

# Cosmopolitan Animals

*Edited by*

Kaori Nagai, Karen Jones,  
Donna Landry, Monica Mattfeld,  
Caroline Rooney *and* Charlotte Sleigh



with a preface by Donna Haraway



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palgrave  
macmillan



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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-37627-5

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First published 2015 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-55738-7      ISBN 978-1-137-37628-2 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/9781137376282

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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# Cosmopolitical Critters

## Preface for *Cosmopolitan Animals*

It matters what thoughts think thoughts; it matters what knowledges know knowledges; it matters what relations relate relations.<sup>1</sup> No one can just state definitively what is or what matters; all semiosis makes meanings through other meanings, in the flesh, in time, in relentless contingency, in the middle of ongoing living and dying. It matters which worlds world worlds and which stories tell stories. Whoever and whatever we were/are/will become, we think, act, narrate, metabolize and come into and out of existence through each other, within each other, at stake to and with each other. These are not innocent recursions; they are sidwinding, snaky yearnings to track how becoming-with moves when the partners are not settled in advance, neither in time nor in space. It matters to cast our lot with some ways of sidwinding, snaky, tentacular becoming-with and not others. It matters to be for some worlds and not others. It matters to decompose some worlds and not others. *Cosmopolitan Animals* explores some of the folds and consequences of these demanding affirmations.

We relate, know, think, world and tell stories through and with other stories, worlds, knowledges, thinkings, yearnings. So do all the other critters of Terra, in all our bumptious diversity and category-breaking speciations. Other words for this might be materialism, evolution, ecology, history, situated knowledges, or animism, complete with all the contaminations and infections conjured by all of these terms. Critters are at stake in each other in every mixing and turning of the terran compost pile. We are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities. Philosophically and materially, I am a composist, not a posthumanist. Critters – human and not – become with each other, compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in ecological, evolutionary, developmental, earthly worlding and unworlding (Dempster, 1998).<sup>2</sup>

Isabelle Stengers's (2005, 2010 and 2011) sense of cosmopolitics provokes these musings. Critters are in each other's presence, or better, inside each other's tubes and crevices, insides and outsides. The decisions and transformations so urgent in our times for learning again, or for the first time, how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living

and dying well in multispecies symbiosis on a damaged planet, must be made without guarantees or the expectation of harmony with those who are not oneself – and not safely other, either. Neither One nor Other; that is who we all are and always have been. All of us must become more ontologically inventive and sensible within the bumptious holobiome that earth turns out to be.

Lynn Margulis and her colleagues defined a holobiont as the host and its microbiota. ‘Symbiogenesis is the result of the permanent co-existence of various bionts to form the holobiont’ (Guerrero, Margulis and Berlanga, 2013).<sup>3</sup> Holobionts intra-act with other holobionts to populate enriched holobiomes, defined as the assemblage of all the kinds of critters constitutively critical to each other’s being/becoming/ongoing. Coral is/are a holobiome, composed of, at least, the animal skeleton-building cnidarians, algal-like zooantheallae and diverse microbes,<sup>4</sup> but also encompassing many other taxa critical to healthy coral ecosystems. Human people are now critical to coral ongoing or undoing. More than 250 million people depend directly on healthy coral reef systems for their livelihoods, and fossil-burning people engaged in continuing extraction and in industrial animal agriculture have put enough greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to warm and acidify the oceans into killing hot tubs for cosmopolitical coral critters – and for the lifeways of coral-dependent human beings too. We are tangled with the coral holobiome, as destroyers or as partners in learning the arts of living on a damaged planet. Ecosystems are sympoietic entanglements of holobiomes.

Note, this is NOT about organisms ‘in’ environments, but something very different. There are no units and containers, entities and contexts, things and their surroundings. Biological sciences have been especially potent in fermenting notions about all the mortal inhabitants of the earth since the European imperializing eighteenth century. *Homo sapiens* – the Human as species, the Anthropos as the human species, Modern Man – was a chief product of these knowledge practices. But now, the best biologies of the twenty-first century cannot do their job with bounded individuals plus contexts, organisms plus environments or genes plus whatever they need; these figures can no longer sustain the overflowing richness of biological knowledges, if they ever did. What happens when organisms plus environments can hardly be remembered for the same reasons that even Western-indebted people can no longer figure themselves as individuals and societies of individuals in human-only histories? Surely, such a transformative time on Earth must not be named the Anthropocene!<sup>5</sup> I suggest these urgent times be named

for the ongoing tentacular workings of mortal terrans, the chthonic dreadful ones who are not finished, including us. We can still recycle the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene into the Chthulucene. The sky has not fallen – yet.

We are all compost. Humans in the humusities must be cosmopolitically attuned, rendered capable, made response-able in a world where bounded individuals and their contexts and responsibilities have become unthinkable. Literally unthinkable, no longer available to think within the best sciences and arts of our times, finally, not a minute too soon.

Sympoiesis, not autopoiesis, threads the string figure games played by terran critters. Always many-stranded, SF is spun from science fact, speculative fabulation, science fiction, speculative feminism, and, in French, *soin de ficelles* (care of/for the threads). I think of animal studies as one practice of caring for the threads of terra, for and with cosmopolitical critters. The sciences of the mid-twentieth-century ‘new evolutionary synthesis’ shaped approaches to human-induced mass extinctions and reworldings later named the Anthropocene. Rooted in units and relations, especially competitive relations, these sciences have a hard time with four key biological domains: embryology and development; symbiosis and collaborative entanglements of holobiomes; the vast worlds of microbes; and exuberant critter biobehavioural inter- and intra-actions. Approaches tuned to ‘multispecies becoming-with’ better sustain us in staying with the trouble on terra. An emerging ‘new new synthesis’ in transdisciplinary biologies and arts proposes string figures tying together human and nonhuman ecologies, evolution, development, history, affects, performances, technologies and more.

This is only a preface; I can only list some sympoietic arts and sciences that touch me most. I am drawn most strongly into art-biology holobionts, which give heart to the ongoing Chthulucene. Each of the lines I throw out deserves a whole tapestry but will get only a thready sentence or two. In hospitality, companionship and postcolonial yearnings, track the threads from here into the cosmopolitical muddles for and in which we must become response-able.

First, I hold out a tasty morsel from biological laboratories that are cooking new model systems for integrative studies of ecology, development and evolution. My favourite is the diminutive Hawaiian bobtail squid and its microbial vibrio symbionts, which are essential for the squid’s constructing its luminescing-bacteria-housing ventral light pouch, so that the hunting squid can look like a starry sky to its prey below on dark nights. The holobiont is a *model*, not an *example* of some general principle, but a working animal-bacterial holobiont, which

includes its scientists and their apparatuses, for plumbing the tissues of becoming-with that turn out to be everywhere once we learn how to look (McFall-Ngai, 2014).<sup>6</sup> Robust new knowledges and new stories, not illustrations of the already known and narrated, are the result. It matters which stories tell stories.

Second, I select a tidbit from the deliciously laden table of science studies scholars in love with their human and nonhuman dancing partners for making knowledges with knowledges. Remembering Darwin's curiosity about orchids and their pollinating wasps and bees, whose bodies are shaped to mimic the genitals of their sensuous flowers, Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers propose an evolutionary force pervading symbiogenesis and sympoiesis:

Involutionary momentum helps us to get a feel for affective push and pull among bodies, including the affinities, ruptures, enmeshments, and repulsions among organisms constantly inventing new ways to live with and alongside one another... It is in conversation with this 'wasp-orchid' that we track the involutionary momentum that ingathers plants and insects in acts of pollination and communication. (2012: 97)

Next, I sample from the overflowing cornucopia of contemporary science-art-technology collaborations, within which the human and nonhuman critters and varied apparatuses compose worlds together in these times of heightened extinctions, exterminations and both human and nonhuman genocides. For me, this kind of science-art is a practice of staying with the trouble, of casting our lot for some worlds, some ways of living and dying, and not others. Music gives me two models of cosmopolitical sympoiesis.

*The Sound of Light in Trees*, David Dunn's acoustic ecological composition with bark beetles, pinyon pines and sound transducers, probes the decomposing of multispecies life ways by climate warming, deforestation and insect population explosions during sustained drought in the US southwest (Dunn, 2006). Dunn tunes in on previously unheard and unimagined bioacoustic interactions of beetles and trees to open up thinking both about how sound works ecologically, biosocially and developmentally in this disease symbiosis, and about non-toxic sonic control interventions and detection strategies.

Playing with as well as listening to the acoustic performances of nonhuman critters, composer and jazz clarinetist David Rothenberg also makes music to culture attunement and response-ability in urgent times,

when wildlife from all vertebrate taxa – birds, fish, reptiles, mammals, amphibians – alive on earth today are estimated to be 50% fewer in number than 40 years ago (World Wildlife Fund, 2014).<sup>7</sup> In *Whale Music*, Rothenberg places an underwater speaker in waters where humpback whales swim, playing his clarinet and recording their responses on a hydrophone. We are not the only species to evolve music. Rothenberg offers unpredictable real-time duets that just might connect species in question-provoking tones (Rothenberg, 2008a).<sup>8</sup> Dunn and Rothenberg compose with critters; they make music for the Chthulucene. It matters what sounds sound sounds. Listen.

To conclude, I turn to the Canadian-Nunavut, Inuk, non-traditional, young woman throat singer, Tanya Tagaq and her album *Animism*, which won the 2014 Polaris Prize. Tagaq practices what my colleague Susan Harding suggests might be called experimental animism.<sup>9</sup> In *Animism*, Tagaq and her partners, violinist Jesse Zubot and drummers Jean Martin and DZ Michael Red, perform a musical argument for and about continuities, transformations, contradictions and SF visual and acoustic kinetic inter-conversions of human and animal beings in situated worlds. Hunting, eating, living-with, dying-with and moving-with in the turbulent folds and eddies of a situated earth: these are the affirmations and controversies of Tagaq's singing and website texts and interviews. Tagaq embraces oppositions and conflicts, not to purify them, but to live inside complexities of shared flesh, casting herself for some worlds and not others. At her Polaris Music Prize performance in September 2014, the names of murdered and missing aboriginal women scroll behind Tagaq. The last track of *Animism* is called Fracking; the first is Caribou. She wears seal fur cuffs during her Polaris performance; she affirms the natural world and hunting by her people. Her risk-taking animism performs materialist worlds – gone, here and to come. She says, 'I want to live in worlds that are not supposed to be'; and she immediately affirms that such worlds already are, have been and will be (Tagaq, 2014). The music is utterly contemporary, and many mobile identities are in play and at risk. The work reaches out to unexpected techniques and audiences; and it is unapologetically rooted in specific places, peoples and critters.

Tagaq's practices of transforming sound, flesh and kind are animist in Inuit terms and in the related sense proposed by the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Viveiros de Castro studied with Brazilian Amerindians, with whom he learned to theorize the radical conceptual realignment he called multinaturalism and perspectivism. 'Animism is the only *sensible* version of materialism.'<sup>10</sup> It matters which concepts

conceptualize concepts. Materialist, experimental animism is not a New Age wish nor a neocolonial fantasy, but a powerful proposition for rethinking relationality, perspective, process and reality without the dubious comforts of the oppositional categories of modern/traditional or religious/secular. Human-animals do something different in this world.

It matters which worlds world worlds. It matters who eats whom and how. It is a material question for cosmopolitical critters.

Donna Haraway  
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## Notes

1. I learned to riff this way from Marilyn Strathern, who wrote, 'It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas' (1992: 10).
2. Imagining that I was somehow original, I first used the term sympoiesis in a grasp for something other than the lures of autopoiesis, only to be handed Dempster's thesis, in which she suggested the term 'sympoiesis' for 'collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change' (Dempster, 1998). By contrast, autopoietic systems are self-producing autonomous units 'with self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries that tend to be centrally controlled, homeostatic, and predictable'. Katie King gave me Dempster's thesis and much more; see King, *Networked Reenactments* (2011) and 'Media in Transcontextual Tangles' (2014), especially slide V on Systems Justice and Its Mattering.
3. See also Gilbert, Sapp and Tauber (2012); McFall-Ngai, Hadfield, et al. (2013); Gilbert and Epel (2008).
4. 'The hidden biodiversity on coral reefs' (2010). Corals have the highest biodiversity of any marine ecosystem.
5. See Crist (2013). For Donna Haraway's lecture, see Haraway (2014); for an interview partly related to the lecture, see Haraway with Kenney (2015).
6. Many examples of sympoiesis could be offered from human-nonhuman animal SF patterning, in 'domestic' and 'wild' worlds among others. The criterion for science in these domains might be best described by Vinciane Despret: how would research proceed that took seriously only those questions interesting to the other critters? Could the scientists' starting questions be reshaped so as to enlist, interest, engage the critters in the work? If not, what kind of knowledge is that? Questions are not interesting in advance to either the human or the nonhuman partners. Interest – inter-esse – is not a matter of consciousness, but something more solid, more elusive, and more situated in entangled difference. Research is that world-making work and play that constructs interesting partners through specific ecologies of practices. See Despret (2012) *Que diraient les animaux, si... on leur posait les bonnes questions?* (What would the animals say if... we posed to them good questions?). Does the field of animal studies do a good job by this criterion?

7. Also see Loucks (2014) and Bawden (2014).
8. Also see Rothenberg (2008b). For sound tracks, go to <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/davidrothenberg2> (accessed 16 November 2014). Not all of the compositions are from live call and response. See <http://davidrothenberg.wordpress.com/> (accessed 16 November 2014).
9. Go to <http://tanyatagaq.com/> and <http://tanyatagaq.com/2014/09/tanyatagaqs-polaris-prize-performance-introduction/>; for the Animism album trailer, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItYoFr3LpDw&feature=youtu.be> (all accessed 16 November 2014).
10. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, personal communication, 2 October 2014.

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# Acknowledgements

*Cosmopolitan Animals* originated in a conference of the same title, held at the Institute of English Studies, University of London in October 2012, jointly organized by the Schools of English and History at the University of Kent. The editors wish to thank all those who took part in the conference – delegates, artists and other participants – for their brilliant contributions, which made it a memorable and intellectually vibrant event. Our special thanks go to Donna Haraway, whose lecture and presence at the conference were such an inspiration. We were deeply touched by her warmth and generosity throughout the event, and we are grateful for her support and encouragement of our volume; we feel honoured to have her Preface to it. We would also like to thank Simon Glendinning, our second keynote speaker, for giving us permission to include in this collection a piece based on his speech. We are grateful to John A. W. Lock, who kindly took us to Richmond Park on the last day of the conference to see real deer and gave us valuable insights into how they live there; it was a marvellous way to finish the event.

We thank Steve Baker for offering us useful advice on the art exhibition we put together for the conference. We used an image of Andrea Roe's 'Butterfly Book' to promote the conference; we thank Andrea and the photographer Michael Wolchover for giving us permission to reproduce it as the cover image for this volume. Andrea's artwork is a modification of Nigel Marven, *Incredible Journeys: Featuring the World's Greatest Animal Travellers* (1997); for the theme of this volume, this book is such a fitting one to be animated through the power of art. We are grateful to Random House for their permission to use 'Butterfly Book' featuring an image from Marven's book published by them.

The conference would not have been possible without generous financial support from several sources at the University of Kent: the Kent Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (KIASH), the School of English, the School of History, the Centre for American Studies, the Centre for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies, and the Centre for Studies in the Long Eighteenth Century. We are also grateful to the Institute of English Studies for granting us the John Coffin Memorial Fund, with which we made Donna Haraway's keynote speech a public lecture. We owe great thanks to Jon Millington of the Institute of English Studies for

his excellent help in organizing the conference and all his support and advice.

We would like to thank Erica Fudge, Susan McHugh and Garry Marvin for their support for the conference and the generous advice and encouragement they gave us for the project. We also drew inspiration and strength from our friends and colleagues, who supported us throughout our journey. We are grateful to Ben Grant and Gerald MacLean for their support and the invaluable input they have provided in aid of the project, and we would like also to thank Lynn Innes, Jan Montefiore, Derek Ryan and Sarah Wood, whose encouragement meant a lot to us. Last but not least, we would like to thank Brendan George and Esme Chapman of Palgrave Macmillan; without their support and guidance, this volume would not have been possible.

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# Introduction

*Kaori Nagai*

According to Donna Haraway in *When Species Meet*:

[W]e are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories... It is a question of cosmopolitics, of learning to be 'polite' in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying, and nurturing and killing. (Haraway, 2008: 42)

Worlds open and flower forth as we read Haraway's text, which is filled with a sense of wonderment at, and love and care for, all fellow critters with whom we share our cosmos. Nevertheless, her multispecies 'becoming with' is hardly a vision of happy human-animal coexistence, or, for that matter, an endorsement of postmodern biotechnological networks, in which 'anything ends up permitted' (88). Instead, she draws attention to the ways in which we are entangled in messy, knotted networks, 'sticky with all their muddled histories': our relationships with other critters are never symmetrical, but always political. Haraway emphasizes the need to engage with what Isabelle Stengers calls 'cosmopolitics' in our multispecies 'becoming with': we need to learn to 'respond' and 'respect' in our encounters with other critters, while 'bearing the mortal consequences' (88) of each decision we make over animal bodies and worlds. *Cosmopolitan Animals* draws its chief inspiration from Haraway's call to 'stay with the trouble' – to stay curious, learning to work, play, think and flourish in multispecies cosmopolitics – despite, and because of, its messiness and complexity (Haraway, 2010). In the face of today's environmental destruction, her wise counsel

is becoming ever more pertinent and valuable, in order for us to keep caring and stay courageous.

*Cosmopolitan Animals*, perhaps controversially, suggests the possibility that animals *are* cosmopolitans, and, in doing so, it explores the intersection between two burgeoning fields of inquiry: Animal Studies and Cosmopolitanism Studies. In recent debates on cosmopolitanism, the concept – classically represented as the Kantian ideal of perpetual peace and the universal brotherhood of Man – has been radically scrutinized and renegotiated to include a wide array of current global issues, such as multiculturalism, migration, transnationalism and economic inequality, to name but a few. Increasingly, environmental crisis and animal welfare have also been on the ‘cosmopolitan’ agenda, and recent collections on cosmopolitanism feature pieces centring on these issues as pressing concerns (e.g. Hayden, 2010; Mendieta, 2012; Braidotti, 2013). This volume builds on that momentum, while placing ‘animals’ firmly at the centre of inquiry.

To take into account a network of ‘animals’ (humans included), whose diversity and complexity of interactions far surpass those of human society, demands a serious re-examination of the viability and validity of cosmopolitan ideals. This is especially the case because ‘cosmopolitanism’, as many have already pointed out, is traditionally a ‘humanist’ concept centring on the figure of ‘the human’ (e.g. Steiner, 2011; Braidotti, 2013; Cooke, 2014). It commonly refers to ‘the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens in a single community’ (Kleingeld and Brown, 2014), solely on the grounds of their shared humanity. That is to say, ‘what is human in humans’ emerges as ‘a cosmos’, or a ‘good common world’ (Stengers, 2005: 995), with which to bring together human differences in unity. There is not much space for animals to intervene in this self-completing anthropocentric network, except as ‘nature’ or animality to be overcome. Furthermore, ‘cosmopolitan’ comes from the Greek *kosmopolitês*, meaning ‘citizen of the cosmos’, and the ‘citizen’ (*politês*) refers to the members of the polis, who form a political community. Non-human animals, who are not deemed to be ‘political’, have been excluded from the club (historically, alongside such people as women, slaves and barbarians).

Thus, to think the possibility of cosmopolitan animals, we have to start by redefining ‘a cosmos’ as a tangled-up ‘knot of species coshaping one another’, rather than as an orderly ‘good world’, following Stengers’s and Haraway’s lead. Moreover, we need to think in new ways about the relationship between animals and politics, to make animals

'citizens' of the cosmos. Notably, Eduardo Mendieta, in his formulation of 'interspecies cosmopolitanism', is wary of engaging animals in the sphere of politics, which is 'a distinct set of human practices', through which 'humans...recognize each other' and sustain 'invidious hierarchies' by excluding others and drawing distinctions. Anthropocentric exceptionalism is entangled with this practice of exclusion and inclusion. Mendieta focuses instead on cosmopolitanism as a 'moral/ethical principle', which has striven to achieve 'cohabitation and co-existence' (282) with those who are different from us by offering them hospitality and protection. While the ethics and cosmopolitics of cohabitation are among our own main concerns, we also seek to explore the way in which animals are inseparably tangled up in politics as 'a distinct set of human practices', and indeed play a great part in shaping them. It is also essential to pay close attention to the practices of inclusion/exclusion which politics involves, because it is in these that decisions about animals, 'ethical' or not, are made for them. Furthermore, we would like to be open to the possibility that non-human animals are 'political' in their own right, not just the objects of our politics and ethics. To consider non-human animals' involvements in politics, we might start by taking seriously Michel Serres's comment in *The Parasite*: 'what we know of animals tells us that, relative to us, they are geniuses in politics' (1982: 127). Not only are they 'geniuses in politics', from whom we can learn diverse ways of being 'political', but they are also (one hopes) geniuses in cosmopolitics.

Indeed, animals *are* all cosmopolitan. As Simon Glendinning points out in this volume, 'cosmopolitan', as a natural-historical term, designates plants or animals which have a wide geographical distribution: 'the eat-anything-live-anywhere global survivors'. This includes humans, quintessentially cosmopolitan animals, whose own accelerating movements are triggering the migrations of other cosmopolitan animals in their wake; as Jason Groves puts it, '[f]rom microorganisms to megafauna, from killer algae to plagues of rats and rubber vines, species are participating in an outbreak of migration greater than any in the history of the planet' (2012: 184). This scientific definition of 'cosmopolitan' does not, and should not, exclude so-called 'non-cosmopolitan' animals from cosmopolitan citizenship. On the contrary, to attend to the specific needs of these animals, whose habitats and living conditions are limited, is to engage with cosmopolitics. Indeed, many scholars have critiqued the prevailing idea of cosmopolitanism as being the choice of world citizenship over local affiliations, and emphasized instead the inseparability of the local and the cosmopolitan. This idea has been captured

using various terms, such as ‘cosmopolitan patriot’ (Appiah, 2007), ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ (e.g. Pollock, 2002; Werbner, 2006), ‘local cosmopolitanism’ (Primorac, 2011), ‘embedded’ (Erskine, 2008), ‘situated’ (Baynes, 2007), and so on. Among these, we find the term ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ fascinating. This biological metaphor is usually used to map, in global contexts, rootedness in ethnic and cultural origins, and to address the complex relationship between local issues and global responsibilities (Kymlicka and Walker, 2012). However, it also evokes trees, woods, rainforests, and so on, rooted to a particular spot, whose existence is indispensable for the survival of both the local critters and all of us living on earth. What is more, some plants form ‘rhizomes’, root-like stems that grow horizontally underground. The structure of these was famously used by Deleuze and Guattari as a model for symbiotic and heterogeneous networks, connecting different species, locations, ideas and many other things, and multiplying endlessly with ‘no beginning or end’ (1999: 25). The movements of cosmopolitan animals should be considered as being in knotted relationships with these ‘rooted’ rhizomatic networks.

The importance of rootedness and of being ‘down to earth’ also figures prominently in Haraway’s recent works, in which ‘Terra’, alongside ‘Cosmos’, emerges as a new name for our knotted existence with each other. Cosmopolitan critters are nothing but critters of Terra; we can see the implications of this beautifully explored in Haraway’s preface to this volume. Elsewhere, she proposes ‘Terrapolis’ as a speculative “niche space” of multispecies becoming-with: ‘Terrapolis is rich in world, inoculated against post-humanism but rich in com-post, inoculated against human exceptionalism but rich in humus, ripe for multispecies storytelling’ (Haraway, 2013). In Terrapolis, the human is no longer the centre of the world, but appears as a ‘worker of and in the soil’ (Haraway, 2013), turning into ‘humus’ and ‘com-post’, which nourish those ‘rooted’ cosmopolitanisms.

How is such ‘terrapolitical’ storytelling, rooted to earth and thereby embracing the cosmos, unscathed by and undoing human exceptionalism, made possible? As it is part of the *polis* and politics, the question of ‘representing’ animals, in particular that of politically ‘speaking for’ them (Spivak, 1988: 274), inevitably arises. Derrida famously invented the neologism ‘*l’animot*’ to replace ‘the animal’, a term which he argues embodies the human ‘violence and wilful ignorance’ of reducing ‘an immense multiplicity of other living things’ (2008: 48) to one single category, against which humans define themselves. His *animot*, animal-word (*mot*), instead denotes a multiplicity of animals, as it is pronounced

in the same way in French as animals (*animaux*). In this sense, our title can be read as *Cosmopolitan Animot*, as a reminder of the care we need to take in telling stories of and for animals. Importantly, Derrida, in turning ‘animals’ into a word, stresses that evoking the *animot* is by no means ‘a matter of “giving speech back” to animals’ (48). He thereby acknowledges the long history of our silencing of animals, whose mouths have been used only to impart human messages. We would like to juxtapose this warning of Derrida’s not to ‘give speech back’ to animals with Haraway’s invitation in her preface to ‘Listen’. To listen, where no effort to make animals ‘speak’ is made, to the ‘words’ which animals make. Not just with our ears (so many animal sounds are out of our hearing range), but also with our other senses if necessary, and with the aid of all our imagination and creativity. When we can, what we hear is music, or stories even, composed in collaboration with other animals (see Preface: ‘Cosmopolitical Critters’). The willingness to listen, to be able to respond, must be a key to opening up a space of hospitality. This is not only to invite in many animals and their stories, but also to unpack and knit together a wide range of knowledges and practices regarding animals, which are often compartmentalized in different disciplines and discourses. *Cosmopolitan Animals* is hoping to be such a space of hospitality, a Terrapolis where multispecies storytelling can flourish.

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