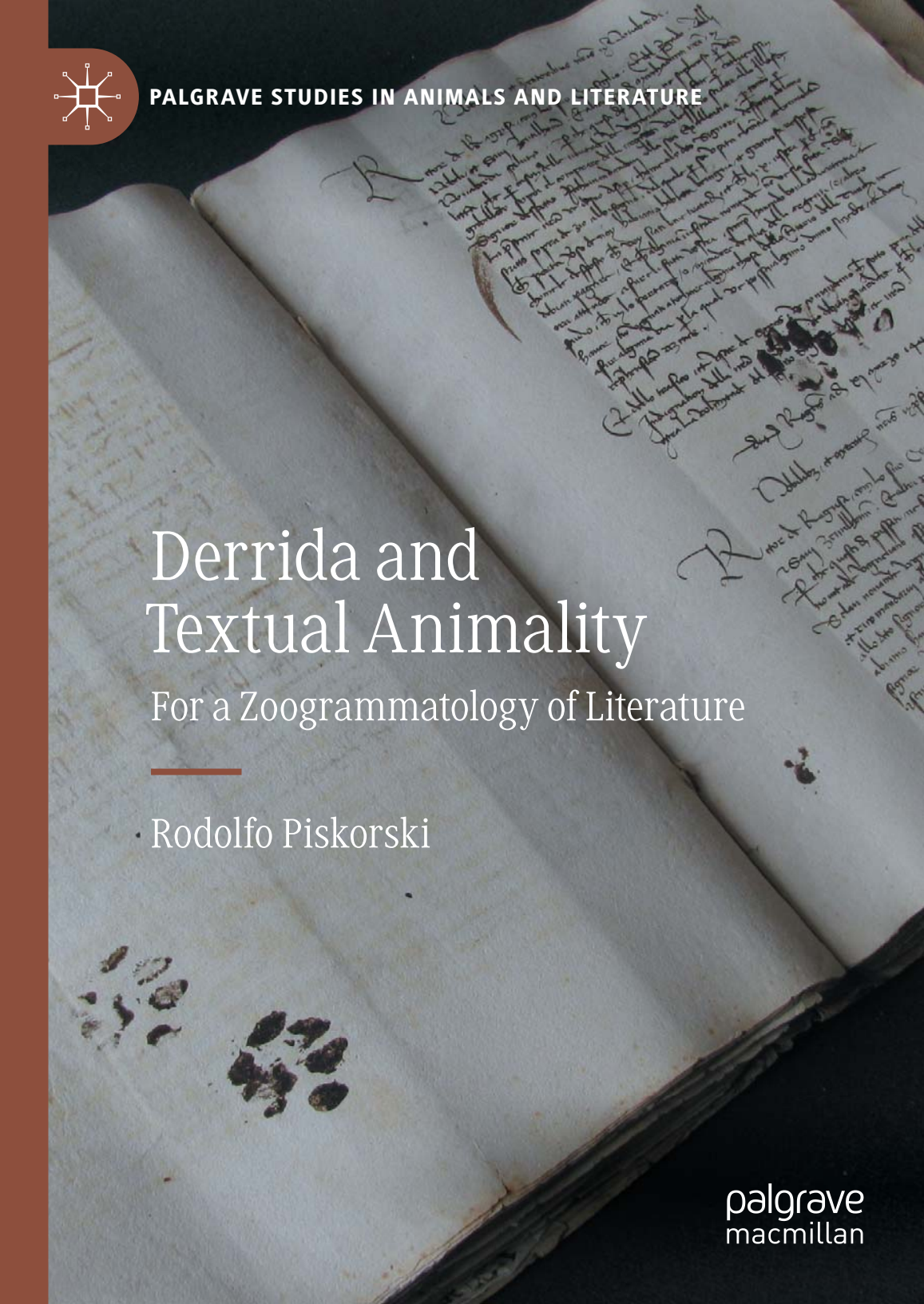

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# Derrida and Textual Animality

## For a Zoogrammatology of Literature

Rodolfo Piskorski

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*To*
*Fernando*

# Praise for *Derrida and Textual Animality*

"With its novel readings underpinned by the conceptual paleonym of 'arche-animality', *Derrida and Textual Animality: For a Zoogrammatology of Literature* is a groundbreaking contribution not only to (Derridean) Literary Animal Studies but also to the kind of Critical Posthumanism that is still willing to engage with deconstruction's vital insights into the trace and into humans' relationship to 'the animal'."

—Laurent Milesi, *Tenured Professor of English at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China, and editor of* James Joyce and the Difference of Language *(2003)*

"*Derrida and Textual Animality* is a rare beast: a contribution to literary animal studies that is equally invested in the question of the literary as it is in the question of the animal. Recuperating the 'linguistic turn' for the 'animal turn', Piskorski shows how writing is always already co-implicated with animality. This is a welcome and productive reminder that literary animal studies must come to terms with Derrida's infamous dictum that 'there is no outside-text'."

—Kári Driscoll, *Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, Utrecht University, The Netherlands, and co-editor of* What Is Zoopoetics?

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Why do animals matter for literature? They might matter as simply an 'end' that can then be conveyed by any given 'medium'—literature, for example. Conversely, the recent scholarly attention towards literary animals highlights a more radical relevance of animality beyond that of mere topic: it could be argued that in recent criticism illuminated by posthumanism and Animal Studies, animals matter precisely due to their matter. The material embodiment of animals is believed to offer a stark contrast to the linguistic constitution of textuality, to the extent that animals 'in' literary texts are said to illuminate—and sometimes challenge—the workings of literature. This is a relatively common view in the literary scholarship on animals, a tendency which Kari Weil names the 'counter-linguistic turn', in which animals' supposed lack of language is refashioned as an asset reliant on their bodiliness:

> Although many current projects are intent on proving that certain animals do have language capabilities like those of humans, other sectors of animal studies are concerned with forms of subjectivity that are not language-based. Instead, they are concerned with ways of knowing that appear to work outside those processes of logocentric, rational thinking that have defined what is proper to the human, as opposed to the nonhuman animal. (2006, 87)



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As Weil's term suggests, this turn critiques the 'linguistic turn' in twentieth-century Continental philosophy which, in literary studies, is most often associated with Jacques Derrida. Writing in *PMLA* in 2005, James Berger describes the wider consequences (in scholarship, art, and popular culture) of this counter-linguistic turn:

> [W]ith increasing influence over the past fifteen or twenty years we can see in the academic humanities, in some literary fiction, and in areas of popular culture varieties of what we might call a counter-linguistic turn. […] Their central claim is that there is an other of language, whether or not this other can be conceptualized, and that language does not go "all the way down." (2005, 344)

As one of the symptoms of this counter-linguistic turn, Berger cites 'studies across several fields that stress materiality or physicality. This work often focuses on the body, which serves as a crucial and contested boundary marker for the limits of language' (ibid.). And in neurologist Oliver Sack's popular writings, he argues that 'the deepest experience of living as a human–animal, the most basic form of consciousness, is not symbolic or linguistic. It is bodily, a sense of at-homeness in the body' (350). In his 2017 book *Bioaesthetics*, Carsten Strathausen identifies a rise of biologism in the humanities, detectable in the prominence of the digital humanities and other strands of the 'posthumanities'. For him, deconstruction and hermeneutics are losing ground to empirical models for the study of texts and culture due to a fatigue introduced after almost a century of focus on the 'being of language' (2017, 4). He credits the 1996 Sokal hoax with a considerable impact on the credibility of 'constructivist', to the benefit of 'realism' (which he glosses as 'an utterly nonsensical juxtaposition') and biologism.

In this biologically informed approach to the humanities, the focus on the animal side of the human, or on what we could call our uncanny proximity to animals, functions to stress their *distinct* type of embodiment, since the material existence we share with them encounters in our linguistically saturated nature a limit to this proximity. The emphasis on bodily matter engendered by such similarity would serve to posit matter once again as that which would ground ontology, as a way of writing it out of 'theory' and the constitutive powers of language. Such matter could easily be found in objects, or the mineral and vegetal kingdoms, but the fact that humans and animals are otherwise extremely similar works

to underscore this materiality—and its push into language—in ways not available to other beings. Animals would represent, then, an exteriority to language, conceptuality, reason, and literature, exposing literary texts to their own limitations. I shall attempt, however, to expose the metaphysical foundation of such an analytical frame by revisiting Derrida' s critique of the simple evocation of matter. His complication of the material/ideal dichotomy will be shown to represent a more productive response to this duality and this will have crucial consequences to a thinking of animality as grounded on bodily materiality.

The counter-linguistic turn is often associated with a strand of critical theory, philosophy, and political theory known as New Materialism, identified broadly as a 'return' to materiality after the supposedly excessively textual focus of post-structuralism. Thus, in their edited collection *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost situate New Materialism in opposition to 'constructivism', the claim that reality is socially/culturally/linguistically constituted, which they attribute to the cultural or linguistic turn. According to them, 'the dominant constructivist orientation to social analysis is inadequate for thinking about matter, materiality, and politics in ways that do justice to the contemporary context of biopolitics and global political economy' (2010, 6). Materiality is here contrasted with idealism or ideality, in which the cultural turn is deemed to be interested. However, it is important to highlight that 'ideality' for Coole and Frost functions similarly to what some of the contributors call 'mentation'—products and processes of the human mind. Conversely, in the Continental tradition which I discuss throughout the book, ideality as opposed to materiality is characterised by not being located in spatio-temporality. Therefore, even mental processes—to the extent that they are *events*—are materialised in time and space in a way that pure idealities are not. This difference will have sizable consequences to my discussion of the destabilisation of the dualism materiality/ideality undertaken by deconstruction. Another crucial aspect of mentation as described by New Materialists, which is thought to include culture, signification, language, etc., is that it refers to an exclusively *human* sphere of existence and experience. Hence, they critique constructivists' inability to analyse the non-human world and occasionally describe them as reducing reality to a set of human concerns. However, for thinkers often characterised as constructivists and post-structuralists, such as Derrida, some issues ascribed to mentation (language, for example) are neither wholly

or primarily human, nor are they essentially ideal, as I discuss in detail throughout the book.

Having said that, it is not clear if Jacques Derrida is one of the constructivists Coole and Frost have in mind, even though he, of *il n'y a pas d'hors-texte* fame, is often identified as one of the main postmodern and post-structuralist thinkers. One therefore wonders who has claimed or is claiming the points they are criticising. When they argue that 'materiality is always something more than "mere" matters, [it is] an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable' (9), it is reasonable to assume they are positing someone who does argue that materiality is mere matter, and that it does not contain theses forces that make it active. Because the constructivist thinkers are not named or cited, one would be safe to include Jacques Derrida or Judith Butler in that list, even though what is presented as a critical, new approach to matter—such as the point that matter has a difference that renders it productive—is similar to 'constructivist' arguments often posed by Derrida, among others. That similarity is sometimes openly acknowledged, as when Coole and Frost point out that new materialists have 'reinvent[ed] materialism in response to the criticisms that radical constructivists and deconstructionists righty made of earlier critical materialisms and realisms, Marxism in particular' (25).

However, picturing Derrida and Butler among the targets of New Materialism might turn out to be inaccurate, as the contributions to the volume often engage in depth with both in a way that explores their thinking of materiality. For example, Pheng Cheah shows that matter in Derrida must be thought in connection with *text*, where the latter is not allowed to be reduced to idealism (2010, 73). Cheah argues that deconstruction explains the emergence of both matter and text by means of the mechanism of *iterability*, which produces materialities and idealities. In her contribution, Sara Ahmed defends the cultural turn as engaging with the phenomenology espoused in the introduction, citing Butler as an example (2010, 234, 246). In fact, Ahmed opens her chapter with a reference to her article 'Imaginary Prohibitions' (2008) in which she stakes out a position critical to the radicalism claimed by the New Materialisms. More focused on feminist thought, her article cites several thinkers who identify—and criticise—Butler as a constructivist, which is, as we saw, not the case in Coole and Frost's volume. Despite the identification of Butler and others as targets, Ahmed still pinpoints a common rhetorical gesture by New Materialists characterised by asserting that something is *not* so,

suggesting other uncited writers who would argue that it *is* so (2008, 34–5). The methodological problem with this gesture is twofold. Firstly, often the criticised arguments, either implied or articulated, are untraceable to any reasonable writer, such as a belief that subatomic particles are invented, not discovered (Coole and Frost 2010, 11–2). Secondly, the theoretical formulations presented as critically incisive and innovative New Materialist claims are strikingly similar to arguments already put forth by constructivists. In short, as Coole and Frost describe it—and Ahmed analyses it—New Materialism seems to be either another name for the critical approach to materialism already under way in post-structuralist thought, or a rebuttal to claims no sensible thinker would defend, which then compels it to linger on the defence of simple facts, such as the reality of subatomic particles.

In the register of literary criticism, this materialism more often than not goes hand in hand with a methodological anti-formalism: literary texts are read as intricate forms of paraphrase of the real, material, embodied lives of animals, which means their textual form is secondary (see Shapiro and Copeland 2005). Interestingly, a radical formalist approach to texts could be attempted in the name of the very focus on embodiment and materiality that guides the interest in animals within certain sectors of Literary Animal Studies. Hence, this formalism could be defended as a type of anti-speciesist literary criticism. If we read this in Cartesian terms, this sort of formalism would suggest an independence of the (animal) body (*form* as the body of the text) from the soul-or-mind, or even some kind of radical materialism that prioritises bodies before souls. However, as we shall see, many literary scholars approach animals as objects in literary texts, as subject matters that can be and indeed are at stake at any other medium. At the level of object, this approach attempts to circle the specificity of animality as a different form of embodiment, while at the level of method, the text itself, as the form or embodiment of signification, is overlooked.

For example, Robert McKay frames the emergence of Literary Animal Studies by stating that '[i]n the mid- to late-1990s, very few scholars were concerned with the near omni*presence* of nonhuman animals in literary texts', and he accuses those works which did try to address 'the animal question' before then of 'coming nowhere near capturing the fullness of animals' *presence* in literary and cultural history' (2014, 637). Similarly, Marion W. Copeland praises Literary Animal Studies which 'approached canonical literature […] and found rich *untapped sources of*

*information* on both human relations with and attitudes toward other animals', sources whose 'mining […] has become one goal of Literary Animal Studies' (2012, 99, emphasis added). McKay and Copeland defend seemingly disparate views on the relationship between animal 'presence' and textuality: whereas the former believes animals are present *in* texts (*omni*present, in fact), the latter seems to suggest that literary discourse is a medium capable of delivering us hard nuggets of important information about animals, who one assumes are therefore very present, albeit elsewhere. But McKay's subtle shift from 'omnipresence in texts' to 'presence in literary and cultural *history*' points towards a belief in that material presence of animals *despite* and *outside* texts. If animals are 'present' in texts, they are apparently *represented* therein, à la Copeland, as pieces of information. She finally confirms hers and McKay's similarity by asserting that some 'poetry […] brings readers into the *presence* of other-than-human animals' (ibid.). The 'presence of non-human animals in works of fiction' is also mentioned by Shapiro and Copeland, who also decry (the presence of?) animal 'absent referent[s]' (2005, 343).

Two interrelated gestures are performed in these position papers. On the one hand, we have the belief that animals can be made to be present in texts by means of appropriate writing or reading practices. On the other, there is a clear sense in which animals inhabit a completely separate realm against which the literary pushes. Both are joined in the assumption that some sort of presence may be evoked by means of textual networks of references, and, more importantly, that this evocation is the overarching work of textuality and literature. This formulation owes its logic to the very concept of form and how it has been understood in poetics.

However, as I shall discuss in more detail, there are many reasons why a formalist textual approach that could rightfully be called anti-speciesist is ultimately untenable. Still, as we saw, the animalised meanings that underpin the very formulation of formalism would seem to invite us to strive to make formalism work in the name of a non-speciesist poetics and criticism that would liberate the body of form from subjugation to the soul of content. The whole problem seems to stem from the double pressure exercised on form—that it be the *way* texts appear but also that it always points to a *what* other than itself—and this connects to some of Derrida's complications of the material/ideal duality in the concept of the signifier. Echoing such Derridean caution, Strathausen criticises the unnuanced approach to this dichotomy present both in the counter-linguistic turn and in some forms of constructivism:

> Today's biologism fetishizes material objectivity and scientific reductionism in much the same way that constructivism fetishized abstract concepts and social conventions. Both "isms" pit matter against meaning, objects against concepts, when, instead, they should concentrate their efforts to examine how each of them codetermines and reproduces the other.' (2017, 12)

Despite the fruitful suggestion, Strathausen's 'constructivism' is more often than not associated with deconstruction and Derrida, in such a way that would constitute a misreading of the project of deconstruction. Derrida is not a thinker of 'language' in the traditional sense, and his deconstructive approach, as I will show, represents precisely the sort of effort Strathausen is proposing.

Another contribution to the area of Literary Animal Studies is Pieter Vermeulen and Virginia Richter's introduction to their edited volume of the *European Journal of English Studies* titled *Modern Creatures*, where they put forward the privileging of the concept of 'creature' and of 'the creaturely' as key frameworks in the work of animal studies (2015, 2). Their main reference point is the work of Anat Pick, whose definition of the creaturely they cite: '[t]he creaturely is primarily the condition of exposure and finitude that affects all living bodies whatever they are' (3). And it is crucial to their project that Pick situates her emphasis on creatureliness as part of a resistance against the tendency to project human traits onto animals. Another important influence is the work of Eric Santner, whom they credit as also responsible for the scholarly relevance of the term 'creaturely'. However, they underline some differences between Santner and Pick regarding creatureliness, especially the former's understanding that human vulnerability and exposure is not only a product of its biological, animal nature. For him, human contingency is determined not only by its embodied vulnerability, but also by its exposure to 'spiritual forces' and 'social textures […] that uncannily animate the human body' (5).

In the area of Literary Animal Studies, Susan McHugh's writings are among the most perceptive to this problem and to the perceived necessity of some kind of formalist poetics of animality. For her, animals 'at once serv[e] as a metaphor for the poetic imagination and voic[e] the limits of human experience'. But, beyond that, their 'peculiar operations of agency, these ways of inhabiting literature without somehow being represented therein, present tremendous opportunities for recovering and interrogating the material and representational problems specific to animality'

(2009a, 487), but also to literature, since she entertains that 'species being works in literary texts as a function of what we think of as their literariness' (488). She argues that 'the problem of animals [is] written into the metaphysics of speech and subjectivity' (489). Despite her discussion of animal agency, she criticises the temptation of transferring subjectivity onto animals, suggesting that 'sublimation of cross-species violence […] derives from the valorization of psychic interiority as the defining quality of the human in literary research' and such 'subjectivity entails a very specific and limiting story of agency' (2009b, 365). She understands that

> the focus on embodiment, surfaces, and exteriority […] perhaps most clearly distinguishes animals as agents of an order different from that of human subjectivity—more precisely, as actors operating in accordance with a logic different from that of intentionality or psychological interiority. (2009a, 491)

However, she does not believe that privileging this beyond-human embodiment is the answer to the methodological problems posed by animals, since this reliance on animal transcendence misses the point of the enmeshing of animality and text. She holds that the argument for the irrelevance of literature and textuality for animals is groundless, since 'messy entanglements of human and animal agents become sedimented even in cultural practices without immediate ties to animals' (490). Therefore, she defends the argument I am putting forth that one must find an answer to animal representation which is, at the same time, a methodological and a theoretical position. She couples the issue of how to account for animal subjectivity (and/or animal embodiment) with the cultural practices that support and are supported by the very concepts of animal being. Thus, in literature, for example, McHugh would suggest both that one not privilege texts *about* animals being portrayed as transcendent to textuality or to the human world, and that one be attuned to how textuality itself as a cultural practice is suffused with the very issues it is trying to represent. As it is, her thinking is not only a call for a different thinking about animals, but also a qualified call for a formalist criticism attuned to the animality of textuality itself, to the 'countless animal aspects of texts' (2009b, 363).

Nevertheless, McHugh arrives at a conundrum. Texts exhibit animal aspects and animal being is enmeshed into textuality, but that still does not tell us about the texture of animal agency. An animal subjectivity

similar to a human's threatens to efface any animal specificity, and misses the fact that even human subjectivity is constructed on the basis of a metaphysics of inside and outside wholly organised by concepts such as body and soul. On the other hand, ascribing to the animal a transcendence to language and text suggests wishful thinking, and ignores the extent to which this transcendence is prescribed by language itself. McHugh's way out is openly guided by 'the Deleuzian assumption […] that animality permeates language, literature, and everything as a line of flight or potential for becomings' (2009a, 493), a position with which I not only agree but that I also explore to some extent in Chapter 5. I believe, however, that there is a second, Derridean answer to the problem, which is more attuned to the issues raised by literary signification.

Several other literary scholars have approached the issue of animality from a Derridean perspective. In their introduction to *Seeing Animals After Derrida*, Sarah Bezan and James Tink stress the importance of considering Derrida's work on animals (and the wider 'nonhuman turn' in the humanities) against a backdrop of questions and challenges posed to Derrida and his overall thought (2018, ix). For example, they identify in readings of Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, even by those supportive of its general project, a disappointment with the text's apparent refusal 'to consider fully what the animal is as such' and with the 'lack of specificity' of Derrida's animal (x, xii). A different approach underscored by them is reading the animal in Derrida as part of 'the ongoing problem of the trace of the Other': the argument goes that, even if the animal as a motif only emerged in his later texts, it came about as continuation of the issues of *différance* and the trace. As they put it, 'in this case the condition of the living is far from being a state of the human being that could be simply attributed as animality, but instead an idea of arche-writing, as in an organization of traces and signs as a text that are the preconditions of understanding subjectivity and being' (xii). However, the 'restatement' of the early Derrida of arche-writing in the animal lectures is not an uncontroversial observation, since literary studies, critical theory, and philosophy have seen a turn towards 'ideas of life, the bioethical and the affect, and indeed ecocriticism, which are sometimes levelled against deconstruction', in the years after Derrida's death (xiii). Bezan and Tink then identify Timothy Morton and Claire Colebrook as two examples of thinkers who are attempting to bridge deconstruction with the recent 'non-textual turn'. Finally, Bezan and Tink's own project is to explore the visual aspect in Derrida's anecdote of being naked before the

cat's gaze in order to inquire 'how the human comes to be exposed and made vulnerable in relation to the (in)visible animal' (xiv). For them, the ethical project before us involves acknowledging 'the inherent meaning of nonhuman materiality', and 'the limitations of human perception'. This ethical call is similarly polarising, since it also separates the field of animal studies in two. They cite Giovanni Aloi's diagnosis of two different views on the issue of animal visibility, with one group reliant on the posthumanist distrust for visibility as 'truth-constructing' and another counting on visibility as an epistemological strategy (xv).

Sarah Bezan connects Derrida's project in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* to some emerging areas such as new materialism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology (Bezan 2018, 66). She sees those fields as allies to animal studies, as she argues that 'a wide variety of scholars in the environmental humanities, ecocriticism, posthumanism, and animal studies more broadly' are united in 'dismantling transcendental humanism' and criticising '*the human's strategies of mediation of the natural world*, whether it be through consciousness, language, [or] spectrality' by means of a 'combat' against the 'transcendental mediation of "Nature"' (69). This is a very sweeping statement, as the fields she mentions clearly contain a wide range of different views of materiality. Timothy Morton, especially, whom she mentions in this context, writes against the belief in the possibility of simply doing away with the mediation of 'Nature'. More serious, however, is the mischaracterisation of the Derridean position by his inclusion in this list (nominally, but also as an important thinker for many within those fields). The so-called linguistic turn with which Derrida is commonly associated actually emerges in his work as a *rejection* of transcendentalism that still constantly rejects any kind of simple material reality. Derrida addressed the pitfalls of materialism as a solution against transcendentalism several times in his writing, and answered questions directly on this issue in interviews.

Christopher Peterson has criticised the general impulse of posthumanisms that interpret the linguistic turn as excessively humanist, and thus reject it in the name of a critique of human exceptionalism and a focus on materiality. For him, these critics, such as New Materialists, in their attempt to read humanity in other-than-human terms (embodiment, affect, biology, evolution, etc.) overestimate their own power of controlling the meaning of the human, thereby reasserting the very exceptionalism they sought to overturn. Bluntly, he entertains, 'does what we

call the human retain any sense outside the discourse of anthropocentrism?' (2018, 2). He does not suggest that we simply accept human exceptionalism, but recognise its phantasmatic endurance beyond declarations of its demise. Similarly, he stresses the necessity of a methodological (but also an epistemological and a phenomenological) human-centredness for any relation to the other *as* other. I shall discuss attempts to overturn anthropocentrism (and their failure) throughout the book and more specifically when I analyse Donna Haraway's similar posthumanist critiques of Derrida for being overly humanist.

A crucial contribution to the field of Derridean Animal Studies is the edited collection *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*. In her introduction, editor Lynn Turner states clearly that the collection's remit is 'to take Jacques Derrida seriously when he says that he had always been thinking about the company of animals and that deconstruction has never limited itself to language, still less "human" language' (2013, 2). Apparently as a response to the title 'The Autobiographical Animal'—the conference in which the *The Animal That Therefore I* Am lectures were given—Derrida provides a helpful overview of animal figures that populated his texts. However, Turner argues that 'these […] animals have largely escaped wider attention'. On the other hand, she points out that many scholars have emphasised that 'Derrida's work pointed to the deconstruction of the elevation of "man" above all others well before the pedagogical "tipping point" of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*' (3).

Thus formulated, the remit of the book seems two-pronged. On the one hand, it is concerned with the exploration of animal figures in Derrida's texts that have been overlooked in Derridean scholarship (the insect of 'Tympan'; the sponge in *Signsponge*; the wolves, elephants, and lions in *The Beast and the Sovereign*; the mole in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing'; the lion in his 'Introduction' to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*; not to the mention the more famous hedgehog from 'Che Cos'è La Poesia'; and the cat from *The Animal That Therefore I Am*). On the other hand, the book strives to locate the importance of animality as a structural concept for the very project of deconstruction (embedded in a discussion of more-than-human language, for example) *even when animal figures are not being directly discussed by Derrida*. It is arguable that the book excels mostly in the former endeavour, but it is the latter venture with which I am especially concerned. Throughout this book, the decision to privilege structural—rather than topical—animality will be continuously argued in theoretical, methodological, philosophical, and ethical terms.

Therefore, I argue that it is symptomatic of the co-implication of animality and language as they are understood by philosophical tradition that this conundrum concerning the animal is the one Derrida faces when deconstructing the linguistic sign. More specifically, the question of how to approach the materiality of signs is the problem that opens the way for Derrida to propose most of his ideas. In his lengthy intervention in Husserl's thought, Derrida attacked phenomenology's disavowal, in the name of ideal transcendentality, of all that is bodily and material. This attack did not entail a triumphant materialism, since Derrida's deconstructive reading, instead of simply refuting what Husserl proposes, identified in his formulation the unspoken possibility both of Husserlian idealism and of a naïve empirical materialism. Originary difference, its play and work, *différance*, the trace, iterability—these are all names for that which is enmeshed in its material support but which cannot be reduced to it. Literary Animal Studies can, therefore, find both the specific materiality of the animal and the bodily form of texts in the impure undecidable of that which is neither material nor immaterial. Similarly, it is well known that, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida frees writing from its subordination to speech to show that all of language depends on a certain scriptural function derived from what he terms *arche*-writing.

Just as arche-writing is situated 'before' the common differentiation between speech and writing, I argue that 'before' the distinction between human and animal as the metaphysical distinction between spirit and body, there must be a sort of *pure* difference that makes the differentiation between body and soul possible. I call that the *arche-animal*. Leonard Lawlor has discussed this Derridean recourse to old names in the 'second phase' of deconstruction, after the initial moment of overturning the classical hierarchy (e.g. speech/writing, human/animal) (see Derrida 1987, 41–3, 71). The second phase 'reinscribes the previously inferior term as the "origin" or "resource" of the hierarchy itself', so that this term 'becomes what Derrida calls an "old name" or a "paleonym"'. Lawlor sees these terms as 'the experience of a process of differentiation that is also repetition', or as 'the experience of language where language is taken in a broad sense' (2007, 30).

In a Derridean Literary Animal Studies, animals cannot be regarded as simply matter, since it is clear that they are animated matter, whose spark of life engenders auto-affection and movement. Their bodies cannot, however, be wished away in a repetition of speciesist, Cartesian conclusions that would consider these bodies to be simply cases for animal

minds. An animal subjectivity, constructed in the human mould, would make the animal itself vanish. And if this entire formulation is, as I argued, coextensive with the structure and functioning of signification, it should be both possible and desirable to read the animated matter of texts, their play of form. The form of a text (its grammar) should be detachable from both its content (semantics) and its substance (phonology, graphematics, typography, etc.), in order for us to get at the animal aspects of texts. But is that even possible? Is form ever identifiable in texts in any way separable from its meaning and material support?

The representation undertaken by signs is essentially linked to animality. As I shall show, there could be no representation without animals, insofar as they provide us with the play of form. However, it is impossible for it to emerge phenomenally, in texts, *as such*, for that would require the process of signification to appear without actually signifying anything. Similarly, there is no signification which is not, in a way, *trapped* in the support of a substance, since there are no signs without a sensible face. It is therefore only possible to identify the moment when or the site where textuality reveals the scar of the impossibility of simply signifying. In a text, signification appears to collapse into either dumb marks on a page or abstract, conceptual meaning, both of which I believe to be counterproductive objects for Literary Animal Studies. But pinpointing signification *as such*—that which makes specific meanings possible—would be crucial for understanding the arche-animal as it works in literary texts and I shall explore whether signification as such can be an object of literary analysis.

Other scholars have also stressed the enmeshing of animality and textuality. Kári Driscoll, discussing animal literature under the name 'zoopoetics', advances that the latter is engaged with the 'constitution' of the animal in language but also with the constitution of language in relation to the animal. He entertains that zoopoetics might even be 'the most fundamental form of poetics', since it involves the fundamental distinction between human and animal as it is usually based on language (2015, 223). Driscoll includes an important historical aspect to his point, since he maps an explosion of zoopoetics around the time of early twentieth-century literary modernism and industrial modernity. The crisis of language, or *Sprachkrise*, explored by the animal texts of the early 1900s, represents, for Driscoll, a diminished faith on the representative powers of language, which he views as intrinsically intertwined with a crisis of anthropocentrism and a crisis of the animal. An acute awareness

of the 'prison-house of language' and the desire to escape it led artists and writers to explore zoopoetics, since 'any attempt to escape the boundaries of linguistic consciousness must proceed via the animal, which exists on the boundary of language and meaning, forever eluding conceptualisation, slipping toward the ineffable' (222). Ultimately, Driscoll defends that the question of language itself has always been (also) the question of the animal. In his view, Literary Animal Studies approaches animals as 'present[ing] a specific problem *to* and *for* language and representation' (227) and he justifies this position with reference to the privileged position of animals in the mythical accounts of the origins of art, music, poetry, and language.

His volume, co-edited with Eva Hoffmann, *What Is Zoopoetics? Texts, Bodies, Entanglement* furthers the project of zoopoetics. In their introduction, they emphasise that 'zoopoetic texts are not—at least not necessarily and certainly not simply—texts *about* animals', which is a claim I will be exploring in depth. Rather, these texts' '"poetic thinking" (i.e. the way they reflect on their own textuality and materiality), on questions of writing and representation, proceeds via the animal' (2018, 4). Crucially, they stress that literary animals thus understood are no less real or more alienated from animals in the 'real world'. Firstly, because in texts 'there are, strictly speaking, no "actual" animals […] that "we" might allow to "be themselves": there are only words, or rather, *animots*',[1] which means that there is a limit to how 'accurate' a 'real' animal might be textually represented. Secondly, because even 'our encounters with animals in the "real" world are *both* material *and* semiotic, and hence […] the relationship between "real" animals and "literary" animals is not that of an original to a copy, but rather reciprocal and irreducibly entangled' (6).

The chapters collected in *What Is Zoopoetics?* explore these theoretical and methodological positions in various ways, although some essays undertake readings which I argue to be grounded on arguments from the counter-linguistic turn, which means they deviate somewhat from the definition of zoopoetics offered by Driscoll and Hoffmann, and are thus less relevant to my project of zoogrammatology. For example, Nicolas Picard, in 'Hunting Narratives: Capturing the Lives of Animals', argues that zoopoetics 'examin[es] the way in which creative language constructs textual animals' (2018, 27–8). However, the exact meaning of the expression 'textual animal' is not made clear, with an abundance of arguments that emphasise that the animals in question are not textual, and that the

role of the text is simply to translate these non-textual animals. Animals are said to be 'transcribed', 'captured', and 'restored' by poetic language, which is tasked with '(re)establish[ing] the connection between man and the rest of creation' (28). This rehearses classical arguments about language as that which both estranges humans from the material truths of nature and offers the means to bridge that gap, if properly reformed—in this case as *zoo*poetics (as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4 with reference to Gérard Genette). Picard's focus on hunting narratives—and hunting as a motif—leads him to privilege the notions of capture and decipherment, as when a hunter interprets signs and traces in order to capture an animal. This priority threatens to relegate attention to textuality (and to poetics) to the background to the benefit of a focus on extra-textual animal materiality, as gathered by the image of the animal footprint, 'the physical production of a living organism' (31). For Picard, in hunting narratives, footprints signal 'someone passed this way'—a metaphysical understanding of the *trace*, which in Derrida is understood as not reducible to a modified form of presence. The interpretation of animal tracks leads to the insight that 'the world is a book, the earth a blank page' (33), but this realisation clashes with continuing references to a simple process of decryption of animal truths. The insight that the reality of the world itself is textual does not affect the conceptualisation of the *nature* of animals and their signs, nor, crucially, the methodological approach to textual analysis. Despite suggesting that all narratives derive in some way from a hunting quest, Picard abandons this metafictional line of thought in order to analyse the subject matter and plot of actual hunting narratives. His assertion that the 'poetics of the *zoon* […] questions and constructs animals' lives through semiotic and hermeneutic processes' is belied by a sustained textual approach that envisions animal presence as extra-textual, and semiosis as a temporary detour on the way to such presence.

In 'The Grammar of Zoopoetics: Human and Canine Language Play', Joela Jacobs analyses stories in which dogs narrate by means of human language and underscores the moments in the texts in which such language fails their canine users (2018). She argues that the dogs' moments of unsuccessful language use point to a distinction between human language (together with narration and literature in general) and canine communication. For Jacobs, the dogs experience human language 'as a central obstacle to the perception of the world and the self', whereas their scent-based communication is able to 'instantly' (i.e. directly)

perceive reality (67). The characterisation of human linguistic abstraction as a screen that covers over a prelinguistic and extra-textual reality is a common feature of the counter-linguistic turn, but is also an echo of a tradition of ascribing human exceptionalism to a human *defect* which is rooted, according to Derrida, in Greek, Biblical, and Freudian thought, among others. I believe that the insights from this tradition are not productive for a zoopoetics as they separate the zoo- from -poetics, while relegating textuality at the same time as it fetishises animals' connection with nature.

Michaela Castellanos presents an approach to *Moby-Dick* which aims to avoid 'reading [whales] as metaphors representing something other than whales' (2018, 130). For that purpose, she gives an overview of nineteenth-century discourses about the taxonomic classification of whales and their impact on theories of evolution and frames Melville's novel as openly about whales. However, some of the methodological statements contradict this strategy, as she highlights the fact that the whale is a 'literary animal', an 'animal created by words', and she quotes theories on zoopoetics by Aaron M. Moe and Kári Driscoll approvingly, which do not support her materialist focus on 'real', non-textual whales. She reads Moe's and Driscoll's zoopoetics differently, however, arguing that Moe's contention that 'the material animal body creates an impulse to grasp it in language' (131) frames the poetic process as a 'straightforward translation' from animal into language. Conversely, she praises Driscoll's claim that animality and language are inseparably intertwined and holds that this is the case of *Moby-Dick*. Nevertheless, her overall historicist approach to the novel's whale repeats the metaphor and translation gestures that she criticises. The whale is repeatedly said to be the 'site' on which discourses are negotiated, or a 'repository' and 'receptacle' that 'registers' historical anxieties. If the animal body is the scriptural space where discourses collide, it is not co-constituted alongside such discourses. And the language of 'receptacles' for pre-existing meanings describes precisely the notion of a straightforward translation from one discourse (historical, political, biological, cultural, etc.) into a literary one by means of animals. While extremely valuable, the historicist approach is, in my view, less productive for zoopoetics precisely because it does not take into account the 'inseparable intertwinement of animality and language' and sees literary texts as paraphrases of cultural and historical discourses, whereas zoopoetics criticises just this gesture of paraphrase,

such as in approaches that see animals as mere stand-ins for human meanings.

Paul Sheehan proposes a 'zoopoetics of extinction', introducing it by means of the killed albatross in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which is said to have taken a symbolic and 'metapoetic significance' (2018, 167). While a poetics of species extinction is both productive and urgent, the actual poetic framing of the issue by means of the *Rime* and the disappearance supposedly engendered by its language seems to diminish the theoretical complications of animal textual 'presences'. There are two main complications: one concerning the structure of presence and absence in texts, and another associated with the relationship between animal species and animal individual.

The first complication is detectable in Sheehan's claim that the metaphoric meanings acquired by the noun 'albatross' (a source of frustration, a burden, etc.) mean that 'the actual, material animal is occluded, […] forced to become a metaphorical substitute' (167). For him, 'the material embodiment of the bird' is '"swallowed up" by language, absorbed into its predetermined anthropocentric directives' (168). However, the *Rime*'s albatross never had, at any point in its textual trajectory, a material embodiment, as Driscoll and Hoffmann point out in their introduction regarding the 'presence' of animals in zoopoetics texts. There was never an albatross—or albatrosses—in the poem, only networks of references, whose only materiality is the materiality of the signifier itself. Thus, Sheehan's argument that 'language can also restore and reaffirm what language has taken away' (169), in this context, suggests that appropriate writing and/or reading practices could in fact make animals present in texts, and constitutes a belief in what Gérard Genette calls 'poetic reformation', which I discuss in detail in Chapter 4. For Genette, it is an illusory trust in the (potential) mimetic power of language that supports the view that poetry's calling is to improve on everyday, failed language.

This relates to the second complication, as Sheehan argues that zoopoetics can 'restor[e] to the albatross its status as a particular species with a particular history—an actual bird, not just a metaphorical substitute' (169). This misses the fact that the poem is not concerned with albatrosses as a species or a group of birds, but with one individual animal that is then killed by the Mariner. In fact, the material embodiment that Sheehan mourns depends on precisely this individuality—as I argue in Chapter 3, an animal species is never a material entity, since it is always

already implicated in the abstractness necessitated by its iterative production. As Sheehan puts it, 'the animal itself [the albatross in the poem] [is] a large oceanic bird comprising about twenty-one species' (167). This reveals a tension between *the* (singular) albatross in the poem ('a bird', 'the animal itself') and the abstract multitude of a whole or even several species. Discourses on extinction are indeed focused on the disappearance of animal *species*, but Sheehan's point about the animal disappearance supposedly undertaken by language focuses on one animal individual; in fact, his argument depends on the materiality that can only accrue to singular individuals in order to lament its erasure. As I argue in detail throughout the book, the dynamics between animal species and animal individual is not only vital for any discussion of literary representations of animal, but also for any theory of *signification itself*, since the iterative play of ideality and materiality is at the heart of the functioning of the linguistic sign, a functioning I claim is essentially linked to animality.

Much more attuned to the concerns of zoogrammatology is Belinda Kleinhans's article on Günter Eich's late texts. In her analysis of his prose poems, Kleinhans privileges not animals as 'objects' of writing, but as a part of a 'complicat[ion] [of] the relationship between the animal in the text and the animal *as* text'. Kleinhans's analysis is grounded on her argument that the lines between 'language and animal(ity)' are blurred, which has major consequences for conceptions of language and meaning (2018, 45). She demonstrates that Eich, by naming the genre of prose poems he wrote a 'mole' and having them 'burrow through language', disturbs the traditional framework whereby language captures animal reality, and introduces moles not only as subject matter of the text but as 'the textual genre itself' (51). In her conception of zoopoetics, animality is something that is not only followed by language in order to be represented, but rather forms literary language and textuality themselves. This clearly has sizable consequences both for texts and for animals, as it suggests that the former are more material than mere cultural abstractions and that the latter are not simply bodily matter. Her conception relies on the decision—present both in her methodology and, according to her, in Eich's poetics—'to break the referentiality and metaphoricity of language' (55). With that, she seems to insist that a zoopoetics must grapple with the meaning-making procedures of language (and with how these are related to animality), and not only with the referential content of texts.

Another crucial contribution to the theorisation of zoopoetics is Aaron M. Moe's *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry*. Moe defines