“Companion Species” and Donna Haraway’s Critique of Post-Humanism  

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Abstract
“The posthuman”, as a cultural condition brought about by techno revolutions, should be discussed along with animals, which function as “the other” that helps with the configuration of posthuman subjectivity. By regarding human beings, animals and cyborgs as “companion species” in the broad sense, Donna Haraway creates new space for making an alternative critique of posthumanism usually associated with informatics and cybernetics. Haraway’s conception of animal, on the one hand, underscores the relationality between men and animals, which not only challenges the anthropocentric image of animals fostered since the Enlightenment, but stands as a counterpoint to the animal philosophies of Deleuze, Levinas and Derrida. On the other hand, Haraway’s posthuman ethics on animals, though derived from the frontier of modern biosciences, remains utopian when it comes to an on-the-ground practice in the lived world. The difficulties of carrying out Haraway’s animal ethics are manifest in her problematic engagement with Spivak’s postcolonial critique. This essay suggests that we need to perform empathic cross-species imagination which finds its embodiment in the domain of literary text. Only by doing so can we find a path to the so-called “Cosmopolitics” rooted in the corporeal and historical commonality of men and animals.

Keywords
Donna Haraway, The Posthuman, Animal, Companion Species

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“Posthumanism” is probably a term as confusing as “Postmodernism”. It is safe to say that “the posthuman” means a series of attempts at transcending the humanism passed down from the Enlightenment thinkers several centuries ago, but there is no such thing as a unanimous posthumanist theory or a uniform stance.¹ Perhaps, we should focus more on the “posthuman condition” as a common cultural context we are living in today. What worries N. Katherine Hayles is the fact that we have gone too far in the posthuman fantasy of information technology and artificial intelligence, even to the point of assuming that digital simulacrum and machine intelligence can free us from any corporal restraints, that we can retreat to the cyberspace where absolute freedom is promised and our human finitude transcended.² If Hayles’s critique of posthumanism alerts us, from the perspective of informatics and cybernetics, to the inescapable materiality of our posthuman condition, Donna Haraway calls our attention to the vulnerability of species preconditioned by biological evolution, and then proceeds to warn against the inevitable “coconstitution, finitude, impurity, historicity and complexity” of all creatures in the Anthropocene epoch.³ Haraway shuttles between the sciences and humanities, trying to break the wall between culture and nature, interrogating the ethical relationship between men and animals, and teasing out the implications of the society under posthuman conditions. This essay will refer to Haraway’s innovative idea of “companion species”, not for purposes of parroting what she has said, but critically probing into how her animal thoughts are deployed to a broader spectrum of issues, in particular her argument against the posthumanist’s indifference to materiality, and her proposed alliance with Spivak’s subaltern studies.

¹ N. Katherine Hayles, for example, suggests that there are at least four assumptions that define the posthuman in different ways. See N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 2-3.
² N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics, p. 5.
1. From the Cyborg to Companion Species

Haraway launched her career as a posthumanist critic, when she published *A Cyborg Manifesto* in 1985. A few years earlier, Ihab Hassan, in his ground-breaking essay on Kubrick’s sci-fi film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, coined the term “Post-humanist Culture” in 1977, unwittingly beckoning to an epoch to come. With years of training in a biological lab, Haraway’s point of departure is materiality, as she finds that the half-machine, half-organism “cyborg” poses a profound challenge to Western theories. The cyborg is not merely a product of sci-fi fantasy, but what is real in our time. A statistic says that “about 10 percent of the current U.S. population are estimated to be cyborgs in the technical sense, including people with electronic pacemakers, artificial joints, drug-implant systems, implanted corneal lenses, and artificial skin.” More importantly, “cyborg” is used as a trope to debunk the myth of political identity, for it signals a transgression against boundaries, among which there are three boundaries underscored by Haraway: man vs. animal, organism vs. machine, physical and non-physical. It seems that cyborg was elevated by Haraway to the status of cultural icon, or taken as a utopian idea to battle difference, boundary and gender itself.

However, Haraway came to realize that cyborg is a problematic concept, which is perhaps politically unattainable and tenable in the United States. By the 1990s, when the neologism “cyborg” had become a catchword among post-humanist scholars, Haraway claimed that she would break away from this term, posting another manifesto to update her position. In the 2003 *The Companion Species Manifesto*, she chooses a more scientifically privy term—“companion species”—to replace the once iconoclastic “cyborg”. She bluntly admits that “[the] reason I go to companion species is to get away from posthumanism.” Haraway’s new terminology marks three counter-arguments. Firstly, she main-

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5 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Become Posthuman*, p. 115.
tains that, as far as transgression is concerned, companion species is a concept more inclusive than the cyborg, because her new concept would “bring together the human and non-human, the organic and technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways.” 9 While in the previous manifesto Haraway was committed to the “reinvention of nature,” she rephrases it as “natureculture” in the new manifesto, hoping to level the distinction between “culture” inhabited by men and “nature” inhabited by animals. For Haraway, men and animals are no more and no less than “species”. Secondly, unlike her metaphoric usage of cyborg, she is against the idea of taking animals as a metaphor. Haraway insists that the mortal animal’s body is equivalent to ours. Haraway takes the instance of dog to illustrate what is companion species: “Dogs, in their historical complexity, matter here. Dogs are not an alibi for other themes; dogs are fleshly material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with.” 10 What Haraway is lashing here is in fact the long-standing tradition of Western animal philosophy based on anthropomorphism, which deems animals as a trope for abstract ideas or human properties. Thirdly, Haraway decides to sever her bond with the radical cultural iconoclasm of the 1960s, turning to a more constructive ethical relation among companion species. It is in this sense that Haraway chooses to stop being a posthumanist, because such a “post-” is predicated on an anthropocentric stance, an intellectual trap many a posthumanist fails to escape from. At the same time, she draws a line between herself and those practitioners of ecocriticism, because the latter stick to the demarcation between nature and culture, in spite of their claim for animal rights. In Haraway’s manifesto, what matters to men and animals is not human love or charity bestowed on animals, but the relationality of the two. Animals are companion species for human beings, and vice versa. The reciprocal need and social bondage constitute the foundation of such a companionship. “Companion species” is a well-wrought term for Haraway: the word “species” suggests the taxonomical common ground between men and animals, and “companion” nods at a possible sharing not merely in the spatial sense, but

9 Donna Haraway, The Companion Species Manifesto, p. 3.
in terms of emotional bond and support provided by all parties involved.

The gap between the two manifestos marks Haraway’s theoretical shift on the posthumanist spectrum from machines through men to animals. Animals and machines are similarly assumed as the “non-human” antithetical to humanity. Animals are usually used in the lab of genetic engineering as expendable “guinea pig”. How to distinguish “men” from “the nonhuman” remains a conundrum at the heart of posthumanism vs. humanism debate. From the cosmology in ancient Greece to the medieval Neo-Platonism, Aristotle’s notion of scala naturae is the classic model to account for our relationship with animals: in the chain of being, immediately below God and angels are humans, succeeded by mammals, birds, and fish, with insects and plants at the very bottom. The Ten Commandments in the Old Testament says “you shall not kill”, but St. Augustine says this law does not apply to animals, because they are not equipped with “reason” which makes humans resemble the divine.\(^\text{11}\) For Kant, “that decent behaviour to the dog is not real decent behaviour, just practice for real decent behaviour to people ⋯ we cannot have a duty to the dog itself.”\(^\text{12}\) Kant’s aphorism is that “Animals ⋯ are there merely as a means to an end. The end is man.”\(^\text{13}\) To sum up, from the ancient Greek philosophy onward, humans are not supposed to have direct duty to animals.

However, Darwin’s theory of evolution has belied the hierarchal chain of being envisioned by Aristotle and St. Augustine. It is certainly a misreading to interpret “evolution” as a transformation from the lower being to the higher one. For Darwin, what matters to natural selection is not whether it’s forward or backward, but whether it’s adaptable or unadaptable. As per his theory, there is no such thing as an anthropocentric exceptionalism; rather, as Freud puts it, after Copernicus gave a heavy blow to humanity’s “naïve self-love”, it is Darwin’s biological theory that “relegated [men] to a descent from the animal world”, dashing our “craving for grandiosity”.\(^\text{14}\) Haraway, with a Ph.D. of biology, is of course

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\(^\text{12}\) Rosalind Hursthouse, *Ethics, Humans and Other Animals*, p. 78.


savvy to the progress of 20th-century animal studies. She understands perfectly the evolutionary proximity between *homo sapiens* and *homo neanderthalensis*, which had been evolving together until 6 million years ago. In her introduction to the latest research on bird cognition and bird behaviour, Haraway concludes that “it turns out that birds do tools way more deeply than we ever thought.” 15 The reason Haraway falls back on “species” to categorize the humans is that she hopes to alert us to our biological status as *homo sapiens*. Haraway’s taxonomical choice stimulates us to critically engage with the posthumanist mindset, but not to the point of rejecting the projects of posthumanism as a whole. The ideal scenario, for Haraway, is to place companion species “in alliance and in tension with posthumanist projects”. 16

Science is not the only resource Haraway seeks to, for Derrida’s philosophical meditation on animals is also critical to her thoughts. Haraway gives special credit to the later Derrida’s famous essay entitled “The Animal That Therefore I Am”, which she believes wonderfully dismantles the Western tradition of anthropocentrism and makes herself “be with Derrida more than others.” 17 How does Derrida think about animals? Starting with an encounter with his cat in bathroom when he was naked, the French philosopher raises some seemingly weird questions: “Ashamed of what and naked before whom? Why let oneself be overcome with shame? And why this shame that blushing for being ashamed?” 18 Derrida describes this “bathroom encounter” as “deranged theatrics”, which induces the philosopher to ask “who I am” and “who it is”. 19 Derrida came to realize that Western philosophy is always trapped in anthropocentrism, even in the case of Heidegger and Benjamin, who used to make some powerful critiques of such a tradition. For Heidegger, the animal is always figured as something lacking and “poor in world”, while the human can “form the world”; for Benjamin, human language has the “naming” power, but animal language is “language of muteness and namelessness”. For the two philosophers, the humans and the animals are

15 Nicholas Gane and Donna Haraway, “Interview with Donna Haraway”, p.147.
16 Nicholas Gane and Donna Haraway, “Interview with Donna Haraway”, p.140.
17 Nicholas Gane and Donna Haraway, “Interview with Donna Haraway”, p.140.
intrinsically different, and the former decides how to measure the latter. Derrida concludes that the reason he was embarrassed by a cat gazing at his naked body is that the encounter happened when his mind was not loaded with the animal discourse as is programmed by Western metaphysics. In other words, for a split second, Derrida forgot to remember that the animal is merely the gazing object of human beings, and accepted the cat as “the wholly other” that can equally gaze at “me”. As Matthew Calarco puts it, Derrida was at a pre-linguistic and pre-recognitive moment, “guided by a ‘proto-ethical’ imperative of sorts”. What the later Derrida hopes to restore is the proto-ethics prior to and free from human language, rationality and knowledge.

Derrida’s essay on animality is based on his lived experience and calls for ethical reciprocity between the human and the animal, which to Haraway is highly praiseworthy. Yet, she notes that even for this cat Derrida “failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning.” To put it another way, Derrida’s curiosity is still oriented towards philosophy and ethics. For all his poignant criticism of those who refuse to exchange gazing with animals, or who reduce them to an imagery in literature and mythology, Derrida has no intention of embarking on a journey to the inside of animal world. Haraway thinks an authentic recognitive “response” to the animal should be “an entanglement and a generative interruption”, but as Derrida’s musing goes, between men and animals lies a multiple and heterogeneous border of “abysmal rupture”. Derrida cautions that “beyond the edge of the so-called human” is not “the Animal or “Animal Life”, but “a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely a multiplicity of organization of relations between living and dead”. In contrast, Haraway is less agnostic than Derrida in terms of crossing the “abysmal rupture” and understanding the animal as

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23 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p. 20.
25 Jacques Derrida, ”The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow).” p.399.
“wholly others”. She is more affirmative of the companionship between the human and the animal, encouraging us to fulfill the moral obligation of companion species. In a nutshell, for Haraway, the animal is not a metaphysical conundrum, nor is it some mythical hybridity like chimera.

2. “Significant others”, or “becoming-animal”

In contrast to Derrida, Haraway’s animal ethics can be appropriately boiled down to “significant otherness”. Here, “significant”, according to OED, means “having a special or secret meaning that could not be understood by everyone”. For Haraway, the animal is not only an object conceptualized by Western philosophers, but also one whose subjectivity doesn’t necessarily means “abysmal rupture”. The reason Haraway is not satisfied with Derrida and his peers is that they are unable to take the side of the animal and think for (not about) the animal.

Levinas in his essay “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights” also recounts his memory about a concrete animal, a stray dog named “Bobby”. Unlike Derrida’s cat, Bobby seems to be more qualified as companion species in Haraway’s sense, because this dog is not simply a prop for the philosopher’s contemplation, but a faithful friend accompanying those “less-human” inmates, including Levinas, in Nazis’s labor camps. Nevertheless, in the eyes of a stray dog, “there was no doubt that we were men…This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives.” 26 Yet, to Haraway’s dismay, Levinas, along with Derrida, failed to think on behalf of the dog, and as a result “missed a possible invitation, a possible introduction to other-worlding.” 27 H. Peter Steeves makes a similar point in his reading of Levinas’s essay, regretting that Levinas was very close to the core of animal right, only to stop at the threshold. As Levinas and other prisoners returned to the camp after their daily drudgery, Bobby enthusiastically wagged his tail to welcome the “lesser humans”, restoring their otherwise flagging confidence in humanity. However, no matter how touching the dog was for Levinas, Bobby’s soothing gesture was no

27 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p.20.
more than a manifestation of animal instinct (say, a conditioned stimulus) and remained “a signifier without a signified”.  

Levinas’s paradoxical stance on the animal as “the other” is probably related to his famous concept of “face/visage”. The Levinian face is, first of all, an object of “seeing” and “being seen”. The other’s face is “the original locus of the meaningful”, where the subject encounters the others. The face of the other is not an object of intentionality, the meaning of which is not accessible to the subject. Rather, the philosophical significance of the other’s face is to induce “a subjectivity in crisis” from “the interhuman face to face that cannot be resolved into a higher unity”. This begets another question: is the Levinian “face” an organ of the human and non-human body? And, does the animal, say, “Bobby” the wandering dog, have such a “face/visage”? For the first question, both Levinas and Derrida are equivocal, never giving a clear-cut answer. As to the second question, Levinas’s response is, to say the least, baffling. He said in an interview, “I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called ‘face’. The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I don’t know if a snake has a face. I can’t answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed…” But there is some reason why we are attracted by an animal “…In the dog, what we like is perhaps his child-like character…It is clear that, without considering animals as human beings, the ethical extends to all living beings.” Therefore, even if Levinas doesn’t deny that the animal has a face, he is reluctant to apply his philosophical idea on “face” to an animal in the flesh. Levinas is noncommitted to the question whether the animal has the other’s face, in part because his project of ethics is to construct a compassionate relationship between self and the other, rather than helping “the subject” understand “the other”.

30 Emmanuel Levinas, Alterity and Transcendence, p.xiv.
Now, we have touched upon the essential disagreement between Haraway and Levinas. While Levinas is always convinced that the other is “a permanent secret, a specter inaccessible for rationality and light, an unknowable Kantian thing-in-itself”, Haraway believes that the animal has “significant otherness” and calls for intersubjective cognition, rather than expelling the animal to an abyss no humans can reach. Moreover, the I-and-the-other relationship as envisioned by Levinas is certainly not the desirable pattern of “companion species”, a relationality based on interdependence in natureculture. For Levinas, “the relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious one of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in other’s place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery.” The root of such a disagreement probably lies in the fact that the ideal other imagined by Levinas (and Derrida) is not modelled on the animal; rather, Levinas tends to make death and God the purest form of the other, or the consummation of infinitude and exteriority. Haraway has little interest in the metaphysical other, as she chooses to develop empathetic companionship with the animal, and acts on the premise of biological commonality. What matters to Haraway is the animal with flesh, body and its singularities. Haraway trusts that the humans, in their life experience shared with the animals, can establish a post-human ethics, which is nothing but tangible, concrete and feasible. If Levinas and Derrida are more concerned about to what an extent we can depart from human subjectivity, Haraway is more pragmatic about how this departure is carried out and what the journey can bring about for both men and animals.

Another frame of reference is Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. On the surface, the so-called nomadic reading advocated by the two philosophers resonates with Haraway’s scientific approach. Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical style is iconoclastic in that they invert the relation between identity and difference. In other words, their philosophy, encyclopedic and heterogenous by its nature, is premised on universal differences, rather than identity, as the means of knowledge making. Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari, like Haraway, take issues with the model of Darwinian evolution. Darwin attributes the evolution and transformation of species to natural selection, a classic model of which is phylogenetic evolution.

33 Jin Huimin, “Infinite Others: Interpreting a Key Concept of Levinas”, p. 49.
tree, but Deleuze and Guattari replace the trope of tree with the metaphor of rhizome, which has more explanatory power because “tree” is hierarchical and “rhizome” hints at decentralization. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* dismantle the familiar category of species, championing multiplicity, heterogeneity and complexity, which is basically what Haraway takes side with in her theory on the cyborg and companion species and hereby explains why Haraway used to be called “the Deleuzist”.

Yet, Haraway is much against this label, and said she was only sympathetic with a Deleuze as is explicated by Rosi Braidott in *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Haraway even decries that “their becoming-animal chapter [in *A Thousand Plateaus*] is an insult because they don’t give a flying damn about animals – critters are an excuse for their anti-oedipal project.” Why does Haraway have so much antipathy against Deleuze and Guattari’s animal philosophy, which is supposedly in line with “nomadic ethics”? On the surface, Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-animal” is teeming with posthuman gestures and sentiments. For example, they assert that “[b] ecomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real.” The result of “becoming” is neither a man playing or imitating an animal, nor making an animal more like the humans; rather, “becoming produces nothing other than itself”. Much like Haraway, Deleuze and Guattari drastically call our attention to the materiality of “becoming”, arguing that “becoming does not occur in the imagination, even when the imagination reaches the highest cosmic or dynamic level,” and that there are “becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible”. Nevertheless, it is ironic to note that the apotheoses of “becoming-animals” mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari are not any real animals on their cellular level, but the Wolf-Man in folk tales, or Herman Melville’s fictional character Captain Ahab, who “is engaged in an irresistible becoming-whale with Moby-Dick.” Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-animal”, to a certain degree, bears striking resemblance

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36 Nicholas Gane and Donna Haraway, “Interview with Donna Haraway”, p. 156.
37 Nicholas Gane and Donna Haraway, “Interview with Donna Haraway”, p. 143.
to the half-human and half-animal “cyborg”, a trope for in-betweenness and hybridity. Furthermore, the cyborg is paralleled to becoming-animals in the sense that “the rhizomatic spread of cybernetic systems has rendered contemporary life a cyborgian threshold for the initiatory journeys into becoming, a threshold that, to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, is ‘where becoming itself becomes’.”

Admittedly, Deleuze and Guattari have taken a great leap from the dividing line between the humans and the animals, a line that Derrida and Levinas assume uncrossable. However, that Deleuze and Guattari take “becoming” (or a threshold) as the end is absolutely unacceptable for Haraway. Put another way, Deleuze and Guattari, compared with Derrida and Levinas, take a harder line on the epistemological framework of anthropocentrism, and choose a more contrapuntal stance against the whole tradition of Western metaphysics, but they eventually decide to pursue some intellectual and ethnic ideals, rather than a down-to-earth project about the real animals.

There is a more irreconcilable disagreement between Haraway and Deleuze, when it comes to the definition of animal. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the two authors categorize the animals into three groups: first, “individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, ‘my’ cat, ‘my’ dog”, which are “the only kind of animal psychoanalysis understands”; second, “animals with characteristics or attributes; genus, classification, or State animals”, which are either “treated in the great divine myths” or romanticized by some brooding poets such as William Blake and John Keats; third, “more demonic animals, pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale.”

It is the third type of animals—exemplified by the wolf pack, a heterogeneous, rhizomatic and decentralized assemblage—that Deleuze hopes the humans can direct their “becomings” to. Therefore, when such “becomings” take place, they must happen when the humans love the packs in the form of complex congregate and assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari famously liken the moment of “becoming” to contagion: “All we are saying is that animals are packs, and that packs form, develop, and are transformed by contagion. These multiplicities with heterogeneous terms, cofunctioning by contagion, enter certain assemblages; it is

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there that human beings effect their becomings-animal.” 44 Captain Ahab’s feud with Moby-Dick, therefore, is not between a single man and a single whale; rather, Captain Ahab is turned into “becoming-whale” because his visceral obsession points to a pack, with Moby-Dick roaming at the edge of such a pack. 45 Once contagion sets in motion, it must be rhizomatic and pervasive for the pack, far beyond a once-and-for-all contact between a local healthy bacterium and an alien pathogenic bacterium (or a single virus). Given Deleuze and Guattari’s preference for “the pack” and “the assemblage”, the two philosopher naturally have little interest in the animals residing in human space (such as Derrida’s cat and Levinas’s dog “Bobby”) or in close contact with the human beings. However, Haraway’s notion of “companion species” is more tilted to individual companionship and realistic interaction between different species, rather than being limited to “one vs. the pack” or “one vs. the assemblage” relationality. Insofar as A Thousand Plateaus has an ethical vision, the key issue is how men get along with “becomings-animal”, a case in point being the 16th- and 17th-century witch trials in Europe. 46 It is a great pity that scant attention in Deleuze’s philosophy is paid to the physical, sustainable and reciprocal companionship between a man and an animal in natureculture, which explains why Haraway objects to the label of “Deleuzist” in her case. Haraway maintains that A Thousand Plateaus stands for “a philosophy of the sublime, not the earthly, not the mud; becoming-animal is not an autre-mondialisation”, which indicates the two posthuman philosophers’ “incuriosity about animals, and horror at the ordinariness of flesh, here covered by the alibi of an anti-Oedipal and anticapitalist project.” 47

3. “Companion species” as a political project (and a literary vision)

It is evident that the tension between Haraway and posthumanism is manifest both in her self-criticism of the cyborg and in her departure from Derrida, Levinas and Deleuze, among other post-structuralist philosophers. However, it is far from enough to delineate and interrogate the limits of posthumanism. What

45 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, pp. 243-244.
47 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p. 28, p. 30.
Haraway has to deal with is to define “companion species” in the ontological sense and to realize the ideal companionship between men and animals. As for the first question, I think Haraway finds her proof less from the Western tradition of philosophy than from the up-to-date biological findings in life sciences, a field Deleuze in his “nomadic reading” only half-heartedly draws upon.

For Haraway, companion species is necessitated by biological symbiosis. Organisms, in her definition, are “ecosystems of genomes, consortia, communities, partly digested dinners, mortal boundary formations,” and the basic rule is “ever more complex life forms are the continual result of ever more intricate and multidirectional acts of association of and with other life forms.” 48 As Haraway put it, “even toy dogs and fat old ladies on city streets” exemplify such mortal boundary formations. 49 More strictly speaking, no ecosystem, Haraway rightly points out, can be independent of others, and she is quite dubious about the possibility of the so-called “autopoiesis”, in which “self-maintaining entities (the smallest biological unit of which is a living cell) develop and sustain their own form, drawing on the enveloping flows of matter and energy.” 50 Indebted to developmental biologist Scott Gilbert’s famous critique of “autopoiesis”, Haraway holds to a radically new conception of organism. Gilbert, based on his study of embryo development, is of the opinion that there is no such thing as “self-building and self-maintaining systems” in the biological world; rather, “reciprocal induction within and between always-in-process critters ramifies through space and time on both large and small scales in cascades of inter- and intra-action.” 51 Thanks to the latest advancement of biology, scientists now suggest that the old-fashioned term “organism” be replaced by “metaorganism”, because in recent years researcher have shown that “what people commonly think of as ‘their’ bodies contain roughly 10 microbial cells for each genetically human one”. 52 The microbial, in spite of their negligible weight (just a few pounds!), can introduce overwhelmingly diverse genes to their hosts, and it is such that “humanity is mi-

48 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p.31.
49 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p.31.
50 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p.32.
51 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p.32.
The ontological implications of the new conception of organism are profound, one result being the dismantling of the traditional dichotomy of “I” and “non-I”. That “you are who you are depending on your nuclear genes” would no longer hold true, “if microbes living symbiotically in the body amount to a second mode of inheritance”. And if all organism, be it the human or the animal, are not self-making and self-contained “autopoiesis” in biological sense, how can one believe in “an autopoietic machine” fantasized by those posthumanist critics or sci-fi writers?

Therefore, it is in the frontline of cell biology that Haraway has found solid evidence for the legitimacy of companion species, and naturally, the next step is to establish a strong ethical and political base to undergird companion species as “significant others”. This time, she must return to the social sciences and humanities. Haraway writes, “When species meet, the question of how to inherit histories is pressing, and how to get on together is at stake.” If we push Levinas’s idea to its limit and endow the animal with a “face” in Levinas’s sense, his ethics of “the others” might apply to the relationship between the human beings and the animals. Not only can men and animals gaze at each other, but the animal “face”, as does the face of an Auschwitz inmate, presents infinite alterity and reciprocal duties. Haraway calls the politics of companion species “a question of cosmopolitics, of learning to be ‘polite’ in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying, and nurturing and killing.”

But what is “cosmopolitics”? It is a term coined by Isabelle Stengers and later on developed by Bruno Latour into a theory that combines sciences and politics. It is not the purpose of the present essay to elaborate on the connections between Stengers, Latour and Haraway; rather, what most interests me is the way Haraway, when discussing the vision of such a cosmopolitics, refers to Spivak’s theory, in particular her idea of “the subaltern” and “worlding”. The reason why Spivak’s postcolonial theory appeals to Haraway is, first of all, that the animals and their dwelling space in nature is analogous to “the Third World” inhabited by the colonized and the de-colonized. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak investigates the widow sacrifice in ancient India, revealing how an ungendered

53 Susan Milius, “Beyond the Microbiome”, 15.
54 Susan Milius, “Beyond the Microbiome”, 17.
55 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p.35.
56 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p.42.
subject was repeatedly cancelled out in historiography. 57 The subaltern, Spivak contends, are not those indigenous people in old colonies, but “some absolutely heterogenous members in decolonized space”, those who were born into silence and cannot speak up on their own. 58 For Haraway, the animals are not unlike the subaltern who are shrouded by absolute exteriority, the whole culture being implicated in silencing them as the others. When the naked Derrida was confronted by his cat in the bathroom, he “did not fall into the trap of making the subaltern speak, and yet “did not seriously consider an alternative form of engagement either, one that risked knowing something more about cats and how to look back”. 59

However, if the animals are as mute as the subaltern, how can companion species manage to establish cross-species cosmopolitics? It is worth noting that Spivak’s idea on the subaltern is subject to vigorous revision. In an early version of the essay, Spivak bemoaned in the conclusion that the Subaltern cannot speak, but after a lot of critical responses poured in, she came to realize that her assertion was probably incorrect. 60 Spivak believes that it is always self-cheating and self-serving, owing to the cognitive abyss between “us” and the subaltern, to put words in the mouth of the subaltern, but it is also true, as is argued by the author of “Can the Subaltern Vote?”, that the inarticulate subaltern can voice themselves vicariously by means of representative democracy. 61 In other words, the problematic risks of subaltern studies is “conflating the temporarily unknown with the permanently unknowable.” 62 The “mute” subaltern might be unable to speak in a familiar way perceptible to us, but it doesn’t mean that in future there is no such thing as a communicative pattern or a political and scientific approach that enables the subaltern speak up. Haraway is much against the agnosticism that expels the animals to the “black hole” of infinite others, because the studies of animal cognition and behavior pattern is a promising new filed. Combining postcolonial theory and Stenger and Matthew C. Watson puts forward an alternative mode of politics, “subalternist cosmopolitics,” which Watson describes as “the ontolog-

59 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, p. 20.
itical politics that attends to its limits of representation and the forms of violence that its boundary-practices enact.” Watson’s political conception obviously resonates much with Haraway’s, because to understand the animal’s social position from the perspective of the subaltern would bring the animals back to the life world, from the exile to mysterious wilderness.

Unsurprisingly, Spivak recently addressed the social dimension of cosmopolitics, which she argued shouldn’t be confused with cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism, in her view, is more like a political ideal, while the cosmopolitical, a term derived from Plato’s politheia, “is a concern about a constitution for the world, world government.” In the age of economic globalization, the boundary-defying world governance is looming large, with the free flow of financial capital. Yet, as Spivak warns, “cosmopolitics is not a question of syncretism. It is a question of the organization of global governance. That is what ‘cosmos’ means”. To achieve this goal, Spivak writes, “we must construct cosmopolitanism differently. We must train our imagination to go into a different epistemological performance when it comes to the idea of cosmopolitanism.” Only when the intellectual have transformed their epistemological configuration can the existing cosmopolitical institution morph from economic globalization into “subalternist cosmopolitics”. When such a change happens, Haraway’s notion of companion species can be extended from the level of embryo and organism to a much larger ecosystem, that is, the natureculture we share with the animals. To facilitate the momentous transformation, Spivak calls for the advent of “organic intellectual”, who are bent on challenging the boundary of representation and exercising cosmopolitics in the broader connection with different organisms. It is at this point that Haraway’s biological approach and Spivak’s postcolonial critique converge, both striving for an alliance in the name of cosmopolitics. As Junmei Zhang aptly puts it, “what the two critics share in common is the commitment to a path other than parochial and exclusive identity politics, to replacing identity with alliance, region with ethnicity, cross-boundary with ossification. They have made affirmative critique

66 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Foreword: Cosmopolitanisms and the Cosmopolitical,” 112.
of modernity and the Enlightenment, not to mention science and democracy.”

This is, of course, not the end point of our discussion. It remains a question as to what “organic intellectual” can really achieve other than the enactment of discourse, as they have no secular power to sway world governance as did the Neoliberal or Keynesian economists, who helped build Bretton Woods System, IMF, or WTO as part of the infrastructure of global capitalism today. Indeed, no matter what an epistemological revolution posthumanist thinkers can bring about, we could never escape from the dominance of anthropocentrism insofar as Realpolitik is the status quo. Nor is it the case that posthumanism has created any social consensus as to opening up the category of the nonhuman. Be it “the Cyborg Manifesto” or “the Companion Species Manifesto”, these texts have but flimsy power when it comes to social praxis. Haraway admits that it is still difficult to spread the generalist idea of “companion species” in a world that glorifies identity politics and consecrates differences. As Helen Verran asks, “How can people rooted in different knowledge practices ‘get on together’, especially when all-too-easy cultural relativism is not an option, either politically, epistemologically, or morally?” The only solution to this dilemma, as Haraway envisions, is “on-the-ground work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures.”

In my view, “on-the-ground work” should not only include the localization of eco-politics, but consist of the enactment of literary imagination. Biologically speaking, empathetic capability spurred by literary reading is still volatile and self-righteous, unable to surpass the gargantuan divide between the human beings and the animals and reach the very affective core of animal world. Yet, literary works that stimulate empathetic imagination is the best training site of what Spivak calls “epistemological performance”. Both Hayles and Spivak attach much importance to the great novels engaging with “wholly others,” but Haraway doesn’t talk much about literature. In How We Became Posthuman, Hayles confirms the central methodological role of literature for her posthumanist studies.

She writes, “the literary texts do more than explore the cultural implications of scientific theories and technological artifacts. Embedding ideas and artifacts in the situated specificities of narrative, the literary texts give these ideas and artifacts a local habitation and a name through discursive formulations whose effects are specific to that textual body.” In other words, by shifting to the field of literary narrative, Hayles attempts to redress the fallacy of “disembodiment” in post-humanism, because it is in imaginative literature that abstract ideas circulating in theoretical discourse are animated and embodied. Similarly, literature is indispensable for Spivak’s postcolonial critique—through her ingenious reading of Charlotte Brontë, Mary Shelley, Baudelaire, Kipling and Coetzee, she convincingly reveals how colonialism worked in history and how the postcolonial world operates today. Spivak uses “worlding”—a term frequently mentioned by Haraway—to describe “the way in which colonized space is brought into the ‘world’, that is, made to exist as part of a world essentially constructed by Euro-centrism”. If Brontë, Shelley and Kipling shed light on the hidden mechanism of “worlding” in the discourse of the Empire and its subjects, Jean Rhys, Coetzee and Naipaul in their postcolonial fiction manage to mobilize the agency of literature to counter the imperialist “worlding” process, and to realize a “re-worlding” of “the Third World”.

As a concluding remark, I believe that the (re-)worlding agency of literature that works in de-colonized space also applies to the relationship between men and animals/cyborgs in the posthuman context. Haraway regards the cyborg as “an obligatory worlding,” a process which is “a military project, a late capitalist project in deep collaboration with new forms of imperial war”. Therefore, the war centering on the cyborg and animals amounts to a war in defense of the subaltern. Only by assuming a transgressive worlding as weaponry of resistance can we gain a foothold in the representation of the cyborg and animals, so as to avoid the tragedy of reducing technology and the animal to the mere tool of late capitalism. We must capitalize on—but not limited to—the literary text, if Haraway’s worthy ideal of companion species, and of re-worlding the natureculture, stands a chance of fulfillment.

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72 N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, p. 22.
74 Nicholas Gane and Donna Haraway, “Interview with Donna Haraway”, p. 139.