

teorii a příbuzné zóny
Notebook for art,
(IX)
Sešit pro umění, theory and related zones

Becoming-with an Animal: Observations on Contemporary Non-Anthropocentric Tendencies¹

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1 This on-line content is the English translation of an article published in the print journal *Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones*. The original was published as: Tereza ŠPINKOVÁ, “Spolu-stávání-se zvířetem. Několik poznámek k současným neantropocentrickým tendencím,” *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny / Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones*, Vol. 17, 2023, No. 34, pp. 41–72. Translated from the Czech by Phil Jones.

The paper contributes to the current debate concerning the position of animals in contemporary art in the context of non-anthropocentric discourses. Significant changes have taken place in the field of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities in the last thirty years or so, with parallels in art. These changes concern a more consistent understanding of animals as living, feeling and acting subjects and individuals, rather than objects for human use. The text focuses primarily on the premises of posthumanism. It presents several motifs from the thinking of two theoreticians,

Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, briefly introduces the international context and then describes the specifics of the Czech environment. The main aim of the article is to show how visual art and the theories intertwined with it deal with new ethical challenges regarding freedom, rights and the treatment of animals. The selected artworks, created in the Czech Republic in the last few years and working with the medium of video, are meant to suggest tendencies about the need for a certain collaboration with animals, in this case with domesticated mammals.

Keywords:

contemporary art – feminist posthumanism – non-human animals – ethics – video – Czech artists

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Introduction

“He’s useless, he doesn’t work and he’s a carrier of foreign African disease,” claim the neighbors of bank clerk Zygmunt Sawicki, who takes in and cares for an abandoned camel, originally a circus attraction. The scene is from the 2000 Polish film *The Big Animal*, directed by and starring Jerzy Stuhr and based on a screenplay by the already deceased Krzysztof Kieslowski. The story takes place sometime around the 1980s in an unspecified Polish village. The neighbors’ complaints seem to sum up our (human) relationship to anything that deviates from the norm. The camel is too big, too foreign, and there is no “meaningful” use for it. It’s a bizarre monstrosity that has disturbed the rural tranquility. “Haven’t we enough of our own, human animals?” a colleague asks Zygmunt accusingly, as the camel’s fate is being decided upon in a tense situation.

The film *The Big Animal* illustrates our ambivalent approach towards animals,² which we admire, breed, love and own for fun, but also torment, hate, are allergic to and kill. The story of a camel suddenly finding itself in the Polish countryside shows how little it takes to turn an otherwise *normal* creature of *ours* (i.e. known, wanted, admired and loved) into something unwanted, harmful, *other*.³ It shows the extent to which we still live within acquired cultural-historical-social and aesthetic models, in a world organized and understood on the basis of dualistic categories. But these traditional dichotomies, which determine the forms of our knowledge and comprehension of the world, have their limits: they always exclude and do harm to someone.

So why choose this precise moment to address questions regarding the coexistence of human and non-human animals? This text draws on some thirty years of ongoing (and proliferating) discussions regarding a non-anthropocentric awareness and understanding of the world emerging from feminist and posthumanist theories and the findings of contemporary ethology and critical animal studies. I focus mainly on an interpretation of selected contemporary artworks that articulate human and non-human interactions in certain ways. These works also show how we might respond to posthumanist thinking via artistic production, all the while contributing to the creation of non-anthropocentric discourses within the context of a non-textual medium. Indeed, artistic practice can to a certain extent reveal and make visible hidden or adopted mechanisms and patterns of the past, while at the same time suggesting ways of moving forward, albeit often utopian and unlikely to be realized in the foreseeable future. In this text I show that, in addition to works that merely depict animals or work with them symbolically or pragmatically (for instance, works in which animals serve merely as a backdrop to the narrative of human actors), there is an increasing number of works in which artists grapple with ethical

- 2 For the sake of convenience, in this text I use the terms “human” and “animal,” although more appropriate would be “human” and “non-human animal,” since we are physiologically very similar (see, for example, Raymond H. A. CORBEY, *The Metaphysics of Apes: Negotiating the Animal-Human Boundary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005). However, the terms human and non-human appear several times in the essay, mostly in reference to theoretical texts, quotations, or in an effort to illustrate the connections that exist between humans and animals that non-anthropocentric theories examine.
- 3 A similar example of a situation in which exotic pets turn into dangerous monsters in a matter of seconds is offered by Hana Janečková and Eva Kofátková. They describe an incident in which a number of animals escaped from the local zoo after the 2015 floods in Tbilisi, Georgia, and were subsequently killed by people in the streets of the city. Hana JANEČKOVÁ – Eva KOŤÁTKOVÁ (eds.), *Animal Touch*, Praha: Artmap 2021, p. 12.

questions. In what ways can art convey animal being, needs and agency without exploiting, infantilizing and objectifying them? What are the paths that non-anthropocentric and posthumanist art are taking? And how might we characterize contemporary artworks being produced on Czech art scene?

When introducing the theoretical background, I shall first outline the roots of what is known as the *animal turn* of the late 1980s. Moving on, I will look at the basic concepts of feminist and posthumanist theorists Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, and the ethical approaches to the treatment of animals expounded by theorists Steve Baker and Giovanni Aloï. In the last part of the essay, I will focus on two works produced in recent years, mainly in the Czech Republic. These are videos that work in different ways with mammals, mostly those belonging to the category of domesticated animal. I will attempt to show how the ethical treatment of living animals is inscribed in these audiovisual works. I do not regard theory as being superior to artistic practice and I share the opinion of art theorist Dorota Łagodzka, who describes this relationship as follows:

So the works of art are not here to exemplify the theories, but rather the theories are here to elicit one of the possible interpretations of the works of art. What is more, I suggest that the works of art in the context of those ideas can raise problematic questions, which are significant for bioethical and biopolitical reasons and can influence our treatment of real non-human animals in relation to humans.⁴

Artistic theory and practice thus stand side by side. Creative currents intersect, influencing and shaping our behavior in the physical world.

*Non-anthropocentric theories –
the animal turn, posthumanism*

Fundamental to our understanding of animal subjectivity was Peter Singer's 1975 book *Animal Liberation*.⁵ His descriptions of unsuitable and sometimes cruel conditions in factory farms or laboratories made a huge impact on the general public. At the risk of over-simplifying matters, one could say that this text contributed to many practical changes being made in the sphere of animal rights in Western civilization. Thirteen years earlier, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published, which detailed the impact of pesticides on wildlife. Carson was one of the first people to raise the issue of animal extinction due to human activities.⁶ Many other research papers have contributed to the growing

4 Dorota ŁAGODSKA, "Hyperrealistic Human-animal Hybrids In Contemporary Art," in: Petr GIBAS – Karolína PAUKNEROVÁ – Marco STELLA, *Non-Humans and after in Social Science*, Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart 2016, p. 88. I will not focus here on the development of the terms bioethics and biopolitics (hence necropolitics), though they are worthy of attention. For the sake of simplicity I will work with the term ethics.

5 Peter SINGER, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*, New York: Avon Books 1975.

6 Rachel CARSON, *Silent Spring*, Boston – Cambridge MA: Houghton Mifflin 1962.

number of voices in post-war Western societies calling for respect for animal rights.⁷ These endeavors have been aided by the sphere of modern ethology, a discipline based on observation of animal behavior,⁸ thanks to which we now know that animals experience pain and pleasure and possess their own inner world and distinct personalities and characters. The humanities, especially anthropology, work with the term *animal turn*, which they identify as having taken place in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁹ According to Stefan Hnat and Marc Stella, the main feature of this turn was “that animals and human-animal relationships are explored more for their own sake.” Since then, animals have increasingly been understood as “social entities and subjective agents.”¹⁰ The field of research focusing on the relationship between humans and animals from a social-scientific, psychological and historical perspective has gradually taken shape under the umbrella term “animal studies.”¹¹

At the end of the last century, questions pertaining to the relationship between humans and their environment, and by extension to animals, permeated philosophy and other theoretical spheres. One of the currents of thought that reveals the possibilities of a non-anthropocentric coexistence is posthumanism, the roots of which can be traced back to the 1980s, though the term itself does not appear until the mid-1990s.¹² According to the theorist Cary Wolfe,¹³ the goal of posthumanism is not to reject humanism, but to critique it drawing on a wide range of transdisciplinary strategies, including the formulation of more inclusive ways for human and non-human beings to coexist on our planet.¹⁴ Donna Haraway, a philosopher and biologist based in the US, is considered one of the founders of posthumanism,¹⁵ even though she herself uses the term but sporadically and even

7 In the Czech Republic, the basic ideas of the social-legal-philosophical discourse are summarized in a comprehensive publication: Hana MULLEROVÁ – David ČERNÝ – Adam DOLEŽAL et al., *Kapitoly o právech zvířat. “My a oni” z pohledu filosofie, etiky, biologie a práva*, Praha: Academia 2016.

8 One of the founders of ethology is the Austrian zoologist Konrad Lorenz. Other important figures include Nikolaas Tinbergen, Frans de Waal, John Webster, Temple Grandin and Zdeněk Veselovský.

9 Stefan HNAT – Marco STELLA, “Human-animal Relations In Social & Cultural Anthropology,” in: GIBAS – PAUKNEROVÁ – STELLA, *Non-Humans and after*, pp. 37–53.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

11 The discipline is also sometimes referred to as “human-nonhuman-animal studies” or “anthrozoology.” Critical animal studies emerged around 2000. As yet we have no term in Czech. The sociologist Tereza Vandrovcová is most associated with this domain in the Czech Republic. See *Animal Studies*, <https://humanimal.cz/> (accessed 3 January 2023).

12 Cary WOLFE, *What Is Posthumanism*, Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press 2009, p. xiii.

13 Wolfe himself first used this term in 1995 in his essay “In Search of Post-humanist Theory.”

14 Cary WOLFE, “Reflections on Art and Posthumanism,” in: Giovanni ALOI – Susan MCHUGH, *Posthumanism in Art and Science: A Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press 2021, p. 324. For more on posthumanism see: Neil BADINGTON, *Posthumanism* (2000), or the work of Karen Barad.

15 Among others, for example, WOLFE, *What Is Posthumanism*, p. xiii; Ondřej NAVRÁTIL, *Řečiště a vlna. České umění a environmentální problematika na počátku 21. století*, Brno: Masarykova univerzita – Dexon Art 2020, p. 36.

belittles it.¹⁶ She is most interested in feminist posthumanism, forms of thinking with care, and the situatedness of the individual and their intersection with the environment. In *Bodies of Water*, the theorist Astrida Neimanis writes:

... a feminist posthumanism is a deeply ethical orientation. The kinds of ontologies it inaugurates – connected, indebted, dispersed, relational – are not only about correcting a phallogocentric understanding of bodies, but also about developing imaginaries that might allow us to relate differently.¹⁷

Drawing on decolonial and queer studies, feminist posthumanism re-evaluates who “we” are and how we “are in *this* together.”¹⁸ We are each different, we have different bodies and ways of expressing ourselves, and yet we must remain with these issues and unpack them.¹⁹

In the case of Donna Haraway and the animal turn, we must not overlook her background in science and her efforts to “combine the study of culture, technology and nature, to overcome the deeply rooted divide between these categories.”²⁰ Virtually all of her texts, beginning with *A Cyborg Manifesto* from 1985, disrupt traditions embedded in Western discourse since the Enlightenment.²¹ They do not place the “rational human” in the centre of things, but attempt to think about human functioning and existence in a non-hierarchical way. For Haraway, one way out of the ongoing crisis is by breaking down boundaries (those we are used to from our cultural history) in three domains: those between human and animal; between animal-human (organism) and machine; and between the physical and non-physical.²²

In her 2003 text *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway introduces a new term in support of her concept of a non-binary world: *natureculture*.²³ The text is about the intersection of the human and the animal and is based on a description of the author’s relationship with her dog Cayenne. Her next book, *When Species Meet*, was published in 2008 and is a follow-up to *The Companion Species Manifesto*, in which she elaborates further on the possibilities of interspecies inclusivity on our planet. “The world is not

16 “I am not a posthumanist, I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind.” Cf. Donna J. HARAWAY, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press 2008, p. 19. Haraway is part of a tradition based on the work of Michel Foucault, as well as feminist and postcolonial discourses, and for the sake of simplicity is sometimes included in the second wave of poststructuralist feminism. Helena BENDOŤÁ – Matěj STRNAD, “Doslov: Donna Harawayova a posthumanismus kyborgu a opu,” in: Helena BENDOŤÁ – Matěj STRNAD (eds.), *Spoleenske vedy a audiovize*, Praha: AMU 2014, p. 641.

17 Astrida NEIMANIS, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2017, p. 11.

18 Rosi BRAIDOTTI, *Transpositions*, Cambridge: Polity 2006, p. 35.

19 See Donna Haraway and her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham – London: Duke University Press 2016.

20 BENDOŤÁ – STRNAD, “Doslov: Donna Harawayova,” p. 644.

21 I use the term Western discourse to refer primarily to the European (and North American) mode of thought.

22 Donna J. HARAWAY, “Kyborgsky manifest,” in: BENDOŤÁ – STRNAD, *Spoleenske vedy a audiovize*, pp. 612–615.

23 Donna J. HARAWAY, *Manifestly Haraway*, Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press 2016, p. 93ff.

finished,”²⁴ Haraway argues, and shows how our existence is in constant interaction with its environment, a continuous multi-species and horizontal process of *becoming-with*. For Haraway, the creation of *kinship*, and not just blood kinship, is one strategy for finding new ways to reject the hierarchy of so-called speciesism.²⁵

While Donna Haraway may not see herself as a posthumanist theorist, the opposite is true of Rosi Braidotti, a philosopher and feminist theorist based in Utrecht. Braidotti's ideas are crucial for the social sciences. They range from gender and feminism, via questions of identity and otherness, to positive coexistence in general. Within an egalitarian and vitalist conception of the world, Braidotti works with the notion of *zoe*, the “dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself,”²⁶ a category that includes not only humans but also everything non-human. “Zoe-centered egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post-anthropocentric turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded, and unsentimental response to the opportunistic transspecies commodification of life that is the logic of advanced capitalism.”²⁷ According to Braidotti, posthumanist subjectivity is in symbiosis with all other living and non-living entities, and she divides this relationship into three *becomings*: *becoming-earth*; *becoming-machine*; and *becoming-animal*. The search for a new relationship and interaction between human and non-human animals is linked to the realization that “[A]nimals are no longer the signifying system that props up humans’ self-projections and moral aspirations.”²⁸

Building on Donna Haraway's *The Companion of Species Manifesto*, Braidotti argues that if we are to “coexist” together, we need to start thinking differently, inclusively, and in solidarity. Reflecting upon how this might be possible, she posits a model of affirmative ethics in which “The ethical relation, however, consists in the active transformation of the negative into something else. Ethics is not just the application of moral protocols, norms and values, but rather the force that contributes to conditions of affirmative becoming.”²⁹ According to Braidotti, affirmative ethics does not deny our pain, suffering and vulnerability, but reveals new ways of dealing with them.³⁰ Similarly, Donna Haraway speaks of the need for an activating, curious and respectful stance, not a nothing-but-critique approach.³¹ And so these theories have much in common and pursue essentially the same goal, namely, to reveal the subjectivity of living creatures, emphasizing their interconnectedness and interdependence and critiquing their anthropocentric exploitation. Safe in the knowledge that we are different, together we can search for common solutions.³²

24 Donna J. HARAWAY, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press 2008, p. 244.

25 HARAWAY, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 99–103.

26 Rosi BRAIDOTTI, *Posthuman Knowledge*, Cambridge – Medford: Polity Press 2019, p. 60.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

29 BRAIDOTTI, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 168.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

31 HARAWAY, *Manifestly Haraway*, p. 211.

32 Another methodology exploring non-hierarchical coexistence is interspecies ethnography as formulated by Eben Kirksey. See Eben KIRKSEY, *The Multispecies Salon*, Durham – London: Duke University Press 2014. Dorota Łagodská and Anna Barcz float the term zoocentrism, which places an emphasis less on “antropos” and more on “zoe.” See Anna BARCZ – Dorota: ŁAGODSKA, *Animals and Their People: Connecting East and West in Cultural Animal Studies*, Leiden – Boston: Brill 2018, p. ixff.

Art, ethics and animals

One of the first people to introduce an awareness of animal studies into the field of art was the British art historian Steve Baker in his books *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (1993) and *The Postmodern Animal* (2000). In *Artist/Animal* from 2013, he poses the following questions:

Can contemporary artists be trusted with animals, living or dead?
Can they be trusted to act responsibly, ethically, when their work engages with questions of animal life? Will they put ethics first, or will they put the interests of their art *before* ethics?³³

According to Baker, whose work embraces posthumanism, the answers to these questions are on the whole negative within the context of art practice at the turn of the millennium. However, his book *Artist/Animal* draws on the work of artists who, in Baker's opinion, can indeed be trusted. These artists do not put themselves or their works before the rights, lives and freedom of the animal: on the contrary. The animals in the works selected by Baker are not objects, but thinking, feeling and agentic subjects. Likewise, the theorist Giovanni Aloi, in his 2012 book *Art & Animals*, sketches out a transformation of the concept of animals in contemporary art,³⁴ in which artists and creators have begun to address themselves more to the subjectivity of animals. His position is embedded in the unlearning of approaches based on humanist cultural history, to be replaced by the discovery and acquisition of unifying approaches that allow for new conceptions of the future.³⁵

According to Giovanni Aloi, the roots of a broader awareness of ethical issues can already be found in post-war art: "The rise of performance art and the impact of movements like the Situationist International, Land Art, and Feminist Art marked the beginning of a new ethical awareness of what it means to be human among other non-human actants and to co-habit and negotiate ever more problematic conceptions of geopolitical space."³⁶ However, widely celebrated works such as *Live Animal Habitat* of 1966 by Richard Serra, *Twelve Live Horses* by Jannis Kounellis of 1969 and *I like America and America likes me* by Joseph Beuys of 1974 still focused on the art itself, rather than the ethical issues involved in the presentation of animals in gallery institutions.

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison's project *Survival Piece: Portable Fish Farm* of 1971 is one of the first works to deal with the life and experience of animals themselves. Locally caught fish were transported to a London gallery, where they were killed, fried and served up to visitors at the opening.³⁷ In the sphere of video art one might mention *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* by Bill Viola from 1986, which depicts animals in their "being".³⁸ However, the artist himself interpreted the work more as a "personal investigation of the inner states and connections to animal consciousness

33 Steve BAKER, *Artist/Animal*, Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press 2013, p. 1.

34 Giovanni ALOI, *Art & Animals*, London – New York: I.B.Tauris 2012.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. xv–xxi.

36 ALOI – MCHUGH, *Posthumanism in Art and Science*, p. 6.

37 JANEČKOVÁ – KOŤÁTKOVÁ, *Animal Touch*, p. 16; Karel STIBRAL, "Bio Art. Živé organismy a biologie v umění," *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny*, Vol. 5, 2011, No. 10, p. 29.

38 ALOI, *Art & Animals*, p. 14.

we all carry within.”³⁹ It was only in the 1990s that the situation began to change, since when an interest in animals in art has gradually increased.⁴⁰ According to the German art theorist Jessica Ulrich, it is only in the twenty-first century that we can truly speak of an animal turn in contemporary art.⁴¹ In this text I will leave aside the question of how far individual works and artists work ethically with animals without exploiting them. What is certain is that they are united by an interest in animals themselves. In 2018, an awareness of animal subjectivity, the increasing frequency of artists working with animals, and new domains in which our relationship with them are being revealed gave rise to *Minding Animals Curatorial Guidelines: Animals and Art Exhibitions*, which includes a code of ethics for curators and artists. The code states, for example, that artworks should not work (in galleries and museums) with any live animals, and that when working “only” with animal parts, careful consideration should be given as to whether there exists an alternative solution.⁴²

The situation on the Czech art scene

Today, as artists and theorists increasingly integrate local and global experience (whether through physical movement beyond their place of residence or through virtual movement within the online world), it can be somewhat misleading to focus only on works produced within the borders of one country. Nonetheless, I believe that a particular local context (comprising language, national cultural policy, education, gallery operations, etc.) can still provide a framework for the creation of specific tendencies and phenomena. I base my arguments for this choice on my own situatedness in the sense that Rosi Braidotti, among others, writes about it.⁴³ My points of reference are the publications *Zelené ostrovy* (Green Islands) and *Řečiště a vlna* (Watercourses and a Wave) by the art theorist Ondřej

39 <https://www.eai.org/titles/i-do-not-know-what-it-is-i-am-like> (accessed 5 January 2023).

40 For more on this topic, see, for example, Randy MALAMUD, “Americans Do Weird Things with Animals, or, Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road?,” in: Tom TYLER – Manuela ROSSINI, *Animal Encounters*, Leiden: Brill 2009, pp. 73–96; Karin ANDERSEN – Luca BOCHICCHIO, “The Presence of Animals in Contemporary Art as a Sign of Cultural Change,” *Forma. Revista D’Humanitats*, Vol. 4, 2012, No. 6, pp. 12–23.

41 Jessica ULRICH, “Animal Artistic Agency in Performative Interspecies Art in the Twenty-First Century,” *Boletín de Arte*, Vol. 40, 2019, No. 40, 71. Among contemporary foreign artists we might cite (drawing on my ongoing research based on the charting of available literature and exhibitions mainly in Europe) Yalda Afsah, Allora & Calzadilla, Marcus Coates, Sue Coe, Mark Dion, Hans Haacke, Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson, Kathy High, Carsten Höller and Rosemarie Trockel, Olly and Suzi, Pierre Huyghe, Catherine Chalmers, Britta Jachinski, Eduardo Kace, Nicolas Primat, Maja Smrekar, Daniel Szalai. The list of exhibitions would include DOCUMENTA (13) in 2012 in Kassel and the “posthumanist” biennale in Venice in 2022.

42 See <https://www.mindinganimals.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Minding-Animals-Curatorial-Guidelines-for-Exhibitions-27-Sept-2017.docx.pdf> (accessed 4 January 2023). One of the authors of the manual, Jessica Ulrich, said that although it was only a recommendation, reactions were not universally positive, and voices were heard complaining that restrictions were being placed on artistic freedom. Jessica ULRICH, “Curating Beyond the Human: The Future of Animal Exhibition,” a paper delivered at the conference *Exhibiting Animals: Curatorial Strategies and Narratives*, University of Warsaw, 18 November 2022. The manual was published under the aegis of the association Minding Animals, which has long been organizing interdisciplinary conferences and bringing experts together around this topic.

43 Cf. Rosi BRAIDOTTI, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge – Medford: Polity Press 2013, p. 5. Braidotti writes that a “key methodological and tactical measure to support this process is to practice the politics of location, or situated and accountable knowledge practices.” *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Navrátil, who develops the theme of animals as part of a discussion of environmental art in his home country of Czechia.⁴⁴ The second book in particular focuses in its final section on the period lasting approximately from 2015 to 2018, described as a “wave” of environmental themes that brought with it an awareness of speculative realism and post-humanism, currents of thought “the centre of attention of which is non-anthropocentric ethics, finding a more harmonious approach and relationship to broadly understood non-human entities.”⁴⁵

At the risk of over-simplifying matters, it can be argued that an awareness of the climate crisis in Czechia has, for various reasons, only recently become fully incorporated into art, with artists beginning to focus on landscapes devastated by the fossil fuel and agricultural industries, as well as air pollution, the end of the world and humanity, questions relating to nature, forests, etc. In these projects, animals mostly occupied the role of more or less suffering elements of these destroyed environments. On the other hand, they appeared as subjects in works by Jana Doležalová, whose videos deal largely with the topic of animal extinction or their use in laboratory and medical research. Animals also feature in the work of Linda and Daniela Dostálková, Michal Kindernay, Sláva Sobotovičová and Tomáš Hrůza. From 2015 onwards, the works created as part of the “wave” referred to above shift from more general themes (nature vs. culture, the end of the world, forest ecosystems, landscape devastation), to more specific examples, be this microbes, insects, mammals, water or ecosystems. This motif, whether we understand it as posthumanist or include it within a different discursive framework, confirms the trend for animals to become our companions in artworks, with their own needs, activities and subjectivities, which we must learn to accept so as to be able to work together towards a full awareness that our world is “more than human.”⁴⁶

In the context of art, an important publication is the collection of essays *Animal Touch*,⁴⁷ edited by the curator Hana Janečková and the artist Eva Kořátková, as well as the creation of initiatives⁴⁸ and other activities ranging from exhibitions, discussions and workshops, to educational events and videos⁴⁹ that address this important topic. Exhibitions attempting to avoid entrapment within an anthropocentric perspective⁵⁰ over recent years include *Kampaň*, which features the work of Linda Dostálková and

44 Ondřej NAVRÁTIL, *Zelené ostrovy. České umění ve věku environmentalismu 1968–2000*, Brno: Jaromír Gargulák – MUNI Press 2018; NAVRÁTIL, *Řečiště a vlna*.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 287.

46 This formulation, which quickly became popular, was coined by the American ecologist and philosopher David Abram in 1996 in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*, New York: Pantheon Books 1996.

47 JANEČKOVÁ – KOŘÁTKOVÁ, *Animal Touch*. This book is a continuation of the project run by the Institute of Anxiety entitled *Factor Farm Animals: Out of Touch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, which was launched in 2018.

48 In addition to the Institute of Anxiety, there is the LES initiative or the platforms RurArtmap and Artbiom.

49 The three-part video *The Art of the Anthropocene* was important for clarifying contemporary concepts related to environmental issues being introduced into the Czech Republic from abroad. It was created in 2019 for Artyčok.TV by the theoretician Anna Remešová and the artist David Přílučík. See: <https://artycok.tv/cs/post/umeni-antropocenu> (accessed 27 August 2024).

50 There are not many examples of such exhibitions. For example, if you enter the world “animal” into search engines on Czech online platforms (Artlist, VVP AVU, Artmap), there will be many results, the problem being that most of them link to exhibitions examining the representation of animals that do not deal with issues surrounding their ethical treatment and status.

explores the strategies of animal rights activist organizations.⁵¹ An exceptionally concentrated grasp of the issue was displayed by the exhibition *Human and Animal Under One Roof*, which looks at alternatives to modern rationality, including feminist issues of care, corporeality and motherhood.⁵² In the spring of 2023, the Pragovka Gallery hosted the international exhibition *Little John*, the central theme of which was the coexistence of human and non-human beings. In 2023, the annual Art Safari show at Studio Bubec focused on the theme of animals, and the Plato Gallery in Ostrava will host an exhibition on “animals” in autumn 2023.⁵³ One might say that the horizontal and “ethical” encounter between art and animals is an increasingly popular theme on the Czech art scene.

Notes on selected works

As I mentioned at the beginning of the text, the audiovisual works I have selected have much in common and, among other things, deal with the human treatment of domesticated animals. Using the example of two works by Czech artists, *Plemeno* (Breed) (2022) by David Přílučík and *Elementární tendence soudružnictví a vazeb* (Elementary Tendencies of Comradeliness and Relations) (2021) by Denisa Langrová, I will look at the ways in which artists might contribute to the contemporary non-anthropocentric debate.

David Přílučík: The Czechoslovak Wolfhound as a Symbol of Permeable Borders

The artist David Přílučík (1991) unveiled the outcomes of his artistic research into the Czechoslovak Wolfdog to the world for the first time in 2019 at the exhibition *F0-F5* at the TIC Gallery in Brno and later at the Nitra Gallery in Slovakia. The project was based on fragments (of a video and installation), from which visitors pieced together a complete picture and acquired an insight into the “cultivation” of a dog breed. This particular story began in 1956, when Colonel Karel Hartl submitted an official request to create a new service breed for the Czechoslovak Border Guard by crossing a dog and a wolf. “The Czechoslovak Wolfdog, the incarnation of the borders of a non-existent state, an unknown creature no longer wolf nor dog. For David Přílučík this was the springboard from which he developed his reflections on identity, territory and dualistic thinking. Imagine a free dog. Would it still be a dog?”⁵⁴

The Czechoslovak Wolfdog brings together a domesticated (tame) animal and a “wild” animal. The breed breaks down the boundaries between the categories we are

- 51 *Kampaň*, Galerie Kurzor 2019 (curated by Edith Jeřábková). Cf. Edith JERÁBKOVÁ, “Rozhovor s Danielou a Lindou Dostálovými,” *Galerie Kurzor*, <https://cca.fcca.cz/galerie/galerie-kurzor/2/daniela-linda-dostalkovy-kampan/> (accessed 7 January 2023). The theme of “animals” also appeared during the Photography Festival in 2021 entitled *Pozemšťané/Pozemšťanky*, or in the exhibition *Optimalizované bajky o dobrém životě* at the PLATO Gallery in 2022 (curated by Daniela and Linda Dostálová and Marek Pokorný).
- 52 *Human and Animal Under One Roof*, Galerie Entrance 2022 (curated by Tereza Jindrová). Cf. Viktorie VÍTŮ, “Spoutání smyčkami závislosti,” *Artalk.cz*, 1 August 2022, <https://artalk.cz/2022/08/01/spoutani-smyckami-zavislosti/> (accessed 7 January 2023).
- 53 *Little John*, Pragovka Gallery 2023 (curated by Tereza Záchová); *Festival Art Safari: ZVĚŘ*, Studio Bubec 2023 (curated by Daniela Kramerová); exhibition program of the PLATO Gallery for 2023.
- 54 Zuzana JANEČKOVÁ – David PŘÍLUČÍK, “F0-F5,” curatorial text, *Galerie TIC*, <https://galerie-tic.cz/cs/f5-f0> (accessed 3 January 2023).

accustomed to using in Western discourse when describing the world around us. It literally and metaphorically connects what we consider to be both “ours” (*cultural*) and the *other/foreign* (*natural*). In the past, the wolfhound had been created by humans for their own purposes. However, it turned out that it was unable to fulfill these “purposes”. The “wolf blood” prevents the animal from barking so as to draw attention to an enemy, and the “dog blood” means it is fixated on a single “master:” if the master leaves their job, the wolfhound will not obey other people. This living creature behaves differently in reality to how people had originally imagined it would. This is also the reason the wolfhound eventually fell into the category of household pet. However, even within the “dog-owning” community, it is often considered “special,” since in order to raise and train it, new boundaries and modes of human behavior and care (i.e. training) had to be created within which these animals were permitted to operate. The wolfhound is often seen as “beautiful” or “majestic” because of its appearance and the “wildness” of its “blood.” It is as though this animal reflects a nostalgic (modernist) longing to return to a lost paradise, to unspoilt nature, to something diametrically opposed to our so-called culture. However, as anthropologist and cultural geographer Jamie Lorimer puts it: “There is no singular Nature to which scientists or politicians can make recourse.”⁵⁵

For the exhibition of the finalists of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award winners, Přílučík created a half-hour-long, black-and-white narrative video entitled *Plemeno* that is linked thematically to the *F0-F5* project. The fictional story focuses on a breeder of three Czechoslovak Wolfdogs, who by sheer chance gets temporary custody of another dog. However, the viewer never actually sees this dog, but only interactions with it or footage filmed from the animal’s point of view. The dog is female and from an illegal breeding kennel, possibly of wolfhounds. It gradually becomes clear that something is amiss. The female does not get along with the other dogs and the breeder is both disconcerted by her and yet comes to care for her more and more. What began as aversion and distance turns into love.

Přílučík focuses primarily on humankind and its behavior towards other beings, while at the same time depicting animal agency in stark detail. The presence of the female dog disrupts the previously functioning order. It is up to the viewer to use their imagination when interpreting what eventually happens in the film. We see that it is the invisible female that determines the action for the viewer. The breeder originally plans to disrupt the established rules of wolfhound breeding. He sets out to establish his own kennel, thus alienating the other breeders in the community. Eventually, however, the female intervenes and changes the situation. An important motif which the video develops is that of nature conservation, or rather care for the natural world, not only of the wolfhounds, but also of the specific region, since the breeder is also the warden of a nature reserve. For Přílučík it is essential not to contradict these terms (in his profile for the Jindřich Chalupecký Award he specifically cites concepts of nature, care and nature conservation), but to reveal their problematic nature through junctures into which the viewer is led by the video narrative.⁵⁶

Using a concrete example, Přílučík shows what transformations are taking place in the relationship between human and non-human beings (and within and around them),

55 Jamie LORIMER, *The Probiotic Planet: Using Life to Manage Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2020, p. 8.

56 David PŘÍLUČÍK, CJCH 2022 Profile, <https://www.sjch.cz/david-prilucik/> (accessed 15 April 2023).

and what this means for our coexistence. In his work, we can trace feminist and posthumanist ethical questions relating to said coexistence, as well as to care, love, the stratification of power, domination, and the definition of who “we” humans are. In fact, the relationship between humans and animals is fluid and reciprocal, and according to some scholars impacts our bodies as well. In her text for the exhibition *Human and Animal Under One Roof* at the Entrance Gallery in Prague, which included one of the videos from the *FO-F5* project, curator Tereza Jindrová references research claiming that “over the course of fifteen thousand years of coexistence, dog and man have interacted even at the genetic level.”⁵⁷ Similarly, in *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway writes: “I bet if you were to check our DNA, you’d find some potent transfections between us.”⁵⁸ These DNA transfections also relate to questions of emotion, addiction and love: “Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog? How is becoming with a practice of becoming worldly? When species meet, the question of how to inherit histories is pressing, and how to get on together is at stake.”⁵⁹ In the animal specimens selected by Přílučík and in their contact with humans, a certain *becoming-with* takes place through the mutual touch of dog and breeder, through thinking about how to involve this “irregular” being (from a human perspective) in the creation of a new breeding lineage.

What is the shared history of which Haraway speaks that we have inherited and that we need to take care of together for the future? How do we get along, what does this breed show us? In *When Species Meet* Haraway recounts a story set in South Africa, where a similar breed of dog was created during the era of apartheid involving the crossbreeding of a wolf imported from North America. However, like its Czechoslovak counterpart, this dog was unable to fulfill the requirements and tasks for which it had originally been “manufactured,” i.e. tracking insurgents and guarding the national borders. After the fall of apartheid, a brisk trade sprang up in this breed. However, the breeding process was not regulated or subject to oversight and thousands of these creatures were left homeless. There was nowhere to “return” these animals, since they existed outside of any category.⁶⁰ Přílučík alludes to these themes in a fictional story in which a breeder incurs the wrath of other breeders while (perhaps) eventually being “eliminated” by an animal that is even more “borderline” than the “classic” Czechoslovakian Wolfdog. The animal is now actant, it has taken a step its human carers had not expected⁶¹ and thus confirmed its own agency within the framework of an encounter between species. In Přílučík’s story, the motives behind the possible “liberation” of a species bred by humans are also revealed, as is the intelligence of the wolves, their needs, and their unique personalities.

David Přílučík’s work thus questions whether the call of posthumanist theorists among others for the creation of an interspecies community can be translated into practice, and if so, then how:

57 Tereza JINDROVÁ, “Human and Animal Under One Roof,” curatorial text, *Galerie Entrance*, <https://entrancegallery.com/en/human-and-animal-under-one-roof/> (accessed 7 January 2023).

58 HARAWAY, *When Species Meet*, p. 15.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

60 HARAWAY, *When Species Meet*, pp. 36–38.

61 I see a similarity in the plausibly tragic ending with the real-life story of the killer whale Tilikum, which killed its keeper. Přílučík himself told me that this story offered inspiration of sorts. Personal interview with David Přílučík, 20 April 2022.

When talking of interspecies interconnectedness or coexistence, most theoretical texts end by challenging us to consider how to live together. How to be together with creatures whose life needs conflict with mine, say? Is it even possible to fulfill the idealistic demand that we live in harmony with everything around us? And if it is not possible, by what means can we distribute violence and care in a way that is still to some extent acceptable to all?⁶²

However, Přílučík complicates the discussion of interspecies coexistence even further, since he does not choose a fully domesticated animal, but one that could be characterized as in a sense “liminal.”⁶³ The film *Plemeno* thus asks questions about how far care and love for another species can go, as well as addressing other bioethical and biopolitical themes: who will live and who will die.⁶⁴

*Denisa Langrová: The Feasibility
of the Feralization of Cows*

The work of Denisa Langrová (1996) is heavily invested in the possibilities of interspecies and non-hierarchical coexistence. Her main medium of expression is video, with Langrová herself one of the central actors, usually the narrator. These narrative videos last up to twenty minutes and the artist says of them that “in terms of genre, they straddle the boundary between fairy tale and documentary.”⁶⁵ Elsewhere they are described as speculative documentaries or video essays “freely combining real and fictional elements.”⁶⁶ *Elementární tendence soudružnictví a vazeb* from 2021 is a 17-minute-long video in which Langrová recounts the story of cattle and their domestication and raises questions regarding their possible feralization and freedom. The research she conducted prior to shooting the video was inspired by the work of writer Ursula K. Le Guin, fantasy stories and practices (tarot, witchcraft, magic, fairy tales and utopian stories), and feminist theories and approaches. The imaginative world intersects with realist backdrops and comes into contact with real animals. The artist spent a long time as a volunteer at the Pastvina Community Garden near Prague, which provides shelter for abused or unwanted animals. It was here that she encountered the two cows that feature in the story recounted in the video. As regards the context within which the work was created and its analysis in this text, it is important to mention that Langrová is not only qualified in art. She studied for a year at the Veterinary University in Brno and is one year into a Master’s program in Animal Health and Welfare Management at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague.

The video is about the possibility of the freedom of cattle in connection with humans. The main character, played by Langrová herself, gradually explores the

62 Personal interview with David Přílučík, 20 April 2022.

63 For example, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka divide animals into several categories: domesticated, wild and liminal. Sue DONALDSON – Will KYMLICKA, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011.

64 On the necropolitics of unwanted species for which humans are responsible, see, for example, CRITICAL ART ENSEMBLE, *Aesthetics, Necropolitics, and Environmental Struggle*, New York: Autonomedia 2018.

65 The Denisa Langrová portfolio, 2022.

66 “Můžem vám pomoci? / Denisa Langrová,” <https://www.otevrenakultura.cz/cs/muzem-vam-pomoci-denisa-langrova> (accessed 7 January 2023).

environment through the prism of the four basic elements, now linked by a fifth: quintessence. In the opening shots the camera circles around the cowshed, taking in its metal and concrete walls. Slowly we see the bodies of the cows. “What kind of place is this?” asks a voice in the video. “The entities involuntarily inhabiting this environment are deeply and unwillingly linked with me. As if we had entered some kind of union in the past.” The narrator is describing a human-cow union in which one party has for centuries been co-opted into this relationship more voluntarily than the other.⁶⁷ The camera films close-ups of the cows’ bodies in such a way that we never see them whole, but do have an opportunity to view the environment they are in: concrete, iron fences, chains, dry straw. “The cows were originally linked to the element of earth, I must find it,” the voice adds, establishing the goal that will feature in the next act. Langrová finds inspiration in the Milovice region, where a nature reserve has recently been created in what used to be military training grounds, where European bison, wild horses and Tauros cattle live. In the video the artist meets a cow that has been named Nebeská (Heavenly) from the Pastvina Community Garden. At first, they walk side by side, before lying down together in a moment of idleness and harmony. Their connection to the element of earth is presented in the video through their bodies, specifically through their digesting and subsequent “roasting” of the soil with cow dung. “Cows are fundamentally connected to the soil. Their bodies contain substances essential for the harmony of the elements on earth,” intones the narrator. Langrová stresses the importance of the interweaving of human and bovine bodies, especially through the destigmatization of “secretions,” including cow’s milk. Care for the body is explicitly translated in the video into thinking about the microbiome, as when the narrator states: “(we need to) expand our conception of our own metabolism, (...) to share the microbiome.”

Over the last few years, the importance of microbes and our corporeal permeability has been a much discussed topic, not only in biology and medicine, but also in the social sciences and philosophy. Posthumanist feminism speaks of a “probiotic turn,”⁶⁸ which reveals the inadequacy of modern concepts of self-enclosed individuality through “an interest in microbiotic life forms and their intersection with human corporeality.”⁶⁹ Langrová approaches “work with secretions” in much the same way as Lorimer writes of them: “Taboo modern elements like dirt, rot, damp, and mess are given salutary probiotic potential.”⁷⁰ In this video, Langrová also criticises the practice of factory farming, the de-individualization of animals, and their disconnection from nature and the land caused by mass industrialization. But this is not the main message, merely inspiration for the search for one’s own starting point. Langrová herself is inspired by the feminist and posthumanist theories already referred to, which she creatively and visually reshapes into her stories.

This video can be seen as embodying an attempt to experience deeply the current fraught situation and to find within oneself the strength to be active via a specific kind of therapeutic agency (visual, creative and narrational). Basically, Langrová adopts the

67 Finish artists Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson worked in a similar way in their project *Museum of Nonhumanity* (2016), in which they attempted to look at our shared history and future from the perspective of cows.

68 See LORIMER, *The Probiotic Planet*.

69 Tereza ŠPINKOVÁ, “Život podle ZOE: přísliby a meze výzkumu více-něž-lidské jedinečnosti,” in: Hana JANEČKOVÁ – Zuzana JAKALOVÁ (eds.), *Multilogues on the Now: O žlázách, membránách a dutinách*, Praha: Display 2021, p. 17.

70 LORIMER, *The Probiotic Planet*, p. 8.

model of affirmative ethics as formulated by Braidotti. She is not content to merely criticize and depict the exploitation of animals, but actively unpacks the possibilities of symbiotic interspecies coexistence and *becoming-with*. This activity need not be radical – when it comes to finding connections between the human and non-human, a certain “kinship” with cow-individuals is established. An important part of Langrová’s projects involves spending time together. She remains in close proximity to the animals, observes them, and tunes into their perception of time, space, and needs. In her text “Caring to Dialogue,” the American feminist theorist Josephine Donovan paraphrases Ludwig Wittgenstein, who famously said that if a lion could talk, we would not understand him.⁷¹ Donovan takes issue with this, arguing that lions do indeed “talk” and can be understood. We simply need to listen to what they are saying, while “paying emotional attention” to them.⁷² It is this emotional attention that Langrová pays to the animals and the outcome of which she subsequently processes in her work. “I am proposing (...) that we shift the epistemological source of theorizing about animals to the animals themselves,”⁷³ writes Donovan, and it is Langrová’s focus on the personality of a particular cow, Nebeská from the Pastvina Community Garden, that fulfils this requirement.

Conclusion

[I]n art, and in theory and philosophy – is not one question but two: not just what the ostensible content of the work is (let’s say, questioning anthropocentrism, to stay with the current example), but *how* the work tries to make good on that commitment. The issue is not just *what* you’re doing (which is usually the easy and obvious part), but *how* you’re doing it.⁷⁴

Since I have focused in this article on the posthumanist motif of *becoming-with*, I will now try to summarize *how* this activity (i.e. *what*) is translated into the works referred to. The way *how* also relates to the medium, i.e. video, that connects both works. It goes without saying that works are currently being created of a more static nature (sculptures, paintings, drawings, installations, etc.) that also have a non-anthropocentric focus. However, the video format is exceptional in that it allows us to record movement and sound, guide the viewer through a story and “reveal the existence” (albeit narratively processed) of real animals. And it is the recording of real, material animals that is one important aspect of the *how*. Přílučík worked primarily with three Wolfdogs, and negotiated their needs with their breeder. Before filming, Denisa Langrová became so close to a cow named Nebeská in the Pastvina Community Garden that neither was afraid to come into close proximity with the other. Both these artworks define themselves in opposition to the objectification of animals, a phenomenon that stems from the fact that we often name and think of animals in terms of “herds” or “packs,” which in turn prevents us from

71 Josephine DONOVAN, “Caring to Dialogue: Feminism and the Treatment of Animals,” in: Josephine DONOVAN – Carol J. ADAMS, *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 362.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 360.

73 DONOVAN, “Caring to Dialogue,” p. 361.

74 ALOI – MCHUGH, *Posthumanism in Art and Science*, p. 324.

perceiving their individuality.⁷⁵ Likewise, the feminist theorist Carol J. Adams points out that the objectification of animals and our treatment of them (and by extension their slaughter) goes hand in hand with the way we name animals (and products, i.e. their remains). Most people do not find it problematic to eat meat because the label “meat” is a “collective term” not tied to a specific being.⁷⁶ The close, almost tangible bodily experience with specific individuals in the videos is also conveyed to the viewer through close-ups of fur, eyes, hooves, tails, and through the motion of the animal, which we almost “sense” for ourselves through the medium used.

In interviews, both Denisa Langrová and David Příkladík mentioned that they often had to defer to the filmed animals, which surprised them with their behavior, expressions or (non-)cooperation.⁷⁷ And so the resulting work did not look entirely as they had originally intended. They also emphasized how important it was for them to think about ways of working as authors that would exploit animals as little as possible during the creation of the work – both physically and metaphorically. Furthermore, both were aware of the problematic authorial position ensuing from “giving voice” to animals, which implicitly involves an unequal relationship between the “giver” and the “receiver.” In contrast, inspiring in this respect may be the “practice of curiosity” that Donna Haraway has articulated, drawing primarily on the observations and texts of inclusive education theorist Vinciane Despret.⁷⁸ According to Despret, a “curious practice” should be pursued with all due “politeness” towards the observed, and one’s “whole being” should be “trained” during these encounters.⁷⁹ When “making kin” with other species, we have much to unlearn, while being open to the unexpected and unpredictable. The animals in the videos referred to, for example, are given a certain “freedom” of movement and activity and are not subjected to human speech or otherwise manipulated by the artist.⁸⁰ Příkladík explains his position as follows:

To say that an animal has collaborated with us in the classical sense is illusory. It would mean that it would have to be aware of the entire context within which it moves. I’m not sure that happens during the creation of works of art. We do collaborate, but in a different way than we both think, because my world is different from that of the animal. Nonetheless, we meet somewhere. I’ve thought about creating a game that would be the same for both me and the animals and which could somehow equalize the relationship between us.⁸¹

75 *Ibid.* The so-called mass paradox operates in a similar way, see, for example Tereza VANDROVCOVÁ, “The Mechanisms of Contradictory Relationships to Animals,” in: JANEČKOVÁ – KOŤÁTKOVÁ (eds.), *Animal Touch*, pp. 202–217.

76 Carol J. ADAMS, “The War of Compassion,” in: DONOVAN – ADAMS, *The Feminist Care Tradition*, p. 23.

77 In his essay “Why Look at Animals?,” John Berger has written about how animals can often take us by surprise, because their behavior does not match the ideas and stories we construct about them, John BERGER, see *O pohledu*, Praha: Fra 2009, pp. 14–16.

78 HARAWAY, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 126–133.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

80 For example, the Ukrainian artist Polina Davydenko, who lives in the Czech Republic, creates animals for her videos in post-production or stylizes human actors into animals through costumes. This is also the case in the video *Rytířsko* by Lea Petříková (2017).

81 Personal communication, David Příkladík, 7 April 2022.

From Wolfe's *how* I return to the content, the message, to *what* Langrová and Přílučík wish to convey through their works. What is important for me are two aspects that appear in these works, albeit indirectly, which I consider inspiring for the continuation of the posthumanist discussion. These are *play*, and the *emotionality* ensuing therefrom. Dorota Łagodzka understands theory and art as permeable and intersecting ways of knowing (though this relationship cannot be demonstrated empirically).⁸² Together, then, theory and practice create a tangle of *becoming-with* via affirmative ethical approaches.

The motif of joint play, mentioned by Přílučík, does not appear explicitly in the works analyzed. Nevertheless, the works can be understood as “simulation games” in preparation for the real world. In his analysis of works by Finnish artists Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson, the American art theorist T. J. Demos draws on the ideas of Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi and his theories of animal-human play: “Play offers a generative zone, a place to create and test out new possibilities, free of real-life stakes and consequences, a training ground for emancipated futures.”⁸³ Returning to the camel in the film *The Big Animal* referred to at the beginning of this article, it could be said that the more tangible correspondence between camel and human takes place in the moments devoted to play and, by extension, joy. The camel begins to sing when his human companion plays the clarinet, and by the end of the film the pleasure both parties experience upon being reunited is evident. Communal and interspecies play can thus be an active driving force powering journeys out of apocalyptic visions. Of course, the game must have a clear set of rules, with all players being equal, caring for each other and creating the game together.⁸⁴ This storytelling, this play, creates new bonds and “kinships” and evokes an essential emotion, namely, joy. The importance of experiencing joy is also mentioned by Haraway, who argues that: “If we are to develop political vision, if we are to develop some sense of living and dying with each other responsibly, including responsibly to ‘the troubles’, I think the practice of joy is critical. And play is part of it.”⁸⁵ In an interview with Cary Wolfe, the two agree that having joy and playing is not usually considered something serious and actively political, and that something should be done to remedy this situation so that the opposite is the case.⁸⁶

Carol J. Adams, too, emphasizes the emotionality that we have objectified in Western discourse, as we have animals. We treat emotions as something irrational and inappropriate, forgetting that they are important for mutual care: “through caring, individuals not only acquire new experiences and skills that accompany these experiences, but also discover that they are part of a network that can sustain them even when caring evolves into grief for what is happening.”⁸⁷ Along with the writers mentioned above, I believe that care-giving can be not only sentimental, but communal, interspecies, playful and activating, through texts and the real world, as well as through artistic creativity. The works

82 ŁAGODSKA, “Hyperrealistic Human-animal Hybrids In Contemporary Art,” p. 88.

83 T. J. DEMOS, *Beyond The World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing*, Durham – London: Duke University Press 2020, p. 136. See also: Brian MASSUMI, *What Animals Teach Us About Politics*, Durham – London: Duke University Press 2014.

84 One question, though one I have no intention of answering in this text, would be: Who will create the rules of this game? To what extent would it be a human/canine/bovine game? Even Donna Haraway, when describing her play (training) with her dog Cayenne, is aware of the limits and rules involved in creating collaborative play. HARAWAY, *When Species Meet*, p. 220.

85 HARAWAY, *Manifestly Haraway*, p. 253.

86 *Ibid.*, pp. 253–254.

87 ADAMS, “The War of Compassion,” p. 34.

analyzed, made with the help of non-human actors, follow this line of thinking about the historical contexts of interspecies coexistence (domestication, breeding, dependencies in questions of life and death), while at the same time allowing us to find ways out of crises using methods based on affirmative ethics, play and *becoming-with*. In doing so, they contribute to the creation of more-than-human narratives and possible shared futures. ●