

Tomaž Grušovnik*, Vesna Liponik**

Animal Ethics and Aesthetics Revisited: Distant Proximity***

SUMMARY

This paper aims to establish a different (transspecies) model of (animal) ethics by challenging one of the dominant paradigms of contemporary ethics (and aesthetics), namely the ethics of otherness. The ethics of otherness, striving for openness and the avoidance of appropriation, pushes the animal into arepresentability and ineffability, marking it as “wholly other”, which consequently leads to the impossibility of any kind of communication and mutual understanding, even self-understanding. It is in this context that the problem of anthropomorphism arises, a problem that is crucially linked to the central issue that feeds the ethics of otherness, the fear of uncanny proximity. Our thesis is that the most appropriate path to resolving the problem is not to try to undo the irresolvable tension between distance and proximity (to find a way out of the confrontation with the animal, either through the logos or through something that is supposed to transcend the logos), but rather the deconstruction of these attempts at transcendence that are the root of the issue. The relationship with the other can then be understood from the recognition of this paradox, an intertwining of understanding and misunderstanding, distance and proximity, or *distant proximity*.

Keywords: distant proximity, anthropomorphism, animal ethics, sublime, Derrida

INTRODUCTION OR THE OTHERING OF THE WORLD

Contemporary ethics builds ethical relations largely on the notion of the “Other”, the relation to the Other, to openness, as an alternative to the relation of sameness. Lévinas is one of the central and most influential philosophers in the field of the

* Institute for Educational Sciences, University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5418-1674>.

** Institute of Philosophy, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4511-3204>.

Correspondence Address: Vesna Liponik, Institute of Philosophy, ZRC SAZU, Novi trg 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. E-mail: vesna.liponik@zrc-sazu.si.

*** The research published in this paper was partially conducted within the framework of the bilateral Slovenian and Croatian research project „Animal Ethics. Towards a Sustainable Transspecies Community“.

idea of the ethics of otherness, which, although it concerns only human ethics, has also had a significant impact on ethical reflection regarding human-animal relations. However, it is Derrida who is most responsible for the dominant view of animal ethics as the ethics of the Other. For Derrida, the animal represents the “wholly Other”.

Perceiving the animal as “wholly Other” allows us to keep the being before us, in all its openness and inaccessibility, as an “institutable singularity” that resists conceptualisation (Derrida, 2008, p. 9), avoids the pitfalls of domestication, co-optation of the animal into the family (Berger, 2009, p. 15), and of anthropomorphism, which returns any talk of the animal to the human being. The idea of the Other in this context is therefore above all a transgression of the logic of sameness and a drawing of attention to difference. The latter has become one of the most common and unquestioned assumptions in almost every debate on animal ethics.

Our aim in this article is to challenge this dominant paradigm of otherness in animal ethics and to propose a different (transspecies) model of (animal) ethics. We propose a model of ethics based on distant proximity, an interplay of intelligibility and strangeness, proximity and distance, in order not to enclose the animal in sameness on the one hand, and not to distance it as “wholly Other” and lose sight of it completely on the other.

Our first step in introducing this model will therefore be to show why the treatment of the animal as absolute otherness is problematic and inconsistent, and why the consistent use of this model leads to the impossibility of any kind of communication and mutual understanding, even of self-understanding.

The fear of domestication, of appropriating animals, is always accompanied by the fear of anthropomorphism, which, as the fear of overwriting an animal with a trait that’s supposed to belong to man, is in fact identical to the fear of overwriting an animal with the sameness of the self. And since it is almost impossible to talk about human-animal relations without talking about anthropomorphism, we will also turn to this question in this paper and try to show why the fear of anthropomorphism is superfluous.

The question of animality in relation to the question of language and communication, or more precisely the importance of *response*, as one of the focuses of the article, will be further explored in the chapter devoted to the perhaps most “notorious” philosophical encounter between man and animal, that between Derrida and his cat.

In the final part, we will relate the idea of the animal’s total alterity and consequent arepresentability to the concept of the sublime, analysing also its more contemporary

derivatives, such as the idea of the eco sublime or in our case zoo sublime. Finally, in addition to ethics, we will in this context also address the question of aesthetics.

THE COMMONING OF THE WORLD: COMMUNICATION AND UNCANNY PROXIMITY

To introduce this model, we will first demonstrate why the idea of the absolute alterity of the animal and the idea that we cannot articulate our relationship to the animal is doubly problematic. Firstly, it is inconsistent: its consistent derivation would lead to solipsism, because then we would have difficulty saying that we can understand anyone else than ourselves or as John A. Fisher (1996, p.1) claims, “unless we also wish to reject our ways of understanding each other, there is a problem in rejecting the system for understanding animals”. Secondly, it is practically problematic: instead of arousing concern for the animals, it may inadvertently distance us from them excessively, saying that it is an “otherness” to which we cannot really understand our obligations because we cannot articulate a relationship to that unintelligible alterity.

Let us first turn to the concern about the inconsistency of radical alterity of the animal. In our understanding, the radical alterity of the animal (the idea that humans cannot understand animals because we lack a common language and because the animal is other than the human) is analogous to traditional philosophical skepticism since it leads to practically identical consequences: the complete impossibility of mutual understanding of “other” minds (or, indeed, the doubt about the existence of other minds which is in the context of the animal present in the idea that animals “do not have souls”). (cf. Grušovnik, 2021, p. 65) As is widely known, Descartes (1996, p. 21) as the most famous proponent of modern skepticism questioned the existence of other minds in his *Meditations*: “But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons?”. However, as also noted by Roger Crisp (1996, p. 310), “[a]ny reason we have to doubt the existence of the minds of animals also gives us a reason to doubt the existence of the minds of other humans. We are faced with a choice between attributing mental states to animals and solipsism or skepticism concerning other minds generally”. In other words, if we want to at least try to understand someone, *anyone*, if we want to understand an animal or anyone else as a being with whom we inevitably form a common world, we are obliged to use the only tools available to us, the same tools we use when we try to understand other human beings. It is these attempts that create a “commoning” of the world, a territory in which language itself emerges as a possibility of communication. When we perceive the animal as wholly Other, we deny it the capacity for this constitution,

we distance ourselves conceptually from it “through the use of both symbolic and physical bars” (Pugliese, 2017, p. 27).

Therefore, Grace Clement (2013, p. 8), when discussing Frans de Waal’s defense of what he calls “informed anthropomorphism”, notes that “just as we must refer to our own experiences to help us understand the experience of other humans, we must refer to our own experiences to help us understand the experiences of other animals”. Consequently, if we deny ourselves the ability to understand animals, we deny ourselves the ability to understand anyone other than ourselves, and ultimately, we lose access to describing our own experiences. Or, as Grušovnik (2021, p. 59) points out: “Understanding animal behavior is epistemologically on a par with understanding the behavior of fellow humans”.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958, § 43) showed in his late philosophy, that the only way out of this skeptical grip is the rejection of the “private language argument”, showing that the meaning of the words lies not in our reference to “inner mental states”, but in praxis, as the famous paragraph § 43 of *Philosophical Investigations* concludes: “The meaning of a word is its use in the language”. Thus we understand the meaning of words not because someone can tell us how they feel, but because they behave in a certain way, and the meaning of a word consists in the repetition of certain behaviours that become attached to that word through use.

This removes not only the worry that we cannot understand animals because they do not speak human language but also the worry that we are attributing false states to them when they behave in certain ways, a worry that is no longer confined to animals but is similar to the worry that such attributions can be made to members of the human species who cannot explain their behaviour to us, for example, because of a language barrier.

The meaning of concepts that refer to mental states derives from praxis, from our everyday encounters with humans and animals (Grušovnik, 2021 p. 59), through the acceptance of common forms of life.

Raimond Gaita (2005) expressed this point eloquently in his book *The Philosopher’s Dog*:

“such concepts, I have suggested, are formed in responses to animals and to human beings together... When dogs respond to our moods, to our pleasures and fears, when they anticipate our intentions, or wait excitedly to see whether we will take them for a walk, they do not assume that we are sensate being with intentions. I imagine it was the same for us in our primitive state. Out of such unhesitating interactions, between ourselves, and between us and animals, there developed—not beliefs, assumptions, and conjectures about the mind but—our very concepts of thought, feeling, intention, belief, doubt, and so on. Misunderstanding this, captivated by a picture

of ourselves as spectators, certain about our own minds but driven to hypothesizing about whether there may be other minds, we have misconstrued the natural history of the development of our concept of the mind.”

The danger is that by postulating someone as radically different, we lose the very possibility of communication and conceptualisation. Skepticism “transforms our uneasy certainty into an epistemological problem” (Grušovnik, 202, p. 56), and this problem is not something that can be solved with philosophical argumentation, but with one’s attitude towards others, or with what Stanley Cavell (2003, p. 95) calls “acknowledgment”: “the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged”.

Following Cavell, Grušovnik (2021, p. 61) emphasized that “[t]he ‘causes of skepticism’ should not be looked for in epistemological defects but in our strategies of avoiding the awareness of finitude”. The key here is the fact that “such worldviews accept human–animal boundary as a dogma” (Grušovnik, 2021, p. 61), and this dogma allows humans to benefit extensively from animals, both conceptually and materially.

But we must also ask ourselves why animals? Why do we insist on comparing ourselves to animals rather than, say, inanimate objects (such as rocks and mechanisms) when we want to demonstrate our superiority? Grušovnik (2021, p. 62) answers this question with what he calls an “uncanny proximity” between humans and animals: “It is precisely because we appear to be so similar to our animal relatives - to their vulnerable and mortal corporeal existence - that we feel the transcendental urge to distance ourselves from their finite nature, trying to overcome it by various intellectual maneuvers”. In this sense “[t]he human–animal boundary serves the purpose of an existential buffer zone, protecting the ‘Man’ from the knowledge about ‘his’ uncanny proximity to the ‘animal’” (Grušovnik, 2021, p. 63).

FROM UNCANNY TO DISTANT PROXIMITY: ANTHROPOMORPHISM

The uncanny proximity between humans and animals is a historical and evolutionary fact and is one reason why John Berger, in his now classic essay *Why look at Animals?* says that the animal is a first metaphor, first in the sense that animals are closest to us, and this is the circumstance out of which the metaphor itself arose. Animals are “both like and unlike” (Berger, 2009, p. 4) or as Jelka Kernev Štrajn (2007, p. 41) named them, animals are “known unknowns”.

The residue of a constant use of animal metaphor is, for Berger (2009, p. 11), anthropomorphism, “integral to the relation between man and animal [...] was

an expression of their proximity". Berger (2009, p. 11) continues that in the last two centuries with the rise of capitalism, animals have gradually disappeared from our lives, referring to the disappearance of live animals, he states that "in this new solitude, anthropomorphism makes us doubly uneasy".

Anthropomorphism arises precisely from what Grušovnik calls the "uncanny proximity" between humans and animals. It is, therefore, no coincidence that James J. Paxson (1994, p. 46), in his treatise on personification, when discussing anthropomorphism as a (non)trope associated with personification, states that "anthropomorphism might at first seem mechanical, but it is a complex coordinate trope of personification that looks at the same time simpler (anthropomorphisms seem to be little more than animated words) *and* more uncanny (its seeming power to 'freeze' or escape tropology)".¹ He even goes so far as to describe it as a "provocative trope".

The provocative nature of anthropomorphism becomes particularly clear when we consider the surprising fact that the reservations about anthropomorphism come from different, even diametrically opposed sides. On the one hand, it was the behaviourists who, for the sake of the continued use of animals in research, could not allow themselves to animate and personify their objects of experimentation; on the other hand, anthropomorphism is also warned against by some critical reflections on animal-human relations (Liponik, 2022, p. 23).

If the former resort to Cartesian-mechanistic explanations of the animal, the latter, fleeing from the fear of overwriting the animal with the sameness of the self, conceive of the animal as arepresentable and rely on concepts of ineffability such as the (eco) sublime (more on the latter in the next chapter). Keri Weil (2012, p. 19) notes that "as a process of identification, the urge to anthropomorphize the experience of another, like the urge to empathize with that experience, risks becoming a form of narcissistic projection that erases boundaries of difference". And it is precisely this fear that prevents critical thinkers on the relationship between humans and animals from using anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism as arepresentability also has its other side, however, where the anthropomorphism of animals and deities collide.² As Mary Midgley (1983, p. 125) points out, anthropomorphism "may be the only example of a notion invented solely

¹ In referring to the "uncanny", or "unheimlich", in this context, we cannot overlook the reference to the Freudian "unheimlich" as that kind of uncanny which springs from what has always been known, the long familiar and which is at the same time that which is supposed to remain secret, concealed, and has come to light.

² Nikola Visković (1996, p. 34) also points to the connection between the anthropomorphism of animals, natural processes and gods at the very beginning of his discussion of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism in *Životinja i čovjek: prilog kulturnoj zoologiji* [*Animal and man: an appendix to cultural zoology*].

for God, and then transferred unchanged to refer to animals”. Anthropomorphism was thus a theological sin before it became a scientific one (Daston, 2005, p. 39). The religious structure of the world in which anthropomorphism “makes us doubly uneasy” (Berger, 2009, p. 11), is, according to Benjamin, capitalist.

Anthropomorphism is one of the best examples of the impossibility of distinguishing between animal and human, of the vagueness and arbitrariness of the boundary between human and animal, which in turn has implications for the vagueness of anthropomorphism as such, and for the question of whether anthropomorphism is part of the problem or part of the solution.

But, as we have shown above, the fear of anthropomorphism is completely superfluous, and what is more, anthropomorphism is inevitable; or rather, anthropomorphism is completely superfluous because we also “anthropomorphise” other people, only that we do not give this operation this name, because we remain in the domain of the same species and the latter would appear redundant (Liponik, 2022, p. 27).

This (inevitable) transspecies view of mutual understanding, to which we have tried to point so far, does not, of course, as Grušovnik (2016, p. 76) points out in his *Etika živali [Animal Ethics]*,³ “mean that the behaviour of different animals is often no mystery and that we are always ‘in the know’ about animals! This does not apply to our fellow human beings, neither from foreign cultures nor from our own community”. Understanding one another, indeed any relationship, is, therefore, a matter of the interplay between intelligibility and strangeness, proximity and distance, a distant proximity that prevents us on the one hand from enclosing the animal in a sameness, and on the other hand from distancing ourselves from it as “wholly Other”, from losing sight of it altogether. Distant proximity means facing the uncanniness of proximity, and the core of ethics is or should be to hold this tension, to have this inner contradiction constantly before our eyes, to recognise the shared vulnerability and mortal corporeality, and to refuse to distance ourselves from this fact, and this refusal and this recognition are the entry points of our, with Haraway, response-ability.

NAKED CAT LOOKS AT A NAKED PHILOSOPHER

Probably the most famous philosophical encounter between man and animal, by which we mean a *real* and *concrete* encounter, is undoubtedly that between Derrida and his cat.

³ The inevitability of anthropomorphism has been pointed out by several authors, e.g. Cadman (2016), Levin (1981), Karwacka (2016), etc. (for more, see Liponik, 2022). This does not mean, of course, that there is nothing that can be called “gratuitous” (Grušovnik, 2019/2020) or “bad” (Cadman, 2016) anthropomorphism.

Particularly in his late work, Derrida has been deeply concerned with the question of animals.⁴ His last seminar at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales between 2001 and 2003 and a long lecture at the 1997 conference *L'animal autobiographique* led to the books *La bête et le souverain* (2001-2002) and *L'animal que donc je suis* (2006). In *L'animal que donc je suis* (the title itself alludes to Descartes' famous cogito ergo sum), Derrida traces the distinction between man and animal in the works of philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan and Lévinas. According to Derrida (2008, p. 32), all these philosophers are talking about the same thing, that "the animal is deprived of language. Or, more precisely, of response, of a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction; of the right and power to 'respond' and hence of so many other things that would be proper to man".

But, as Derrida (2008, p. 12-3) points out, what all these philosophers neglect, and what their neglect reflects, is the ignorance or disregard of what it is like to be 'addressed' - especially naked - by a real animal. *The Animal That Therefore I Am* begins as an encounter between a naked philosopher and a naked cat, with the naked gaze between them, the observation of the feline gaze as the gaze of a concrete real animal, a cat, a concrete real cat: "I must make it clear from the start the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. It isn't the figure of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literature and fables" (Derrida, 2008, p. 6).

Since the animal is above all a word, a concept, a figure, Berger's "first metaphor" or Derrida's "quasi-transcendental referent", it is so important for Derrida's point to refrain from this dominant view of the animal that characterises the whole of Western thought, a view that relegates the animal to the figurative. This is why Derrida insists from the outset that it is the real, concrete cat that is at stake, not just the image into which the cat is pushed; it is not even Rilke's, Baudelaire's, or Carroll's cat. As David Brooks (2016, p. 56-57) points out, referring to this encounter: "Derrida has realised that, behind the mirror-cat, which he, and a long tradition behind him, has so loaded that he cannot see past her, there is another cat, another *being*, loaded with herself, her suffering, the weight and intensity of her own existence".

This is one of the most decisive moments in Western philosophy, suddenly it is not an animal that is being looked at, it seems that all the barriers, all the symbolic and physical bars that have characterised the whole of philosophy up to this point have finally been shattered.⁵ Rather, there is a shared space of vulnerability and

⁴ Even if Derrida is in no doubt that this is, in fact, the question that has been at the heart of his whole work (for more see Calarco, 2008).

⁵ Lévinas is another example of how an encounter with a particular animal destabilises the whole conceptual framework. The rupture or destabilising moment, which unfortunately does not represent a major change or shift in Lévinas's thought, is Lévinas's encounter with Bobby, a dog, or with Lévinas, „literally a dog!“, which represents

consideration, there is this cat looking at us “and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” (Derrida, 2008, p. 29). Derrida draws the contours of what we, with Cavell above, have called acknowledgment. Or as Matthew Calarco (2008, p. 126) points out, identifying in this encounter “one of the main stakes of Derrida’s work on the question of the animal”, the fact that “ethical thought in relation to animals begins in and attests to such proto-ethical encounters – which is to say, animal ethics is not simply a matter of theoretical consistency and rationality”.

But then what happens when before “the gaze of the animal [...] the philosopher is embarrassed, his philosophising no longer able to clothe him” (Brooks, 2016, p. 46). There is a certain unease, “[a]n *abyss*, in short, which threatens to swallow him” (Brooks, 2016, p. 56-57), and Derrida retreats in the face of radical exposure, as if sensing something unbearable, an unbearable nakedness.

Shortly after declaring that the cat he is talking about is a *real* cat, he repeats this in an attempt to avoid several literary cats, Baudelaire’s, Rilke’s, Buber’s, who “do not speak”. But then he explicitly refers to a chapter of Carroll’s book *Through the Looking Glass*: “Entitled ‘Waking’ this penultimate chapter consists in a single sentence: ‘it really *was* a kitten, after all’ [...] Although I don’t have time to do so, I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact, you can’t be certain that I am not doing that, for better or for worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing” (Derrida, 2008, p. 7).

At this point, the question arises as to why Derrida first tries to distance himself from all the cat figures and then immediately establishes a connection with one of the very figures he was trying to distance himself from. Is Derrida simply pointing out the complex relationship between the real and the figurative, is he teasing us, or is there something else going on? In any case, it can be argued that this gesture “seems to betoken a discomfort, a heightened consciousness – before the stare of this cat!” (Brooks, 2016, p. 55).

Brooks (2016, p. 56) argues that Derrida’s promise of an “extensive examination of philosophy’s relation to animal” is followed by a deferment. He returns to himself, to his philosopheme, in which he dresses, and accordingly the cat, in “philosophy’s processes of metaphorisation and anthropogenic, conceptual instrumentalization” (Brooks, 2016, p. 32). It is worth noting here that the semantics of costume and clothing, as well as nakedness, is one of the key tropological meta-toposes, and furthermore, that clothing and the sense of shame are among the many traits that belong exclusively to humans. And when Derrida commits himself to nakedness at

the moment that would allow Lévinas’s thought, precisely on the basis of the encounter with a concrete animal, with the *face* of an animal, with Bobby’s face, to rethink the animal, but which unfortunately does not succeed in doing so (for more see Burgat, 2015, Calarco, 2008 and Derrida, 2008).

the very beginning of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, one could say that he does not renounce it, but only follows it as far as it goes.⁶

At one point, Derrida himself articulates what we have been trying to demonstrate. He tries to distance himself from the two dominant ways of talking about animals: on the one hand, the fear of attribution, interpretation and projection (similar to the general fear we discussed in the previous chapter, which suspends all possible communication) and, on the other, what he calls the other violence, or “*asinanity* [*bétise*] that which would consist in suspending one’s compassion and in depriving the animal of every power of manifestation, of the desire to manifest *to me* anything at all, and even to manifest to me in some way *its* experience of *my* language, of *my* words and of *my* nudity” (Derrida, 2008, p. 18). Derrida (2008, p. 18) »feeling disarmed before a small mute living being” is trapped in this terrible binary, unable to linger, unable to sustain what could in a sense be termed *distant proximity*, “all that might lead one to guess that [he is] not ready to interpret or experience the gaze that a cat fixes, without a word, on [his] nakedness, *in the negative*” (Derrida, 2008, p.18). And this is exactly what has led many to guess, since “he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him [...]. Or, if he was curious when he first really noticed his cat looking at him ... he arrested that lure ... with the sort of critical gesture that he would never have allowed to stop him in his canonical philosophical reading” (Haraway, 2008, p. 20).

And soon after, Derrida takes a flight into philosophy, never to return to his “really little cat”. Brooks (2016, p. 55) emphasizes that “[t]he trembling that we see here, the almost-admission of a need or desire to grasp a *real*, a mode of Being unshackled by a consciousness of its relentless textuality, characterises much of *The Animal that Therefore I Am*”.

Derrida sees a crucial gap, but this insight into the gap, which could help him to bridge the very same gap, only ends up deepening it. Since Derrida starts from the logic of alterity, he cannot bridge this gap, he can only make it surmountable and thus inscribe himself in the same line that he is trying to criticise. It is therefore not surprising that Derrida’s cat is burdened by being “wholly Other”. For Derrida (2008, p. 132), the animal as a “quasi-transcendental referent” represents “the wholly other, more other than any other that *they* call an animal”. In this sense “the category of the ‘animal’ [is] the one that effectively founds and constitutes the other categories

⁶ “In the beginning I would like to entrust myself to words that, were it possible, would be naked. Naked in the first place - but this is in order to announce already that I plan to speak endlessly of nudity and of the nude in philosophy. Starting from Genesis. I would like to choose words that are, to begin with, naked, quite simply, words from the heart” (Derrida, 2008, p. 1).

that it animates and renders intelligible precisely as Other” (Pugliese, 2017, p. 25). And in times in which has become “increasingly difficult for us to state with clarity the reasons for which we constitute the common world” (Gržinić, 2019, p. 282), “the idea of otherness and difference [...] have become a key leverage for more effectively justifying relations of domination and exploitation” (Gržinić, 2019, p. 280).

“WHERE THE KANTIAN CRUEL GOD / OF KNOWLEDGE AS A STRANGER STEPS INTO NATURE”⁷

On the one hand, the concept of the sublime has been subjected to numerous critiques in postcolonial and decolonial theory, Marxist theory, feminist and environmental philosophy; on the other hand, there have been attempts to reformulate it, for example in the context of environmental philosophy and aesthetics, in the direction of the eco sublime. Those who oppose, or at least resist, such reformulations see the problem with the concept of the sublime primarily in “that it depends on and reinscribes the notion of nature's otherness, of the separation between the human and nonhuman realm” (Hitt, 1999, p. 306).

Jelka Kernev Štrajin in her article “On the Possibility of an Ecocritical View of the Thematisation of ‘Non-human Subjectivity’ in Literature” discusses the use of the concept of the sublime, especially when thinking about the thematisation of non-human subjectivity in literature, and identifies the absence of a common language between humans and animals, the absence of logos in animals, which creates a distance between humans and animals, as the main reason for considering human-animal relations in the light of the sublime.

The absence of a common language between humans and animals refers to the reservations that we tried to refute in the first chapter of this discussion, the reservations that ultimately lead to the impossibility of understanding anyone, the impossibility of establishing a common space as a space of encounter and mutual responsiveness.

For the key to the sublime is “critical spatialization of the distance between human and animal through the use of both symbolic and physical bars” (Pugliese, 2017, p. 27) that allows unhindered identification and manipulation of the observed space, “which the observer isolates from the surroundings by some principle, so that in this isolation he is able to have complete control over it” (Detela, 2011, p. 290). There is an optical asymmetry inherent in this kind of separation, whereby it is the human

⁷ A verse by Slovenian poet Jure Detela in his posthumous fragments and texts, collected under the title *Orphic Documents* (2011).

being who observes, or as Gaita pointed out above, that we perceive ourselves as spectators, denying spectatorship (and everything else) to everyone else.

This is also the moment that Derrida identifies in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* as one of the main symptoms of Western thought, but as we tried to show in the previous chapter, despite the difference and the departure that Derrida tries to make in this work, he too ultimately succumbs to the logic of the animal as “wholly other”.

The decisive place in the thinking of the sublime is certainly held by Kant. Kernev Štrajm relates Kant’s sublime to his theory of knowledge, pointing out that the object in itself exists and that the experience of the sublime occurs when the subject becomes aware of its helplessness in the face of the magnitude of the natural phenomenon (in our case, the incomprehensibility of the animal) when the power of imagination is overstretched and broken. Kernev Štrajm quotes Christopher Hitt, who identifies this moment as the pointing of the sublime to the ontological autonomy of all that is non-human, forcing man to acknowledge his own limitations. But (and here comes the moment that some theories of the eco sublime seek to correct) what man derives from this confrontation is to raise his mind above nature, since both Burke and Kant conceive of the sublime as a disorienting or overwhelming confrontation with a natural object (Hitt, 1999, p. 605), in our case the animal.

Kant was the first in the history of the treatment of the sublime to make a precise argument for the relationship between imagination and the mind:

For though the imagination finds nothing beyond the sensible that could support it, this very removal of its barriers also makes it feel unbounded, so that its separation [from the sensible] is an exhibition of the infinite; and though an exhibition of the infinite can as such never be more than merely negative, it still expands the soul. Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in-heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc. (Kant, 1987, p. 275).

The last part of the quoted passage can be related to anthropomorphism, or in Derrida’s terms, anthro-po-theo-morphism, which, as already mentioned, was first a theological sin before it became a scientific one. The fear of the appropriation of animals, of the dissemination of sameness, like the fear of anthropomorphism, ultimately leads to the representation of the powerlessness of man to really confront the otherness of animals. It is easier to proclaim the collapse of the imagination and the impossibility of access to the other, and so the other is established as other at all, as radically other and inaccessible - here the animal appears as arepresentable.

Hitt sees the problem primarily in the so-called final stage of the sublime, the stage following the collapse of the imagination, in which the mind is elevated above the natural object. Hitt’s theory of the eco sublime attempts to reformulate the sublime,

or its final phase, in such a way as to exclude the intervention of logos and the consequent division into object and subject from the confrontation with the non-human. But even if one can accept his observation about the ‘problematic’ nature of the third phase of the sublime in particular, his alternative to this phase of the sublime is the experience of the non-human in the context of a religious, almost mystical experience that pushes the animal back into the zone of the ineffable and arepresentable.

And if we go back to Derrida and what he does, “feeling disarmed before a small mute living being”, unable and unwilling to choose between a “projection that appropriates and an interruption that excludes” (Derrida, 2008, p. 18) his gesture in relation to the really little cat is in a sense similar to that of the sublime, when he turns towards the boundlessness of textuality and never returns.

The essence of the problem, then, lies in the attempt to resolve the irresolvable tension between distance and proximity, to find a way out of the confrontation with the animal, either through the logos or through something that is supposed to transcend the logos, without really thinking that perhaps the problem lies precisely in these attempts at transcendence and that the relationship to the other can be thought precisely on the basis of the recognition that it is necessarily a paradox, an intertwining of understanding and misunderstanding, distance and proximity, *distant proximity* and that animals are, again with Kernev Štrajn (2007, p. 41), “known unknowns”.

“AT ONCE FAR OFF AND NEAR”⁸

Lastly, with the help of Jure Detela (1951-1992), a Slovenian poet and one of the most important and rigorous thinkers on the relationship between humans and other beings, who undoubtedly understood animals, plants and the material world as agents of communication (Detela, 2011, p. 183), we will answer the question of why exactly the affinity between distance (as vastness) and proximity is greater than that between distance (as width) and distance (as vastness).⁹

By moving away from the symptomatic and established exploitative readings of nature in William Wordsworth’s texts, Detela formulates a significantly different view of nature and animals, one that is rooted in the linking of space and time

⁸ A verse from William Wordsworth’s poem *To the Cuckoo*, first published in 1807 in *Poems*, in two volumes.

⁹ In Slovene there are two synonyms for distance, *daljava* and *razdalja*, which Detela does not understand as synonyms, but rather makes a distinction between them, which can be roughly replaced by the expressions vastness (*daljava*) and width (*razdalja*), even if these are only approximations, because the best way to explain the difference between the two expressions is Detela’s analysis of Matsuo Bashō’s haiku.

as a bridging of the categories of space and time, and that manifests itself as the replacement of dimensions and widths with proximity and distance.¹⁰

When Detela tries to explain why the affinity between distance and proximity is greater than that between distance as width and distance as vastness, he refers to a haiku by Matsuo Bashō and conceives a text that he later publishes in *Nova Revija* as a separate essay entitled “Instead of a Poetic Theory”. In the essay, Detela (2011, p. 292) explores the way space occurs in haiku, exploring what he calls the spatial paradox. This does not ignore the time component, and the essence of the spatial paradox is precisely how the poem brings together two different times. To further illustrate the point, I will quote the haiku in full: “sparrows / in a field of rapes / with the faces of flower worshippers”. The sparrows, seeing the whole field, can only bring the poet closer to the individual flowers if the poet feels close to the sparrows, which means that he must have observed them in a different moment, perceiving them as flower worshippers, which is of course already an anthropomorphism, and not only that, the sparrows *have faces*. Both moments of observation allow him to capture them in the text as seen from close and from a distance, to capture their individual faces, the expressions on their faces, and also the whole field. The process takes place in such a way that “[t]he sparrows [...] draw nearer the poet from a distance to the individual flowers” (Detela, 2011, p. 293). At the same time, the sparrows draw nearer the poet his own distances. It is a principle of how “[s]patial relations / denote spiritual / relations” (Detela, 2011, p. 175).

Detela places on one side the world of widths and dimensions that allow for separation and control, the “bourgeois production of symbols”, and on the other side the world of proximities and distances that allow for participation and confrontation with each individual being in each newly established context. When Detela writes about animals, he understands them as beings of both distance and proximity.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to point out the main neuralgic points of the dominant paradigm of the ethics of otherness, which, in its quest for openness and the avoidance of any gesture that would appropriate the animal, gets caught in a loop that pushes the animal into arepresentability and leads to the impossibility of any kind of communication

¹⁰ Detela's reading of Wordsworth holds a special place in this respect, especially his poem *To the Cuckoo* (from which the title of this chapter is taken), which he also translated several times. The key to *To the Cuckoo* is precisely this constant tension between proximity and distance and the attempt to understand the cuckoo, which results in neither mere proximity nor mere distance, but rather the subject of the poem and the cuckoo in the poem are both arrivers who meet at some point, in some valley, and the poem focuses on this moment of encounter between the two.

and mutual understanding, even of self-understanding. In this context, we have also touched on the issue of anthropomorphism, which is not only crucial to any reflection on human-animal relations but also crucially linked to the central reservation that feeds the ethics of otherness, the fear of overwriting the animal with a trait that relates to the human. In both cases, it is the fear of an uncanny proximity between man and animal.

This was followed by an analysis of one of the most famous encounters between man and animal in philosophy, the encounter between Derrida and his cat, and the discomfort Derrida feels in this encounter, which ultimately leads him to label his cat as wholly Other and to distance himself from the cat.

We continued with the theory of the sublime and its later derivatives, which attempted to correct the concept of the sublime, mainly by excluding the hierarchical relationship between the (non-human) object and the (human) subject, the spectator, and the intervention of logos, but failed to offer a solution that would significantly deviate from the dominant image of non-human otherness.

Our main aim was to demonstrate that the essence of the problem is thus to try to resolve the irresolvable tension between distance and proximity, to find a way out of the confrontation with the animal, either through the logos or through something that is supposed to transcend the logos, without really thinking that perhaps the problem lies precisely in these attempts at transcendence and that the relationship to the other can be thought precisely on the basis of the recognition that it is necessarily a paradox, an intertwining of understanding and misunderstanding, distance and proximity, *distant proximity*.

REFERENCES

- Berger, J. (2009). Why Look At Animals? In J. Berger (Ed.), *About Looking*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Burgat, F. (2015). Facing the Animal in Sartre and Lévinas. In M. Senior & C. Freccero & D. L. Clark (Eds.), *Animots: Postanimality in French Thought* (p. 172-189). Yale University.
- Cadman, S. (2016). Reflections on Anthropocentrism, Anthropomorphism and Impossible Fiction: Towards A Typological Spectrum of Fictional Animals. *Animal Studies Journal*, 5(2), 161–82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14453/asj>
- Calarco, M. (2008). *Zoographies : the question of the animal from Heidegger to Derrida*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cavell, S. (2003). *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clement, G. (2013). Animals and Moral Agency: The Recent Debate and Its Implications. *Journal of Animal Ethics*, 3(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.5406/janimaethics.3.1.0001>
- Crisp, R. (1996). Evolution and Psychological Unity. In M. Bekoff & D. Jamieson (Eds.), *Readings in Animal Cognition* (pp. 309-21). Harvard, MA: MIT Press.

- Daston, L. (2005). Intelligences: Angelic, Animal, Human. In L. Daston & G. Mitman (Eds.), *Thinking Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Derrida, J. (2008). *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Descartes, R. (1996). *Meditations of First Philosophy, with Selections from Objections and Replies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Detela, J. (2011). *Orfčni dokumenti: teksti in fragmenti iz zapuščine*. In M. Komelj (Ed.). Koper: Hyperion.
- Fisher, J. A. (1996). A Myth of Anthropomorphism. In M. Bekoff & D. Jamieson (Eds.), *Readings in Animal Cognition* (pp. 3-16). Harvard, MA: MIT Press.
- Freud, S. (2003). *The Uncanny*. London: Penguin Books.
- Gaita, R. (2005). *The Philosopher's Dog: Friendship With Animals*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Grušovnik, T. (2016). *Etika živali: o čezvrstni gostoljubnosti*. Koper: Univerzitetna založba Annales.
- Grušovnik, T. (2019/2020). Da bi le govorile? Modusi živalskih subjektivitet v filmu. *Ekran, revija za film in televizijo*, 59.11(12/1), 31-3.
- Grušovnik, T. (2021). Skepticism and animal virtues: denialism of animal morality. In T. Grušovnik, R. Spanning & K. L. Syse (Eds.), *Environmental and animal abuse denial: averting our gaze* (pp. 55-70). Lanham, Maryland : Lexington Books.
- Gržinić, M. (2019). Svet kot so-pripadanje. In A. Mbembe (Ed.), *Kritika črnkega uma* (pp. 277-297). Ljubljana: Založba ZRC.
- Haraway, D. J. (2008). *When species meet*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hitt, C. 1999. Toward an ecological sublime. *New Literary History*, 30(3), 603-623. <https://doi.org/10.1353/NLH.1999.0037>
- Kant, I. (1987). *Critique of Judgment*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Karwacka, W. (2016). Anthropomorphism in translation: human/animal binary, distance and proximity. In P. Górszczyńska & W. Karwacka (Eds.), *Pod pretekstem słów: księga jubileuszowa dla Profesora Wojciecha Kubińskiego*. (pp. 359-75). Gdańsk: Cześci Proste.
- Kernev Štrajn, J. (2007). O možnosti ekokritičkega pogleda na tematizacijo 'ne-človeške subjektivnosti' v literaturi. *Primerjalna književnost*, 30(1), pp. 39-54.
- Levin, S. R. (1981). Allegorical Language. In M. W. Bloomfield (Ed.), *Allegory, Myth and Symbol* (pp. 23-38). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Liponik, V. (2022). *Antropomorfizacija: kritična analiza (ne)tropa*. Master's thesis. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta.
- Midgley, M. (1983). *Animals and Why They Matter*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Paxson, J. J. (1994). *The poetics of personification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pugliese, J. (2017). Terminal Truths: Foucault's Animals and the Mask of the Beast. In M. Chrulaw & D. J. Wadiwel (Eds.), *Foucault and Animals* (pp. 19-36). Leiden, Boston, Brill.
- Visković, N. (1996). *Životinja i čovjek: prilog kulturnoj zoologiji*. Split: Književni krug.
- Weil, K. (2012). *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Revizija životinjske etike i estetike: Udaljena blizina

SAŽETAK

Cilj rada je utvrditi drugačiji (transspecijski) model (životinjske) etike izazivanjem jedne od dominantnijih paradigmi suvremene etike (i estetike), etike drugoga. Etika drugoga, u stremljenju k otvorenosti i izbjegavanju aproprijacije, gura životinju k zastupljenosti i neizrecivosti, označavajući je kao „posve drugačiju“, što posljedično vodi nemogućnosti ostvarivanja bilo kakve komunikacije i uzajamnog razumijevanja, čak i samorazumijevanja. U ovom se kontekstu javlja problematika antropomorfizma, problem koji je usko povezan s temeljnim pitanjem koje hrani etiku drugoga, strah od nevjerojatne blizine. Naša je teza da najprikladniji put k rješavanju problema nije pokušavanje rješavanja nerješive napetosti između udaljenosti i blizine (izbjegavanje sukobljavanja sa životinjom, ili kroz logos ili nečime što nadilazi logos), već dekonstrukcija ovih pokušaja nadilaženja koji su korijen problema. Stoga se odnos s drugim može shvatiti prepoznavanjem ovog paradoksa, isprepletenost razumijevanja i nerazumijevanja, udaljenosti i blizine ili udaljene blizine.

Ključne riječi: blizina, antropomorfizam, životinjska etika, uzvišenost, Derrida.