. The stakes of "this ordeal of undecidability" through which the decision must pass are more acute and urgent given that Derrida asserts that the ethics at issue in the "ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse" are unchanged by real or symbolic death (EW 278).<sup>14</sup> This is not to deny the difference between literal and figural death, but to underscore that the decision, "if there is any," as Derrida would say, must not be made to the rule of a pre-existing and prescriptive moral programme.<sup>15</sup>

The only possibility of re-writing the self as a subject within and against a structure of carnivorous sacrifice, opens, in other words, by countersigning its idea of sovereign and auto-affective auto-biography (its gathering and ordering of the self to the self, commanded by a mastery of the centre) in and through difference. That is, by thinking of the autos as heterogeneous at the origin. In chapter two, this figure of difference is marked by the trace of a foreign body, for the *animot* that "I am/ following" is always already interrupted by its own hauntological foundation.<sup>16</sup> This is an auto-hetero-affectation in which, in the ambivalent logic of *plus d'un*, one *is* in the opening to 'more than *one*,' whether that heterogeneity is inscribed as spectral, abject or as ex-appropriation. In its foreignness, it is too close and unassimilable, in Kristeva's terms, a subject-in-process/on trial, and thus, unavailable to the ontological rooting of presence. Contra Mbembe, then, it is alterity that nurtures the possibility of auto-bio-graphy. And it is alterity, too, that underpins both Derrida's "metonymy of eating well" and Haraway's relations of "significant otherness." As I argue in relation to the uncanny at work in Alexander's *animot* (read through both deconstruction and psychoanalysis), mutuality requires the foundational violence of contamination, impurity and haunting by

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<sup>12</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 17-18. Her notion of the regulatory terms of "making killable" anchors and explores this violence in a relation of responsibility that defies easy answers or a moral high ground, because it does not shy away from fact that literal eating involves killing (295).

<sup>13</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, "Force of Law," 24.

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 288.

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 3.

the other that is also the self. That is to say that Alexander's strangely affecting and affectingly strange works promise an ethics of mutuality that is dependent not on naming of life as the essence or substance of being, but rather, on the trace of the living as a relational opening to corruption, a violent and non-ethical opening to ethics, and foundational finitude.<sup>17</sup> In following this opening to corruption through the limitrophic complications of self and other, human and nonhuman, edible and inedible bodies, real and symbolic death, literal and figurative ingestion, incorporation and introjection, I have aimed both to provoke a notion of an inappropriate/d subject, and, to narrate the "learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat" that underwrites the metonymic function of the injunction "one must eat well" (*il faut bien manger*).

In chapter three I introduced a concept of an ethics of mourning through an analysis of Gunter's *Rou* drawings. I argued for an orificial touching that has mourning at its heart ("greater than my heart in my heart").<sup>18</sup> In order to do so, I drew on Derrida's *On Touching*, as well as his rereading of Abraham and Torok's "Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation."<sup>19</sup> I argued for a relation in which mourning exceeds its Freudian model (and the animal displacements it puts in place) and finds an ethics in which difference is originary and unassimilable. Central to this movement is Derrida's framing of eating as a "metonymy of introjection" that takes place at the porous thresholds between self and other, and in the devouring movement in which identification is scarred by loss (EW 282). As Turner succinctly puts it, "[p]sychic life is in mourning from the start."<sup>20</sup> That is, Derrida draws the literal ingestion of eating into the figurative processes of 'taking in' through which both ego-identification and mourning are formed (in Freud, at the moment of the primal feast; in Kristeva, through the necessity of maternal sacrifice). If eating, as Guyer writes, "is really a symbolic act of mourning," then mourning, as I argued through Gunter's drawings, is not only impossible, originary and "ahuman," but its ethics are aporetic, excessive and indigestible.<sup>21</sup> For Derrida's metonymy of eating does not privilege the substitution of language over loss and thus does not secure the legal and prohibitive division between

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<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Majesties" in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (eds.) New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 110.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 290.

<sup>19</sup> Abraham and Torok. "Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation," 125-138. See Guyer, "Albeit Eating," 65.

<sup>20</sup> Turner, "Animal Melancholia," forthcoming.

<sup>21</sup> Guyer, "Albeit Eating," 73.

cannibalistic and carnivorous eating, between criminal and noncriminal death, nor indeed, between human and nonhuman, living and nonliving. Since “one must eat,” and since we can neither eat alone nor can we know in advance how much or which other we take in when we eat, the ethical imperative to “eat well,” both in the sense of the “one must” (*il faut*) and of “good eating/ eating the good” (*bien manger*), is always at stake (EW 282-283).

I want to stay in the undecidable aporia that “eating well” stakes out, and return to Steven Cohen’s collaboration with Elu and an ox’s heart, *Dance With Nothing But Heart* (Figs. 1-2, 17-19, 2001). I introduced this work (through its photographic remainders) in this thesis’ introduction. There I used it to set the scene for Derrida’s theoretical explication of a “profound humanism” that cannot “*sacrifice sacrifice*” and thus maintains an absolute ontological divide between the human and nonhuman (EW 279). His account of ‘the animal’ captures the violence of this absolute opposition through which the living is reduced to a killable abstraction: an object of meat, a body whose flesh is unlike my own. Here, though, borrowing Abraham and Torok’s phrase, I want to read *Dance With Nothing But Heart* in terms of the “mouth-work” it proposes – one that risks the metonymic slippage between literal and figurative eating.<sup>22</sup> For reasons that will become clear through my description of the performance, I read its abjection, gesture and movement as a “mouth work” of ex-appropriation, at once a staging of the hauntological interruption of the trace and of an im-possible mourning. In so doing, I want to flesh out a concept of self-writing that responds to an alterity that cannot be appropriated – neither to a regulative ideal of the good nor to a species hierarchy – precisely because it remains, as Derrida writes, “non-subjectivable in the experience of mourning” (EW 271).

## II. “Show them your lack and your love”<sup>23</sup>

As I indicated in the thesis introduction, *Dance With Nothing But Heart* took place in Johannesburg as part of the 2001 Dance Umbrella season. With Cohen’s programme

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<sup>22</sup> Abraham and Torok, “Mourning or Melancholia,” 128, in Guyer, “Albeit Eating,” 68.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Cohen, “Dance with Nothing but Heart,” *Q-Online*, Johannesburg, 8 March 2001. <http://web.archive.org/web/20061012004238/http://www.q.co.za/2001/2001/03/08-dance.html> accessed 14 September 2014.

notes prefaced by a warning for its “full frontal poverty,” it is a performance undertaken, as he writes, “without funding or finance, without costume or music, without video, and without choreography.”<sup>24</sup> Based on Cohen’s idea that his partner, lover and collaborator, Elu, conceive of a piece to “show them your lack and your love,” *Dance With Nothing But Heart* was performed by Elu twice, over two nights. It begins in darkness with an extract from an abusive phone call to Cohen and Elu by the Dance Umbrella’s then artistic director, apparently made in response to seeing the work in rehearsal.<sup>25</sup> Transitioning into silence and full house lights after a short but solemn Buddhist chant, Elu begins to dance, naked, accompanied by nothing but the ox’s heart he cradles, carries, caresses, kisses, and then tears open to expose its darkened, meaty flesh and its muscled interior (Figs. 1-2). His improvised choreography, drawn from a blend of yoga, contemporary dance and classical ballet, also sees him leave the stage to move up the theatre aisles and in and amongst a mostly uncomfortable, bewildered, sometimes sniggering, and easily offended audience (Fig. 18).<sup>26</sup> Returning to the stage, he hangs the heart on a tiny hook that is suspended by a wire and illuminated by a tiny light, and, after what Cohen describes as a mixture of Martha Graham movements, yoga, and bare-toe ballet-pointe, he falls to the floor, takes his foot in hand and begins to suck it, at first gently and then with increased motion until, Cohen writes, “he is fucking himself in the face with his foot”<sup>27</sup> (Figs. 17, 19).

*Dance With Nothing But Heart* is a dense and loaded work but I want to spend some time with its inappropriate/d gesture of carrying, its bareness and bearing, the “lack and ...love” that resides in the literal and figural resonance of its ‘heart’ and its object imprinting of eating as mourning of the self and/as other. In other words, I want to interpret the “*With*” of its title as linking to “the finitude that we share with animals” which Derrida calls “the anguish of vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish,” and do so as it opens the ordeal of an ethics without calculability.<sup>28</sup> It is worth recalling that the inappropriate/d cites a subject position unsanctioned by the sovereign assurance

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. As Cohen notes, members of the audience got up to leave during the initial performance. The second performance was heralded by the organiser’s three-fold warnings of its “offensive content.” My description is also based on my recollection of the event.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 28. See also chapter one’s discussion of non-power in relation to Mntambo’s *Beginning of the Empire*.

of the killable. Such a position recognises that to live is to ‘become with’ in a relation with no outside from which to pronounce good conscience or abstain from violence. It is to live in the event of the decision, which is also, to witness the mortal life of the other that Derrida calls “survival,” and Lawler, “infinite corruptibility.”<sup>29</sup> It is in this unflinching ethical co-implication, and not simply in its graphic nakedness, that *Dance With Nothing But Heart*’s supposed ‘controversy’ and ‘offense’ lies. But it is also there that its ethico-political commitment to an auto-hetero-affective writing of the subject is to be found (EW 268).

### III. Dancing with Death

Elu’s choreography is not only “without” but also, as Cohen writes, “‘out’ ... in every sense:” exposed, unexpected, discordant, obscene (off-kilter, perverse and off-stage) “queer, unfashionable...strangely void.”<sup>30</sup> It is oddly ‘off’ and strange, foreign. Yet it is also familiar, uncomfortably so: Elu mimes the posturing of virile sovereignty through which carnophallogocentrism is anchored, but his awkward re-iteration also disturbs its self-sustaining, sacrifice-accepting authority and any totemic allusions the performance’s quasi-ritualistic mood presupposes. The ox heart is strangely bloodless. It is also malodorous, having been bought for the rehearsal and then binned, only to be recycled after another heart, procured in the days before the performance and stored in their home’s freezer, would not defrost in time.<sup>31</sup> As Cohen writes, Elu, ever the “honest artist and vegetarian” would not dance with a frozen heart.<sup>32</sup> The ‘original’ heart, pre-cut and sewn up so that it could be torn open in performance, was repaired. Re-sewn and re-blooded by Cohen using the remains of run-off oxblood he collected for ox-heart emergencies, the heart used for both performances was, so to speak, doubly abjected: excised from ‘the animal’ in which it once beat and filled with stagnant blood and violated in performance.

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<sup>29</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem” in *Sovereignities in Question*, 155-163. Lawlor, *This Is Not Sufficient*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, “Dance with Nothing but Heart,” *Q-Online*, Johannesburg, 8 March 2001.

<http://web.archive.org/web/20061012004238/http://www.q.co.za/2001/2001/03/08-dance.html> accessed 14 September 2014.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

The abject has no object, as Kristeva writes, only the ambiguous torment of violent expulsion and tender holding-on that un-ravels and besieges the subject-in-process/on trial.<sup>33</sup> *Dance With Nothing But Heart* juxtaposes a lifeless, stinking heart against a beating, aching one; a warm, expressive and an animated body against a cold, disembodied death-bearing emptiness. And it does seem – through Elu’s contorted poses and “falling away to one side movement,” through the embodied proximity of the animal corpse, through the risks he takes leaving the stage and the toe-crunching pain that he endures dancing *en-pointe* bare-foot – that his body aches. It is a difficult performance to describe and to watch, and it is impossible to remain passive (hence the audience’s visible discomfort). It demands one pay attention: more than that, it demands one respond without calculation for there is no knowing what comes next, as Elu’s auto-erotic/autophagy ending testifies. This demand, moreover, is singular in its address rather than communal. Here is a performance of mutuality that refuses “the common [*commun*], the as-one [*comme un*]” that resounds, as Derrida writes, in the boundary-restoring unity of community.<sup>34</sup> Thus, despite appearances, the performance of the abject in this space acts not to consolidate the sacrifice of animality in the name of the human subject who lives through the death of the other and eats alone. Instead, in the cradling, kissing and caressing, the abjected animal returns matter to its material remainder: it is an interruption that opens as a wound, but is just as wounding.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, 25. Quoted in Hillis Miller, *For Derrida*, 320.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, “Rams,” 266.

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