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I AM AN ANIMAL

The relationship between people and animals is a reflection of social developments. It can be seen as a symptom of these developments or a response to them. There is a wide range of how animals are seen, from being valued for their usefulness to being an object of sentiment. Animals are food, beasts of burden, sympathetic companions, mediators, colleagues, substitutes for partners or children, etc. Linked to this is the status of animals, whether they are seen as an object or as a subject, whether they are subjugated or are treated as equal beings, as is demanded by post-humanism. Post-humanism has attempted to re-structure the human-animal relationship by abandoning anthropocentric viewpoints and establishing a relationship based on equality. The subject is no longer seen as a uniform entity, but as a nomadic hybrid being with changing identities. In this way, the opposites of man/animal and man/technology dissolve: what has been considered the «other» disappears and becomes an integral part of one's own self.

If seen from this perspective, the pet boom observed in many countries, the increased interest in cats and dogs, can be understood as a response to digitization and technology as well as people's changing relationship to nature. All areas of life are being economized by technology and, above all, the digitization of communication. This is making direct social contact and physical nearness disappear. The impact of technology as well as the virtualization/digitization of relationships can create a fear of physical proximity. This fear is combined with a longing for touch.

The dread of being hurt can be circumvented virtually by means of digital, pre-programmed relationships, or through real relationships with pets. Animals or animation characters can become replacements for social contacts or even love relationships, they can be substitutes for partners or children, in the future they may even be seen as ideal partners. Here, at the interface of the person, is where the concept of rationality, i.e. technology, meets the concept of irrationality, i.e. nature.

Emotions arise where we spend most of our time. What is crucial is the quality and the kind of relationships we have. The illusion spread by social media of quantifying one's social existence leads, among other things, to solitude. Animal petting cafés can be seen as an expression of this development. The longing for emotional security exists alongside anxieties connected to it. Emotional security through pets is exploited economically, with hourly fees being charged for petting and feeding animals. On one hand, it is practical if affection for animals can be purchased. But on the other hand, it is an expression of non-commitment and affection/nearness becoming a commodity. This raises the following questions: What kind of relationships do we want? Where does this lead us in our expectations and ideas? What kinds of relationships are possible beyond human cognition and perception?

Giving animals equal status, making them a subject and not an object, is justified by the fact that they can suffer, but also because it is possible that they have abilities unperceivable to humans. In Natsumo Soseki's novel *I am a Cat* (*Wagahai wa Neko de aru*, 1905/1906), the tomcat, protagonist and narrator, satirizes Western

attitudes; he makes fun of the Japanese ego (*wagahai*), with its inherent need for power and affected authoritative behavior. At the same time, he is a caricature of the author's own position, that is, the author as subject. In turn, the fact that the tomcat doesn't have a name neutralizes the focus on the subject. Paradoxes are celebrated through association, Japanese and Western viewpoints are caricatured, as are concepts of salvation and traditional notions. Stylistic elements and categories are intermingled; the satiric and the aesthetic are jumbled together. The sophisticated cat describes and comments on people's behavior, on everyday events, science, history, literature, philosophy, etc.: the objects of his observations, explanations and his wit. He criticizes Western modernity, combining the rational with the irrational. He loves idleness and experimenting, he is a tomcat in word but not in deed. The ontological and epistemic levels are merged. Through the story's artful satire, the cat succeeds in dispelling opposites. And closes the circle. It is possible to link Natsumo Soseki's novel to post-humanism, although there is no satire to be found in the latter.

Technology increasingly leaves its mark on us, which changes our understanding of nature. Over and above abstract and real relationships, the idea of what it means to be human in the 21st century is also changing. Robots are increasingly being programmed to act like humans, while more and more, humans are supposed to function like robots. Questions of economics and optimization have priority, also in human-animal relationships. The opposition demands equality for all living beings/objects, it demands that differentiations

between humans, animals and technology stop being made. This is manifested, for instance, by the recognition of hybrid beings. In the virtual realm, mixed beings like those known from antiquity, from the world of the gods in India or Egypt, are finding new forms and significance.

Transformation and ever-new invention are basic elements of fashion. Real animal materials such as leather, fur and feathers are used, as well as their imitations or ornamental references to them. Linked to this are mimicry effects or animal-related features that can be donned temporarily, according to a specific mood.

Edwina Hörl's new collection suggests various links between humans and animals, not only through references to animals, but also through the satirical use of elements representing certain human-animal relationships. For example, a riding helmet—a symbol of training animals—is caricatured by a straw hat, which suggests leisure or vacationing. Or fly fishing lures, a hunting symbol so artfully made of feathers and fur, become earrings: accessories to make a catch. This doesn't only have to do with symbolism or animal properties, but also with ironic interpretations of various human-animal relationships. The different parts of the collection are named after animals. This suggests possible categories based on associations with certain animals, although this is sometimes contradicted by the design or the materials. By dissolving clear categories, it is possible to find some space to breathe. That was something that Soseki's cat knew all about.

Sabine Winkler

translation from German / Cynthia Peck

ON ANIMALS AND PEOPLE

Orangutans can actually speak,
but they don't in order to avoid
being forced to work.
(Javanese myth)

If the lion could talk,
we would not understand.
(Wittgenstein)

Horses like to communicate
by moving their ears.

Cat cafés, rabbit cafés, five dressed puppies sitting in a dog stroller, a group portrait with collies in Halloween costumes, the «insect ambassador» dressed up like a bug (Yukari Kabutomushi), Japanese boys going crazy over beetles—sofas, clothes, backpacks—everything for cuddly animals. Kawai! Dog hotels, animal psychotherapy...

Change of perspective: A pig weighing 110 kg is reduced to 0.7 m²; after six months his life is over, despite a life expectancy of fifteen years. Up to 26 chickens share 1 m²; their fattened, hybrid bodies are too heavy for their underdeveloped legs, unprofitable male chicks (no eggs) are shredded up immediately... Methods for economizing in factory farming include removing horns, cutting off beaks, castration, automatic feeding, cages... A slaughterhouse is an optimally organized battlefield—everything happens on a conveyor belt, including stunning the animals. This is not done only because it is more efficient, but because the screaming of animals that sense their approaching end is unbearable. Not kawai at all!

Then a cheap piece of meat lies in the supermarket, bloodless and wrapped in plastic. We don't see a living being and can buy it without a second thought. Lap dogs and livestock: the extreme poles of how we keep animals, a sign of our urbanity. These two sides of one coin mirror the today's alienation of people from nature. On one hand, we humanize animals (anthropomorphization) by making them a projection of our desires and longings, ascribing them consciousness and feelings that resemble our own. This pleases and comforts us, and goes as far as the idea that animals are better people. On the other hand, mass breeding exploits animals to the greatest extent possible and makes commodities out of living beings. The inaudible pain and suffering of animals have been banished from view.

It is not a coincidence that the animal welfare movement started during the Industrialization Revolution in the 19th century. The first animal protection law was passed in 1822 in England. Awareness of the suffering of animals was thanks to Jeremy Bentham, who believed that animals have primal forms of feelings, thoughts, and human behavior and need to be protected. But the philosopher Descartes's 1622 theory of the «animal-machine,» which has no perceivable emotions, has informed and continues to inform experiments on animals in laboratories as well as their use for other research purposes. In 1957 the Russian dog Laika was the first living being in the space, dying after only six hours in the confinement of Sputnik II. And several monkeys were sacrificed by NASA in space flight experiments.

In 1735 the Swedish naturalist Linné stated that animals are «living relatives of humans» (Menniskans Cousiner). But philosophical thoughts on the relationship between man and animal are as old as mankind itself, a complex question that forms a thread running throughout our cultural history. Animals are linked to magic, cults, sacrifices, religious worship... But in ancient Roman law, animals were also objects («movable goods»). A history from the perspective of animals has not yet been written... Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, based on the most ancient of myths, present the game of transformation between animals, humans and gods, a game with dynamic cultural power. Fables and legends, originally transmitted orally, are also examples of how man and animal are closely intertwined in all their forms.

The idea of a link between humans and animals came as a shock when Darwin proposed his theory of evolution in 1859, with human beings descended from animals, their closest relative the chimpanzee. «Man is no exception,» Darwin wrote in his diary. He is only a minor evolutionary deviation. The human being is biologically classified as a higher mammal—a primate—under the sub-order haplorhines or «dry nosed» primates. Thus, humans are part of the family of great apes. Still today, the idea remains a massive «narcissistic wound» that the origins of rational man—who considered himself higher than all other living creatures—can be traced back to the animal kingdom. There are scholars who emphasize the differences between humans and animals, with humans heavily favored to widen the gap. But other

experts and animal lobbyists negate the differences completely. Animals are capable of anything: feeling, dreaming, imagining, laughing, thinking, speaking... Hey! We need an animal parliament! Freud's psychoanalytic insight that man, with all of his rational abilities, does not behave autonomously but is steered by the unconscious added yet another shock to modern man's self-understanding. He is not «master in his own home.» What is a person? What is an animal? It seems there is no certain answer to these questions, at least if one considers the unflagging debates they cause. Perhaps what makes a human being a human being is the eternal attempt to define human beings and their identity. Is it helpful to draw a boundary between man and animals? It is certain that animals were on this earth before we were, and that we needed them to become what we are, not the other way around. With the exception of pets—the result of domestication by humans about 11,000 years ago (could wolves have domesticated humans?)—animals do not need us. They are fully adapted to their habitats and can survive there. There is the famous example of the tick, put forward by Uexküll around 1930. A tick needs only three things to have a successful life: being able to distinguish between up and down, warm and cold, sweat or no sweat. A female tick sits on a branch for up to eighteen years and falls off just when a mammal/person walks by. Then she bites firmly and lays her eggs... With that, she has exhausted her existence. Wild animals generally run away from us, which is why we find them particularly beautiful, graceful and interesting. In

order to watch these shy creatures, we have created zoos, wilderness parks, birdwatching platforms, safari lodges. If a person is occasionally killed, we are shocked by nature's fangs. But when this happens, nature has merely reclaimed her right to be nature. If one considers how humans exploit nature, we can only conclude that the wild beast is still man. We look at animals. Animals are aware of us. When gazing into each other's eyes, the question of man's identity is put to the test.

There is an anecdote about this: Two gentlemen visited a zoo and fed the monkeys. When the monkeys had finished, they handed back the leftovers through the cage bars. The two men fled the zoo, horrified... Apparently it is very disturbing to be confronted by a caricature of oneself, by one's own ape-like nature.

Human identity has to stand the test of both looking at an animal, one's own «other,» and that animal «other» returning the look. This is something that anyone who has an intimate relationship with an animal understands. If a person's glance meets that of a cat, the cat purrs and the person tries to do the same. A profound satisfaction arises; a mystical and mysterious communion emerges that reveals the continuity of the world over thousands of years: the animal form as the ancestor of the human one. But what the cat is «thinking,» we can only imagine. Also dog owners are sometimes sad that their compassionate companion is shrouded, even imprisoned, in the form of an animal...

What is certain: specific to their species, animals have sensations, empathy,

intelligence, the ability to remember (the Pavlovian dog, Hachiko) and can communicate with their body language and their voice organ. The dance of the bees, the song of the whale...

But—if we were to solve the riddle that animals present us, where would that leave our fascination for them?

Humans can be reduced to a creature that is either rich or poor. Biologically, humans are not fixed to a certain environment, they do not have a stable innate nature. This means that their basic endowment for self-preservation is quite elementary; they are poor in contrast to animals. But humans possess the richness of the environment they create, the environment that becomes their home. Humans are able to create symbols and thus, to create worlds—in myths, religion, language, art.

Since the result is not necessarily positive when judging today's culture—hopes for a more humane world have not grown in the face of «biopolitics» being forced on us—the Italian philosopher Agamben advocates an «anthropomorphic animality,» which could provide new political choices. In order to remain human, one must be aware of oneself as being non-human. «Man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human.» For this, he must accept his own animal form. When forsaking his animal-nature, man presses life out of himself; he becomes a cyborg.

The research pioneers of «biomimetics» or «bionics» have provided impressive evidence that a great deal can be learned from the intelligence of nature:

- To minimize air compression and noise in tunnels, a prototype for Shinkansen trains had a 15-meter-long aerodynamic nose modeled on the beak of a kingfisher.
- The surface of Lufthansa aircraft reproduces the scales of sharkskin to reduce air resistance. Airplanes of the future could become «whales of the sky,» using the whale's extremely elastic fins as models for lighter and more flexible wings than current ones.
- The eyes of flies have 3,000 facets offering a 360-degree view: the original model for panoramic cameras.
- Salmon have a natural GPS that helps them navigate through the ocean and back to the area where they were born.
- Analyzing how shellfish adhere to rocks in the sea helped in the development of harmless adhesives for household use.
- The extreme strength of the silk thread made by spiders has stimulated the production of new textiles, such as bulletproof vests.

- For his images of flight machines, even Leonardo da Vinci was inspired by bats. But the refined echolocation calls of bats have also served as a model for developing unmanned aerial vehicles (hawks and drones).
- In developing movement technology for robots, engineers have applied the jumping mechanisms of kangaroos and the crawling of spiders, whose legs move independently.
- Cat paws have offered a new idea for safer car tires: when cats change direction, their paws spread out to have more contact with the surface.

And so on...

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