



Animal Crackers: Rationality & Animality in the Western Political Imaginary

Dr Paul R. Harrison
School of Humanities and Human Services
Queensland University of Technology

**Paper presented to the Social Change in the
21st Century Conference**

**Centre for Social Change Research
Queensland University of Technology
29 October 2004**

Animal Crackers: Rationality & Animality in the Western Political Imaginary

Dr Paul R. Harrison, Humanities and Human Services, QUT

1. Introduction

The issue of the animality of man is back on the philosophical and sociological agenda. At the philosophical level, this results from the more thorough-going critique of anthropocentrism and humanism in contemporary thought. At the sociological level, the re-emergence of the thematic of barbarism, on the one hand, and the emergence of the recognition of our 'posthuman future', on the other hand, has brought into question the centrality of the humanity of the human.

I would like to consider four different but inter-related questions that circle around the issues of the subject, sexual difference and the difference between what has been called historically 'man' and animal before concluding with what could be called 'the comatose woman'. I will say a few things first about the emergence of the 'non-concept' of difference in contemporary thought and how it has been used to deconstruct the purported domination of the subject and the technological preformation of thought that flows from it. My argument will be that this reading of philosophy, as Derrida points out, brings to the fore the question of what the German language calls *Geschlecht*; that is, the question or questions of species difference, of sexual difference, of ethnic or racial difference. In sum, those differences that the subject of western metaphysics transcended, either non-dialectically or dialectically. These differences have been described conventionally as belonging to the order of nature, which is a categorization that deconstruction rejects. What might lie beyond nature and these 'naturalised' differences is a certain experience of an originary multiplicity of the world before its determination by subjectifying thought. The question that the issue of sexual and species difference raises, however, is: How can we both deconstruct the subject and the spiritualist metaphysics that determine it, while not falling into a naturalism or biologism that still requires both critique and denunciation? Is there not only a paradox, but a dangerous paradox in trying to think the multiple. It is my argument that deconstruction can not really answer these question and that this fact necessitates a re-evaluation of the subject and points to the limitations of postmodern notions of difference.

2. Metaphysics and the subject of the reflexion model

I will turn briefly to the question of the subject. The 'non-concept' of difference is a way-out of Greco-occidental metaphysics and its determination of being by the subject. Its cogency, therefore, derives from a particular reading of Western metaphysics that Heidegger developed out of suggestions by Nietzsche. According to Heidegger, modernity and the modern determination of being is under the sway of 'being-there' determined as *subjectum* and the concept of

representation as the 'beingness' of being as such. The *subjectum* determines truth as certainty, which serves up beings for man's disposal in a process that Heidegger describes as 'machination'. Representation is the treatment of beings as beings for the *subjectum* and his 'machination'. For Heidegger, 'the unity of these powers of machination founds a position of power for man. That position is essentially violent' (Heidegger, 1991: 180). The connection between metaphysics, the subject and violence, therefore, is quite clear for Heidegger. This connection, moreover, relegates nature in western metaphysics to the status of the violated or subjugated other of the subject.

If 'all violence is a violence of the concept', then thought must lead back to an unmediated experience of the object or a certain step beyond the immanence of the concept (Derrida, 1978: 140). The temptation of immediacy, to which Levinas succumbs in his conception of the face and to which Serres succumbs in his philosophy of the five senses, is one Derrida wishes quite clearly to avoid. This is not the case with the thought of exteriority, as that which exists beyond being and its determinations; that is, to the thought of the 'infinitely other'. This is an experience to which Derrida draws nearer without, however, leaving behind an appreciation that within the Greek *logos* there was also a certain experience of otherness that the modern idea of the subject occluded. For Derrida, the modern subject is a captive of the living presence, which reduces past and future presents to that of the living present. 'Only the alterity of past and future presents', Derrida argues, 'permits the absolute identity of the living present as the self-identity of non-self identity' (Derrida, 1978: 132). Presence, presence-to-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) and the priority of beings as tools for man and his 'machination' have their origin in the violence of the concept that seizes being, rather than letting Being be or experiencing pure exteriority beyond being itself; that is, a thought that thinks non-identity as such is a thought beyond the concept.

The connection between the subject and representation is interiorised in the reflexion model of the subject typical of modernity. The question that must be raised is whether the hegemony of the model necessitates a deconstruction of the concept of subjectivity, rather than its reconstruction on another terrain. The elements of the model of reflexion that concerns us here centre on the auto-affective character of the model. Within Husserlian phenomenology, the subject is characterised as a being that hears itself speak in a circle of pure auto-affection. It is not only hearing, but both sight and breath that are implicated in the auto-affective circle of the occidental concept of the subject. Immediacy is what counts and representation must capture the immediacy or else lose all representational validity. The closeness of the subject to the materiality of its expressions guarantees their 'ownness'. The recuperation of the gaze that loses itself in its reflection validates the subject's own self-hood. The breath that emanates from the being of the subject expresses immaterially the soul of the being that exhales. The Occidental theory of the subject eschews alterity and difference, according to Derrida, and values identity as recuperation and reconciliation without loss.

The history of western metaphysics, however, is not as clear as this would suggest. As Manfred Frank has pointed out, it is not clear that the subject as self-consciousness was conceived as both immediate and without differentiation. Indeed, it was conceived usually both as a mediated and 'virtually' differentiated relationship to oneself (Frank, 1984: 300-301). What Frank makes clear, moreover, is that reflection was conceived as a detour through otherness back to the self. For Derrida, the notion of an 'otherness' that would be reflected back into the self would not be 'other'; and the notion of a unity into which 'otherness' would return is untenable. The unity of self-consciousness is an 'undecidable' and self-consciousness becomes, therefore, an effect of a non-concept of difference that attains a transcendental status. Difference is, as Frank shows, the power of the negative that can never be recuperated; and as such bears comparison with Hegel's notion of 'autonomous negativity'. Unlike Hegel, however, Derrida does not think there is a unity to which the self returns out of negativity as there is only the difference that produced the subject in the first instance (Frank, 1984: 357-358). If the western idea of the subject is not as hostile to its internal otherness as deconstruction suggests, then the idea that this subject is also responsible for the eradication of external nature is also implausible. Hence, critics of the enlightenment project from Adorno and Horkheimer to Gray and Mestrovic are mistaken.

3. Sexual difference: man and woman

The importance of the question of sexual difference lies in the challenge that it poses to the idea that the subject and conceptual thought neutralise nature and the realm of the natural. Within the thought of Heidegger, according to Derrida, the notions of *Geschlecht* and *Neutralität* circle around the theme of particularity and its opposite, between a mere anthropology, as opposed to a fundamental ontology, of *Dasein*. The tension between these two poles is a recurrent theme of contemporary feminism; namely, whether the universality of certain philosophemes does not contain a profound complicity with male sexuality. More radically, the question that this further raises is whether human beings are fundamentally 'sexed' beings; and whether this characteristic pre-determines subjectivity in ways that western thought has not been able to comprehend. If sexual difference pre-determines and pre-forms subjectivity, then what remnants of a cognitive and ethical approach to subjectivity can be retained? If the principle of autonomy contains a masked pre-determination and pre-formation of subjectivity by male sexual being, then what forms of subjectivity remain after the unmasking. If autonomy is complicit with domination, then female sexuality and other alternative sexualities emerge as 'exit-points' from Western thought.

Derrida's reading of Heidegger's thoughts on *Dasein* and *Geschlecht* deconstructs both Heidegger's and, by implication, western metaphysics' attempt to 'neutralise' *Geschlecht*. For Heidegger, it is 'sexual neutrality' and not 'sexual difference' that is both required for the analysis of *Dasein* and even indicated by the passage from the masculine *Mann* to the neutral *Dasein* (Derrida, 1987: 400). The separation of the anthropological realm of sex, gender, race and

species from that of fundamental ontology seems to repeat a typical gesture of Western philosophy that can be also seen in the difference between Kant's *Anthropologie* and the *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*; namely, the gesture of simultaneous recognition and marginalisation of the anthropological domain. What Derrida shows, however, is that Heidegger's attempt to argue that sexual neutrality is a neutrality that refers only to sexual duality and that the neutrality of *Dasein* contains an 'originary positivity (*ursprüngliche Positivität*)' that does not result in a 'de-sexualisation' of *Dasein*, but to a positive notion of a 'pre-differential' or 'pre-dual' sexuality that is neither 'unitary', 'homogeneous' or 'undifferentiated' (Derrida, 1987: 402). 'Pre-dual' sexuality is an undecidable and the dualisation of sexual being emerges, therefore, as a negativity in the thought of Heidegger. The implication for subjectivity is that selfhood or *Selbstheit* is already marked by sexuality before its subsequent dualisation and subsequent 'violent' neutralisation (Derrida, 1987: 404).

This 'pre-dual' sexuality or non-originary sexual origin of being is 'originary positivity'. This 'originary positivity' is 'non-originary' in so far as it is 'the internal possibility of a dispersion or of a factual dissemination (*faktische Zerstreung*) in the body proper (*Leiblichkeit*) and 'by there in sexuality (*und damit in die Geschlechtlichkeit*)' (Derrida, 1987: 405-6). Factual dissemination belongs, therefore, to the neutral concept of *Dasein*. It constitutes the 'originary spatialisation' of *Dasein*; and has a transcendental status in so far as elevates 'dispersion', 'dissociation' and 'deliasion' into quasi-transcendentals. 'Transcendental dispersion' is the pre-originary origin of the spatial determinants of *Dasein* in its neutral determination; and not merely, as it is usually viewed, as a mode of inauthenticity of *Dasein* (as in the analysis of *Geworfenheit*) (Derrida, 1987: 413). Derrida's conclusion is that sexual difference as 'transcendental dispersion' is 'not yet' or 'already more' than sexual duality (Derrida, 1987: 414). Sexual difference acquires, through this turning, a transcendental and undecidable aspect that renders simplistic any elevation of female sexual being over male sexual being, both of which acquire a derived character. 'Factual dissemination' has a sexual character that is not yet 'sexed', but already more than 'sexed' in so far as its seminal character is multiple. Sexual difference or duality, therefore, is a narrowing of an originary multiplicity.

It is in the body or in bodiliness that this 'factual dissemination' is located not as either a male or female body, but as a sexed body or as the flesh prior to all sexual dualisation: 'assigned to a body, *Dasein* is, in its facticity, separated, subservient to dispersion and to pacellisation (*zersplittert*) and by that very fact (*ineins damit*) always disunited, detuned, cloven, divided (*zwiespältig*) by sexuality, towards a determinant sex (*in eine bestimmte Geschlechtlichkeit*)' (Derrida, 1987: 406). Unlike feminist psychoanalysis that sees in the historico-cultural valorisation of the male sexed being, the beginnings of the western idea of the subject, Derrida outbids all psychoanalysis and all theories of subjectivity in his reading of Heidegger's idea of the flesh. The multiplicity that is flesh as the locus of 'factual dissemination' sexualises the body without sex and

subjectivises it without the subject. It becomes the origin as originary dispersion and de-liason: a multiple origin. Sexual difference, therefore, is more accurately understood as multiplicity.

4. The *animal rationale* of western thought: man and animal

The question of species difference arose out of atypical emanation of the sixties; namely, animal liberation is a product of the sixties. At a time when peasants, workers, students, women and homosexuals amongst others demanded liberation from a society that was uniformly characterised as repressive or oppressive, animal liberation as well as ecological movements posed the question of a liberation not from a particular type of society, but of a particular mode of relation between society and nature. This fetishism for liberation was not without the kind of difficulties satirized unmercifully by Alexei Sayle in a sketch which depicted the revolutionary liberation of a line of shopping trolleys from their chains outside a supermarket. These movements, however, had an undeniable effect. The initial main proponent of 'animal liberation', for example, used the utilitarian philosophical tradition to cut through discussions of the differences between man and animal in terms of the possession or non-possession of a soul or of a free will; and to assert that the sentient nature of animals required us to pursue a 'utilitarian calculus' both with respect to man and animals (Singer). Such a calculus is, of course, not designed to produce a difference, but to eliminate one. The difference to be eliminated is the western philosophical elevation of man over the animal through the elaboration of a species (*Geschlecht*) difference. What is, as Marx would have put it, the species-being (*Gattungswesen*) of man? Marx's answer was thought and the imagination, as in the 'parable' of the architect and the bee, Heidegger's answer is thought and the hand or, rather, a particular usage of the hand.

For Heidegger, according to Derrida's reading, it is the hand or, more particularly, a particular usage of the hand that separates human beings from animals such as monkeys. The monkey is, of course, an animal that possesses a hand, but its usage of the hand is not that of *Dasein*. The monkey uses its hand solely as a tool with which to grasp things; it is its prehensile grip that determines the use that it makes of its hand. The human being as *animale rationale* is also an animal which seizes things; and, moreover, it is precisely this aspect of seizure which, as Derrida points out, Hegel associates with the concept. It is, therefore, elsewhere that the difference between man and animals resides. What Heidegger, in fact, uses to separate man from animal is the capacity of the hand to give and receive and not simply to seize; an opposition which Derrida deconstructs in terms both of his earlier analysis of the undecidable character of the *pharmakon* as both remedy and poison; and in terms of an analysis of Heidegger's own concepts of presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) and ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) (Derrida, 1987: 432).

The hand holds a seminal importance in the work of Heidegger not only in terms of the gift, but also as a sign, a *monstrance*. A monstrance is an archaic word with one of two meanings. It

refers either to a demonstration or a proof or it is a receptacle on which the host sits (*SOED*). Derrida stresses the connections that Heidegger makes between the hand and thought, between thought and the word, and between the word and *Handwerk*; and stresses the hands of Heidegger himself and his insistence on handwriting and his repulsion, shared neither by Nietzsche nor Derrida, for the mechanical typewriter or the personal computer. This series of metonymical shifts are part of Heidegger's critique of technology, which at this level of the argument counterpoises the hand as receptacle to the hand as tool. The hand as receptacle gives and receives; it is no longer a tool that seizes and makes useful. It is this concept of the hand that allows Heidegger to reverse the metaphysical determination of the hand as presence-at-hand by readiness-to-hand or usefulness. For Heidegger, the primary character of *pragma* or things is precisely their presence-at-hand, their present-ness.

This argument will not, of course, escape Derrida's critique of presence; a critique he pursues in terms of Heidegger's rejection of mechanised writing as the 'destruction of the word (*Zerstörung des Wortes*)' (Derrida, 1987: 434). The co-belonging of the hand and the word, the word and the handwork of handwriting also involves a link on Derrida's reading, although Heidegger makes no such link directly, between the hand-written word and the phonetic system of writing. The privileging of the hand as presence-at-hand also involves, therefore, a secret complicity with the *phonē* as immediate self-presence. It is not, however, presented as such by Heidegger, but the elevation of Socrates to the rank of the purest thinker of the Occident because he did not write and his further identification of intellectual decline with the advent of literature suggest otherwise for Derrida. As Heidegger sees it, according to Derrida's reading, there is 'an essential and originary co-belonging of *Sein, Wort, legein, logos, Lese, Schrift* as *Handschrift*. This co-belonging which collects them together belongs moreover to the same movement of gathering which Heidegger reads ... in *legein* and in *reading*' (Derrida, 1987: 436). It is, moreover, the hand in the singular that concerns Heidegger as hands imply dispersal, rather than a gathering.

This meditation on the hand as the way to designate the difference between man and animal is radicalised in Heidegger's reading of the world in the posthumously published lecture series on the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. For Heidegger, man is *weltbildend* and the stone is *weltlos*, whereas in the middle stands the animal as *weltarm*. For Derrida, these distinctions, despite their phenomenological sophistication, lead back to the old western metaphysical debate concerning whether animals possess or do not possess a soul or spirit. In other words, they lead back to an unexplored opposition between the Platonic-Christian notion of spirit and its chthonic or pagan alternative: the spirit as flame as it appears in the poetry of Trakl. For Heidegger, the world in this text is spirit and the world-forming capacities of *Dasein* are spiritual. The problem, therefore, is what does the animal possess or not possess given that it is not without a world, but merely poor in relation to the world. The example used by Derrida is Heidegger's example of a lizard on a rock and his suggestion that one should 'strike through' the word rock in order to signify

what the animal lacks; namely the capacity to name the rock (Derrida, 1987b: 83). This fundamental incapacity means that, as Derrida puts it, 'one cannot say that the animal is closed to being. It is closed to the very opening of being. It has no access to the difference between open and closed' (Derrida, 1987b: 85). The interesting point here is that although Derrida acknowledges that this distinction smacks of anthropocentric or humanist teleology; that is, the incapacity to name closes off animal being to the very notion of being as the difference between openness and closedness, Derrida argues that this was justified, then as now, as the price to be paid 'in the ethico-political denunciation of biologism, of racism, of naturalism, etc' (Derrida, 1987b: 87). The lapse into humanism by Heidegger, which threatens to undo his deconstruction of the Platonic-Christian metaphysical tradition, receives a contextual justification from Derrida that will be shown to be out of line with the general determination of the concept of spirit as flame in Heidegger.

This argument does not seem plausible, however, if we think more in terms of the phenomenological concept of the world than in terms of the political conjuncture. What Heidegger will later call 'earth' has nothing at all to do with the phenomenological concept of the world' as the horizon of human activity. The concept of earth is chthonic, that of world is gnostic or intellectualist. Hence, the early Heidegger's commitment to the concept of the world seems a more promising avenue of inquiry than the later Heidegger's notion of the *Geviert*; and Derrida's accusation of humanism merely stifles the further development of this argument. Furthermore, if the deconstruction of the notion of spirit in western metaphysics must stop before it collapses into biologism, racism and naturalism, then the question of the plausibility of the man and animal question must be taken more seriously and not short-circuited by accusations of humanism. Finally, there is a sense in which the Derridean deconstruction of spirit parallels a kind of deep ecological position in which the 'human being is not a thing in an environment, but a juncture in a relational system without determined boundaries in time and space' (Naess, 1989: 79). Unlike the anthropocentrism of the utilitarian calculus of 'animal liberation', deep ecology departs from the standpoint of both 'holism' and 'antihumanism'; a standpoint sympathetic to the anti-Cartesian sensibilities of Heideggerians (Ferry, 1992: 144). As Ferry points out, however, such a position can only lead to the positing of a concept of life as the overarching value (Ferry, 1992: 171). There is no sign in Derrida's thoughts on messianism that such a limited notion is adopted, but if this is the case then the anti-humanism is not as radical as suggested and the question of the world-forming character of man is more legitimate than Derrida allows.

The sexual difference and the species difference cannot be deconstructed by recourse to a pre-originary origin of sex that pre-exists the emergence of dual sexes or the common value of life that subtends both human and animal life. The thought of difference strikes real difficulties in so far as its anti-humanist drift can not fully cover over the question of subjectivity. The accusation of naturalism or biologism, of either a chthonic or intellectualist kind, awaits every over-drawn

deconstruction of subjectivity. The attempt at a 'subjectivity without any subject' is an attempt to address this problem (Blanchot, 1986: 30); as is the attempt at a 'messianism without the messianic' in Derrida's politics. The extent to which it is a philosophical project that can be successfully executed remains, however, to be explored.

5. The open: the animal and the comatose woman

The recent work of Giorgio Agamben (2002) has thrown an unusual light on the Heideggerian theory of the animal by pointing to the influence on it of the zoologist Jacob von Uexküll. Uexküll made a distinction between *Umgebung*, which is the objective space within which humans supposedly move, and the *Umwelt*, which is constituted by 'bearers of signification' (Bedeutungstraeger) or of 'marks' or 'markings' (*Merkmaltraeger*). The animal, for Uexküll, is only interested in those 'bearers of signification' that constitute its environment. The animal knows nothing about the object as 'no animal enters into a relation with an object as such', but only with those 'bearers of signification' that constitute its *Umwelt* (62). Hence, the spider does not know the fly that it entraps, but 'the web characterizes the paradoxical coincidence of this reciprocal blindness' (67). It is the blindness toward the object that creates an openness through the separate but complementary closure of each animal's *Umwelt*. For Agamben, this idea breaks out of the unitary universe of classical science and partakes of the revolutionary ideas of quantum physics and the avant-garde. And it is precisely this revolution that is expressed in Heidegger's redefinition of the subject as *Dasein* in relation to its world as one of *in-der-Welt-sein*. In other words, the subject does not confront an object-world, but the world constitutes an enclosure that is *Dasein's* originary form of openness.

For Agamben, the distinction between the stone, the animal and man is really a way of thinking through what difference the irruption of man into the living means in relation to the animal beyond the conventional designation of man as an *animal rationale* within the context of that 'anthropological machine' that determines Western subject (75). In this context, he points to two radically different solutions in the Heideggerian oeuvre. In the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger translates von Uexküll's concepts into his own and argues that the fundamental mode of being of the animal as one of stupeur or captivation or *Benommenheit*. Hence, the animal is distinguished from its other in terms of the etymological chain that stems from *benommen* (captivate/benumb) to *eingenommen* (absorb) to *Benehmen* (behaviour), and as such it is absorbed by its 'bearers of significance', whereas the etymological chain that determines its other leads from *handeln* (act) to *sich verhalten* (comport oneself). This would seem to determine

the issue along the lines of a distinction between, to put it simply, behaviour and action or the 'être-*pris*' and the *ispeite* or *Selbstheit* of man' (79). But there is more to it than that as Heidegger is arguing that the animal possesses a world; it is *weltarm* not *weltlos*. Stupeur or captivation is the soustraction (*Genommenheit*) through which the animal can be re-absorbed by the world (*Hingenommenheit*). It is its specific form of openness or closure in so far as the animal's 'bearers of signification' make a world open to it if not accessible or revealed (*offenbar*). Captivation cracks open that world that constitutes the animal.

According to Agamben, there is a radicalisation of the openness that the animal effects in the reading of the animal that Heidegger gives some ten years later. This radicalisation can be best seen in the reference to Rilke who argues that it is the animal (*die Kreatur*) which sees the opening, whereas man has his eyes inverted and placed like traps within his interior (87). The animal experiences the opening, but not the revelation, through its stupeur or captivation. But what precisely is the more fundamental? As Agamben puts it, 'la stupeur est une ouverture plus intense et fascinante que toute connaissance humaine; de l'autre, en tant qu'il n'est pas en mesure de dévoiler son propre desinhibiteur, il est fermé dans une complète opacité' (90). Hence, the animal's stupeur or captivation corresponds to the opposition between negative theology and positive theology; or 'the obscure night of the mystic and clarity of rational knowledge', or, finally, mystical knowledge and destructive observation (90-1). Its stupeur or captivation entails, in other words, 'an expulsion towards the other than it' which qua desinhibiteur introduces an essential shattering or cracking open to otherness of the animal (*wesenhafte Ershuetterung*) (93). The animal is, in Agamben's words, 'tendu extatiquement hors de soi dans une exposition qui l'ébranle dans toute sa constitution' (94). Through an extended analysis of boredom, Heidegger reoperates the distinction between man and animal and concludes, according to Agamben, that 'le Dasein est simplement un animal qui a appris à s'ennuyer, qui s'est réveillé de sa propre stupeur et à sa propre stupeur' (107). Man or humanity is the awakened animal; awakened to the captivation that constitutes him or it through boredom.

For Agamben, Heidegger's politics is read in the light of this interpretation of the animal. The early Heidegger's opposition between openness and revelation is embedded in his interpretation of the conflict (*Streit*) internal to the polis over concealment and unconcealment and the prospect of an assumption by a people of its destiny. It remains true to the anthropological machine, whereas his later work gives up the possibility of a grand shattering (*Ershuetterung*). Agamben's solution to this predicament is to revert to the category of 'vie nue' and to argue that the only thing left is 'la 'gestion intégrale' de la vie biologique, c'est-à-dire de l'animalité même de l'homme' (117). It seems to me a somewhat short-circuited alternative to argue that political theory can only circle around either the exhausted thematic of *post-histoire* or the quasi-naturalised terrain of the genome, the global economy and humanitarian ideology' (117). It is a perspective haunted by the biopolitics of the camps as the *nomos* of the modern where the new living dead man is born,

whether that be the concentration camp prisoner, the refugee, neomort or the comatose. Political modernity is construed as quasi-totalitarian in its continued manufacture of a zone of exclusion where the state of exception is decided in the confrontation between sovereign power and bare life.

The animalisation of the human and the humanisation of the animal remains nevertheless a pressing thematic. At another point in his text, Agamben refers to a famous painting of Titien that renders a scene of sexual satisfaction which he interprets not as a return to nature, but as a mode of boredom, of idleness or otium, of destitution or desoeuvrement. This is the fundamental Stimmung or attunement of the animal's opening that is still present or revealed in sexual satiety, according to both Benjamin and Agamben. At yet another point, he refers to the Jew, the neomort and the coma patient as figures of animality isolated in the human body itself. The neomort and the coma patient are key figures as well in the films of Almodovar. In *Talk to Her* the film's pivotal scene is not filmed, but neither is the act staged in Titien's painting except by reference to the goat or stag in its background. The idleness and desoeuvrement that Titien depicts post coitum is now a pornographic cliché. In the nakedness of the female coma patient, the body regains the erotic charge it lost when it became the nude; and around the non-presented sexual act circles the endless attempts to humanise the *wesentliche Erschuetterung* that expels the animal towards being.

5. Concluding remarks

What we can conclude, perhaps, is that the denunciation of the concept and the subject as a form of violence is a one-sided characterisation of the history of western thought and the contemporary project of the enlightenment. We can further say that the deconstruction of subjectivity through sexual difference results in a notion of the flesh as a locus of 'factual dissemination' prior to the emergence of sexual dualisation and that the deconstruction of subjectivity through species difference results in a notion of the hand as a receptacle of being prior to any utilitarian determination. Both deconstructions, however, escape the subject not by any simple privileging of female sexuality or animal experience. Nor do these deconstructions escape the subject in so far as they in fact turn into a meditation on the flesh or the hand. There is a certain reference to humanity that survives these deconstructions and must do so if a crude naturalism is to be avoided. After all, what deconstruction is after is the transcendental non-site out of which difference emerges, as either sexual or species difference. The question of the subject is pushed back and altered, but not liquidated by this manoeuvre. If this were not the case, then the ethico-political denunciation of biologism, of racism, of naturalism would indeed be impossible. The refugee does not become a figure of ethical concern merely by an act of sovereign power, and the critique of humanitarianism complicity with bare life is well taken (133). Nevertheless, the political construct of nativity and nationality that creates the refugee is only one of the elements that constitutes our political modernity even if it has led to the most gruesome of consequences. What

we have tried to reconstruct here is the attempt to think multiplicity through the concept of *Geschlecht*. This would be an originary multiplicity that pre-exists the determination of nature by the subject and dualistic thinking. We have also looked at the opening that precedes the distinction between animal and man that expels both 'outside of being'. The animal creates an essential breach or cracking open of a world, and humanity is determined, or as I have argued even overly determined, in relation to this breach. Life as an overarching value leads interestingly if somewhat problematically to the fixation of the ethical relation on the management of its limit, viz. bare life, as opposed to the good life of the western philosophical tradition.

References

- Agamben, Giorgio (2002) *L'ouvert, De l'homme et de l'animal*, Paris: Bibliothèque Rivages.
- Blanchot, Maurice (1986) *The writing of the disaster*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Derrida (1978) *Writing and difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, Jacques, (1987) *Psyché, Inventions de l'autre*, Paris: Galilée.
- Derrida, Jacques (1987B) *De l'esprit, Heidegger et la question*, Paris: Galilée.
- Ferry, Luc (1992) *Le nouvel ordre écologique, L'arbre, l'animal et l'homme*, Paris: Bernard Grasset.
- Frank, Manfred (1984) *Was ist Neostukturalismus?*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Heidegger, Martin (1991) *Nietzsche: Volumes three and four*, San Francisco: Harper.
- Heidegger, Martin (1995) *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics: World, finitude, solitude*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Naess, Arnie (1989) *Ecology, community and lifestyle: Outline of an ecosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.