STEPHANIE POSTHUMUS

Eco-Animal Assemblages in Contemporary French Thought

In the Anglophone world, animal studies and ecocriticism have given rise, for the most part, to separate fields of scholarship, academic conferences and programs, internationally-renowned journals, monographs and anthologies. And for good reason. When one considers the ethical foundations on which they have been built, their differences appear quite marked. Animal studies emerged largely from the ethics of individual animal rights and welfare, while Ecocriticism adopted the holistic, ecocentric view characteristic of early environmental ethics. These two branches of moral philosophy have long been in conflict. In his 1980 article "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," environmental philosopher John Baird Callicott attacks Tom Regan's animal ethics because of its focus on the individual organism rather than on the inherent value and needs of the ecosystem as a whole. Even if the historical rift between these two branches has been bridged–Callicott and Regan have since published together–its traces can be found in other areas of study.

Despite the fact that ecocriticism began to take hold in the early 1990s, it did not seriously ask the "animal question" (Derrida) until almost twenty years later. In his 2011 articles, Lawrence Buell refers (a little naïvely) to "the strange disconnects … between 'environmentally'-oriented work and other initiatives that at first sight ought to seem more intimately allied," with a "notable case in point" being "animal studies" (105). In the second edition of his Routledge *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard extensively reworks the chapter on animals in response to the increasing interest in this field. Such examples of leading ecocritics crossing the "historical rift" is encouraging to say the least.

To continue bridging the gap between these two fields, I will adopt a twofold approach. First, I will move beyond the Anglo-centric history of Animal and Eco Studies that I have been recounting so far, and consider contemporary work being done in French in the field of moral philosophy. My point is not to construct a questionable French exceptionalism, but instead to illustrate that cultural and linguistic diversity is key to rethinking animal-nature-human relations. I will focus on two concepts in particular–*le vivant* and *l'habitabilité*–both of which encompass ethical concerns about the livability of planet Earth for a wide diversity of living organisms. Second, I will shift my attention to two contemporary works of French fiction in

order to illustrate the ways in which a transversal poetics cuts across the ecological and the animal. While Didier van Cauwelaert's *Le Journal intime d'un arbre* (2011) and Jean-Baptiste Del Amo's *Règne animal* (2016) may first appear to call for a separate poetics–the former referring to a tree and the latter to the animal–they both offer responses to an ethics of *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité*. Rather than reducing literature to a single set of morals, my analysis will explore the text's poetics, that is, its making of a world that is livable for some and not others, that is co-habitable for some and not others. Understood in this way, textual poetics is an active, imaginative, embodied practice in which the reader participates.

Minding the Language/Culture Gap

In her article "Wild, Domestic, or Technical: What Status for Animals?" French ethicist Marie-Hélène Parizeau compares the ways in which the animal question has been theorized in Francophone Europe and in North America. French-speaking philosophers such as Florence Burgat and Vinciane Despret do not distinguish between wild and domestic animals as has been the case in North America, where animal rights scholars have taken up the cause of domestic animals because of their concern for individual animal welfare, whereas environmentalists have given greater moral value to the wild animal because of their concern for wilderness. Parizeau convincingly argues that "the philosophical consideration of the animal question is related to the dominant conception of nature, culturally constructed and historically situated" (163). Drawing inspiration from French biologist Georges Chapouthier's nature-culture continuum, Parizeau calls for a "nature and animal" rather than a "nature vs. animal" view. She then highlights the influence of phenomenological thought in France that has given rise to a model of care for the nonhuman world.

While Parizeau helpfully identifies positive developments in the field of animal studies in Francophone Europe, it is important to also acknowledge the negative forces that have brought together thinking about animals and nature in France. In his 1992 book *Le nouvel ordre écologique: l'arbre, l'animal, l'homme*, Luc Ferry castigated eco- and animal philosophies as equal menaces to the philosophical tradition of (French) universal humanism. According to Ferry, deep ecology and animal ethics espouse a dangerous anti-humanist sentiment that can quickly lead to the excesses of fascism and totalitarianism. Despite a reductive (mis)reading of different American, French, and

German philosophies and politics, Ferry's book had a lasting impact on the French intellectual scene, essentially rendering environmental and animal ethics off limits for philosophers for many years.[1] On the flip side, it created an undeniable, albeit negative, association between the animal question and increasingly urgent ecological issues.

To further investigate this association, I am borrowing the term "assemblage" from the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. I do not want to spend an inordinate amount of time discussing their philosophy, especially since they have been given ample attention in the world of Anglophone critical theory already. But I do want to point out how this particular term opens up a way of thinking relationally about animals and nature as provisional bodies (matter coming together in specific forms) and as a constellation of terms (words and discourses with their own specific expression). In *A Thousand Plateaus,* the two thinkers offer the following explanation:

> On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away. (88)

Animal and nature assemblages have each produced their own set of bodies, affects, and enunciations in North American philosophy and ethics. But as the title of my paper indicates, I am interested in concepts that assemble eco- and animal concurrently and co-dependently and so do the work of deterritorialization, of which Deleuze and Guattari speak in the second part of the above quote.

Two concepts in particular will retain my attention for the bulk of the paper: *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité*. I am leaving these terms in French because they are, I am arguing, what French philosopher Barbara Cassin calls *untranslatables*. In her introduction to the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophes* (2006), Cassin posits that "untranslatable" does not mean "impossible to translate" (as the translation of the dictionary from French into English and the fact

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[1] Cf. for example the work of French philosopher Catherine Larrère who has spoken repeatedly about the censoring effect of Ferry's book and who has worked for many years to bring American environmental philosophy to a French public from a less polemic position. In the field of literary studies, cf. Anne Simon's article on the continued difficulties of raising the animal question in France ("Les études littéraires françaises").

that this paper is in English should make quite obvious). Rather, it refers to a term that requires ongoing, multiple, translations in light of evolving socio-historical contexts:

> To speak of untranslatables in no way implies that the terms in question, or the expressions, the syntactical or grammatical turns, are not and cannot be translated: the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating. But this indicates that their translation, into one language or another, creates a problem, to the extent of sometimes generating a neologism or imposing a new meaning on an old word. It is a sign of the way in which, from one language to another, neither the words nor the conceptual networks can simply be superimposed. (xvii)

In Cassin's edited dictionary, terms are given in various original languages such as English, French, Greek, German, then listed as translations in other languages and interpreted with respect to the gaps and overlaps of these different meanings. As Cassin explains, the goal of the project is neither to reinforce an "ontological nationalism" (xviii) nor to construct a "logical universalism" for philosophical discourse (xix). Instead, the dictionary defends linguistic diversity on the premise that "each language is a vision of the world that catches another world in its net, that performs a world; and the shared world is less a point of departure than a regulatory principle." It is in a similar spirit of multiplicity "not only among languages but within each language" (xix) that I will be exploring the terms *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité* as eco-animal assemblages.

The "Living" Turn

In his introduction to *Le moment du vivant*, Frédéric Worms identifies a growing preoccupation with the notion of *le vivant* in a host of different disciplines, ranging from the humanities to the sciences. His assessment of this new theoretical preoccupation is difficult to summarize because the term at the heart of his argument–*le vivant*–has no clear equivalent in English. It can mean broadly "the living" encompassing all organisms in the environment, including plants, animals, and humans. It corresponds most closely to the Greek term *Zoe* that means "life," and belongs in the same word group as *Zoon* which means "living creature, being." In the sciences, biology has emerged as the study of life more generally, which is something of a misnomer given that the word *bios* means an individual life. In reality, biology is a kind of *Zoe*-ology in contrast to zoology that studies the specific behavior, physiology, habitat of nonhuman animals, and to anthropology, which focuses on the traditions, rites, practices of human cultures and civilizations.

But such general reflections do not convey the depth and complexity of what Worms essentially deems a "living turn" (as in the "linguistic turn," "material turn," etc.) While he acknowledges that the sciences are redefining *le vivant*, Worms warns against a reductionist view of the body as made up of neuro-biological processes. For Worms, it is equally important to analyze *le vivant* from a Foucauldian biopolitical perspective, as a set of socio-cultural practices and discursive formations. Moreover, he counters the notion of life as the binary opposite of death by taking as his short case study the example of Alzheimer's. On the one hand, such a disease is studied in terms of the degeneration of brain functioning and so fits within a scientific paradigm. On the other, it is part of the bio-medical complex that determines diagnoses, treatments, medication, and care facilities. To avoid the (scientific) naturalism vs. (social) constructivism binary, Worms concludes by describing a kind of relational *vivant* that requires many different social bodies involved in a politics of care for patients suffering from such diseases. Worms calls such an approach "critical vitalism."

Writing a few years before the publication of Worms' edited collection, Corine Pelluchon brings her discipline of moral philosophy to bear on contemporary issues related to *le vivant*. Cutting across the supposed "rift" between animal and environmental ethics, Pelluchon outlines human responsibilities in issues as diverse as intensive factory farming, animal experimentation, job insecurity, social isolation, and the environmental crisis. More generally, she defines *le vivant* as "fragile" and develops an ethics of vulnerability according to which humans are accountable to the human and nonhuman worlds not because of their capabilities but because of their dependencies. While the touchstone of much of moral philosophy is the notion of the autonomous subject, Pelluchon begins with a theory of the broken subject (*Éléments* 212). Even if Pelluchon's emphasis is on human subjects, she asserts that animals, plants, ecosystems, and the biosphere are, like us, part of *le vivant*, whose fragility represents a new ontological category for remaking the foundations of moral philosophy.

Pelluchon further articulates the nature of relational dependencies from the perspective of what she calls a phenomenology of food in her book *Les nourritures. Philosophie du corps politique*. To live (*vivre*) is always to live with/from/alongside somebody or someone (*vivre de*), whether this be a good bowl of soup, light, air, films, or social relations (*Nourritures* 17). Ethics start from that which puts me in relationship with other living beings, exposes me to hunger and death, and requires action on my part when faced with the needs of another. Eating instantiates the primary act of existence that

makes one's life dependent upon the lives of others, including that of future generations and other species (358). Pelluchon undoes the nature/culture binary by theorizing bio-physical acts (such as eating an apple) in terms of socio-political relationships (the apple is part of me and vice versa, but also, I have made a choice to eat one kind of life rather than another).[2] In place of Descartes' famous "I think, therefore I am," we might assert: "We eat and therefore we are (already) (always) other."

If assemblages contain "bodies, actions and passions" on the one hand, and "enunciations, acts and statements" on the other, as Deleuze and Guattari contend, it is helpful to summarize *le moment du vivant* in these terms. Both Worms and Pelluchon envision the living world as organisms with bodies, as discrete beings embedded in bio-social relationships that are constantly being constituted and reconstituted. Their aim is to rethink *le vivant* as an essential field within philosophy and ethics.[3] Whereas Worms' focus remains on the human, Pelluchon proposes new ontological categories such as vulnerability and incorporation, which include eco- and animal worlds. She opposes the thesis of human exceptionalism, absolute freedom, and the notion of the individualistic subject, calling instead for a new social contract and a reconstructed democracy to protect the biosphere, the interests of future generations, and other living beings. By including humans as living beings dependent upon the living world, *le vivant* represents a paradigm shift away from the idea of nature as separate from culture that has been at the heart of much of environmental ethics in North America. In this way, it presents a way forward for a non-dualist politics and ethics that asks how life can be made livable for the greatest number of species.

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2 In *Manifeste animaliste. Politiser la cause animale*, Pelluchon develops her position on vegetarianism and the eventual liberation of animals. In an earlier article, she denounces the suffering of factory farm animals but does not align her thinking with that of abolitionists (cf. "Zoopolitique et justice envers les animaux").

3 I have chosen to focus on Worms and Pelluchon because of their philosophical perspective. However, many scientifically oriented politically engaged texts are also part of *le moment du vivant*; cf. Henri Atlan's *Le vivant post-génomique: ou Qu'est-ce que l'auto-organisation?* (2011), Robert Barbault's *Au nom du vivant. Plaidoyer pour réconcilier l'homme et la nature* (2014), François Letourneux and Nathalie Fontrel's *Chroniques du vivant: les aventures de la biodiversité* (2014), and Alain Prochiantz's *Qu'est-ce que le vivant?* (2012).

Life on a Livable Planet

This leads me to my second concept, *l'habitabilité*. Whereas the verb *vivre* means to live in the sense of having a body (as an organism or being), the verb *habiter* refers to living in the sense of having a place. The first verb is more often used intransitively–*je vis* ("I live")–and so evokes the possibility of autonomous existence (however misleading this may be, as Pelluchon makes clear by using the expression *vivre de*), while the second verb is more often used transitively–*j'habite une maison* ("I live in a house")–and so places the subject in relation to a location. In this way, *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité* are intimately interconnected. For a being to have life, it must be living in a place that sustains life. We might then ask: How is a place made livable? How is the livability of a place increased or decreased? In his article "Répondre du vivant," Roland Schaer responds by outlining a philosophy of care that can be seen in human and nonhuman communities in actions such as parenting the young and creating spaces for those who are sick and dying (330-33). This leads Schaer to the question of how these practices play out in a globalized world (334). In the era of what some are calling the Anthropocene, what living beings contribute to *l'habitabilité* of the planet as a whole? Even if life in the form of bacteria goes on surviving on the planet for millions of years to come, the habitats of many species are drastically changing, leading to what some scientists are calling "the sixth greatest extinction." In light of this reality, how do we articulate a politics of living together and maintaining the live-ability of the planet?

According to Verena Andermatt Conley, French political ecologists such as Michel de Certeau, Félix Guattari, Bruno Latour, and Michel Serres all take up the idea of *l'habitabilité* as a way of critiquing contemporary neoliberal capitalism. But Andermatt Conley focuses on a humanist sense of habitat-making when she asks:

> If *habitable* once meant access to a non-alienated way of living the everyday, far from state control and other forms of power, how can we think of it in relation to space at a times when many people do not have access to the experience of an everyday life, understood as a practice not based entirely on subsistence or survival nor so destitute as to be devoid of common and collective symbolic activities? (9)

While Andermatt Conley associates making *habitable* with humans, I want to come back to the notion of *le vivant* that extends *l'habitabilité* to a much larger collection of organisms.

In her book *Ce à quoi nous tenons. Propositions pour une écologie pragmatique*, Émilie Hache addresses head-on the complexities of inhabiting the earth with such a wide variety of other living beings. Although she describes the current ecological crisis as tragic, Hache's tone is the opposite of apocalyptic. A pragmatic ecology seeks to understand current practices in terms of how they give voice to new agents and how they create new publics. Even if Hache defines her approach as *une morale écologique*, she rejects the opposition between animal and environmental ethics. In many respects, she follows in the steps of Bruno Latour, who speaks of *écologiser le monde* to describe the process of constructing a collective with many different forms of nonhuman life (19-21). For Hache, habit-ability becomes a practice of the political, understood as making common things or matters together, humans and nonhumans alike. In constant negotiation, we ask: How many are we? And who are "we"?

In contrast to grand Anthropocene narratives, Hache is attentive to emerging, temporary, nature-culture collectives. She rehabilitates the notion of moral compromise in cases as varied as industrial livestock production, unfaithful husbands infecting their wives with AIDS, and sharing suburban milieus with wild pumas. *L'habitabilité* is clearly not live-ability as in urban planners' ratings of public safety, healthy environments, education, etc.; it is a way in which we learn to *répondre à* ("answer to") and not *répondre de* ("answer for") other species. Whether we are capable of negotiating the live-abilities of so many humans and nonhumans is open to discussion. And yet Hache remains optimistic, citing examples of new publics, new matters of concern that are constantly forming, and leaving the reader with a sense of hope for future heterogeneous livable worlds.

At the same time, Hache acknowledges how complete our dependency on the planet as habitat really is. Taking up the notion of Gaïa, Hache prefers Isabelle Stengers' understanding of nature's indifference to James Lovelock's metaphor of a vengeful nature. Once we recognize that Gaia does not care if the earth becomes uninhabitable for humans, Hache explains, we become aware of our total dependence on so many other forms of life: "Gaïa nous fait réexpérimenter un 'nous' élargi, human et non humain…. Gaïa nous rapproche formidablement des autres mammifères, mais aussi des arbres, des algues, des insectes, de tout/tous ce/ceux qui vit/vivent dans et fabrique/nt notre écosystème"[4] (90). Faced with this new moral experience of our own possible extinction and our closeness to other living beings, we must take on

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[4] "Gaïa compels us to experiment repeatedly with an expanded human and nonhuman 'we'…. Gaïa brings us incredibly close to other mammals, but also to trees, algae, insects,

what Hache calls "hyperbolic responsibilities" that go beyond our present realities to include the lives of our children and our children's children. It is when moral ethics experience life as dependent upon the living world that they become truly ecological.

Textual Poetics, Textual Politics of Life and Death

In a 2015 interview, Anne Simon explains that she created the term *zoopoétique* to mean a "poétique du vivant" (122). Her definition reveals the language/culture gap to which I have been referring throughout this article. In the Anglophone world, zoopoetics has largely been the study of nonhuman animals in poetry and literature (Moe), whereas ecopoetics has been "writing about poetry whose subject is, broadly speaking, ecological" (Hass qtd. in Hume 754). For Simon, the term *zoopoétique* can theoretically refer to all living beings, including plants and bacteria, and so bridge the gap between zoopoetics and ecopoetics. There is, moreover, overlap between Simon's *zoopoétique* and Moe's zoopoetics that both emphasize a rendering of animal life not as scientific or realistic representation but instead as a more general force or *élan vital* that moves through a text. For example, Simon speaks of the corporeality of animals that inhabits the text as "rythmes, styles, allures, élans, surgissements" ("rhythms, styles, speeds, forces, surges"; 124). While literary form will play a role in my analysis of Del Amo's *Règne animal* (2016) and van Cauwelaert's *Le journal intime d'un arbre* (2011), I will not be separating animal from ecological poetics. Following my exploration of the terms *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité*, I will examine the ways in which living matter and livable environments are co-constitutive. Moreover, I will illustrate the extent to which the novels intimately bind together the processes of life/nonlife and livability/unlivability.

The titles of the novels might (erroneously) lead the literary scholar to adopt either an animal studies approach or an ecocritical one. Del Amo's epic story highlights the devastating effects of industrial pig farming on a multi-generational family, asking whether humans and animals can ever escape the cycle of violence and oppression brought about by an increasingly profit-driven socio-economic system. Van Cauwelaert's novel, on the other hand, looks at the relationship between a three-hundred-year-old pear tree

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to all those living in and making our ecosystem." If not indicated otherwise, all translations from the French are my own.

and the many humans, histories, and events it has known over this long period of time. Given each novel's clear alignment with a specific set of political preoccupations, why adopt the perspective of eco-animal assemblages like *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité*?

A transversal approach allows the literary critic to bring together two novels that may not otherwise be compared. Del Amo's work would most likely be discussed in the context of an emerging genre in France that focuses on the abuses of factory farming and animal-human relations.[5] In van Cauwelaert's novel, the critique of deforestation and the call for more harmonious relations with the plant world make common cause with plant studies that consider trees as communicative, intelligent living beings.[6] By shifting the focus from either the animal or the environmental question to the analysis of eco-animal assemblages, the literary critic cuts across these differences. For example, both novels portray sickness and death as part of the living world and emphasize the deep scars left on humans and nonhumans because of capitalism's exploitation of *le vivant*.[7] Rather than being placed solely in the role of the oppressor, humans are destroyed by their own destructive behavior; as part of *le vivant*, what they do to the living world, they do to themselves.[8] However, in both novels, children serve as possible mediators for reconnecting with the living world: the young autistic boy Jérôme identifies with the suffering animals and the role of death more generally on the farm in Del Amo's novel, while the young girl Manon keeps the toppled pear tree alive by using its wood to create sculptures in van Cauwelaert's novel. The interactions of a future generation with *le vivant* counter a dominant and dominating anthropocentrism.

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5 Cf. Olivia Rosenthal's *Que font les rennes après Noël?* (2010), Isabelle Sorente's *180 jours* (2013), and Joy Sorman's *Comme une bête* (2012). Anne Simon's article "Hommes et bêtes à vif" offers an excellent analysis of the portrayal of animal welfare issues in a growing collection of contemporary French novels.

6 In the French context, botanist Francis Hallé is well known for his research in this field: *Éloge de la plante, pour une nouvelle biologie* (1999), *Plaidoyer pour l'arbre* (2005), *Du bon usage des arbres* (2011).

7 In her seminal text *The Posthuman,* feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti looks at the many biopolitical and necropolitical forms that capitalism has taken to destroy the living world. She nevertheless continues to call for an affirmative politics of *zoe* "as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself" (60).

8 I am paraphrasing one of the sections of Isabelle Delannoy's article "On Being Living Beings" that is entitled "What I Do to the Living, I Do to Myself" (140).

In addition, both novels illustrate the principle of *vivre de* (life living from/with/alongside other lives),[9] but they imagine different solutions to the problem of humans exceeding the boundaries of living life. In the case of Del Amo's novel, the pigs' bacterial contamination cannot be contained, and so, in a fit of despair, one of the sons sets fire to all the farm buildings. Not all of the animals are killed, however. The final pages of the novel describe the farm's prized stud pig escaping into the woods, successfully eluding the humans who track him for several days. As for van Cauwelaert's novel, the trees take things into their own hands (or rather, their own leaf and branch systems), developing a chemical hormone reaction to humans as they had done to insect predators in the past. They disseminate cortisol in the air, provoking a deep depression in humans that often leads the latter to suicide. In a deadly feedback loop, the living world takes care of that which is destroying it. The novels illustrate that *le vivant* is not an infinite capacity for life. At some point, excesses are terminated to keep the world livable.

Textual Poetics, Textual Politics of (Un)livable Worlds

The notion of *l'habitabilité* shifts attention to the actual places, the habitats portrayed as livable or unlivable in the stories, but also to the ways in which living beings come together locally and globally in these places. *Règne animal* centers on a farm near the fictional town of Puy-Larroque, limiting the story to one small geographical area in what has been called "le rural profound" ("rural backcountry"; Mathieu). The farm is just barely livable in the economic sense of meeting the needs of its human inhabitants, even in the late nineteenth century when the story begins. Del Amo's novel underscores the labor, sweat, and suffering of working the land and so refuses the idealization of *l'habitabilité*. Moreover, the novel illustrates the debilitating effects of a collective in which fewer and fewer humans and nonhumans are allowed to speak. The animals on the farm are reduced to capital as part of the cost-benefit machinery that accords no ethical or moral value to their live-ability. The humans are not much better off as they too have bodies deeply scarred by biopolitical control of *le vivant*. If the novel holds any hope, it is in the power of stories to jolt the reader from their commonly held positions, push-

[9] Despite their clear exploitation of the nonhuman world, humans are nodes in much more complex food chains in both novels. *Le journal* describes in detail the exchanges between insects, bacteria, fungi and trees, while *Règne animal* evokes many kinds of co-constitutive relations on the farm, in the fields, and in the surrounding woods.

ing them to ask where their food comes from and how it is treated before it makes its way to their plate.[10]

The emphasis on the local in Del Amo's novel is countered by a global mobility in van Cauwelaert's *Le journal intime d'un arbre*. While a tree is usually understood as rooted to the ground, the novel presents vegetal life in constant movement, constant interaction with the rest of the living world. It does so by according narrative perspective to the pear tree, Tristan. Although the novel is narrated in the first-person, the tree is able to shift his consciousness to his former trunk, branches, roots, but also to memories and discussions humans are having about him. In addition, Tristan "travels" to the Amazon via the thoughts and dreams of the female character Manon but is not able to "speak for" the trees in the rainforest or compose a global collective with them because he is too permeated with Western scientific rationalism. Despite what may seem like a problematic anthropomorphism, the novel works to undo the notion of a centered consciousness, while still according intentionality and subjectivity to the vegetal world. The story creates a sense of dispersion with seeds of memory and life sprouting up in places around the globe, dating back three hundred years in the past and into an undefined future. The overall effect is not omniscient or holistic, but rhizomatic.

At first glance, *Règne animal* seems much more straightforward in its form, telling the story of four generations of farmers, from 1898 to 1981, whose lives spiral downwards into increasing violence and destruction. Del Amo does not adopt, however, the omniscient narrator of the nineteenth-century naturalist novel; instead, he uses limited third-person perspective, experimenting with italics to convey more directly the thoughts of his characters. The final pages of the novel are, importantly, in italics, and told from the perspective of the escaped hog. In this way, the animal is given the last word to counter the previous silencing of animal voices on the factory farm. But this conclusion solves too quickly the problem of telling stories about human-animal relations. In the middle of the book (which disrupts the story's chronology) and in the only other long passage in italics (which creates a connection to the end of the story), Éléanore decides, as she watches the

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[10] Del Amo has asserted his militant veganism on multiple occasions (cf., for example, his association with the group L214 that diffuses videos of illegal slaughterhouse practices in France–https://www.l214.com/). Various critics have noted that a reader would not dare eat pork for several days after reading his novel (cf. Bernard Pivot's "Que des têtes de cochon!"). Fewer comments have been made about the novel's portrayal of the tilling of the soil, which raises questions about food production in the West more generally.

farm buildings burn in the distance, to break her silence and recount the events of her ancestors to her great grandson, Jérôme. She asks:

> *Comment restituer cette histoire, à la fois si simple et si banale qu'elle en devient vulgaire, mais aussi enchevêtrée, nébuleuse? Comment rendre ce qu'il faudrait percevoir, pour le comprendre, en une vue, non pas sous une forme horizontale, la ligne du récit que je m'apprête à te faire faute de mieux, mais simultanée, à la manière d'un point?*[11] (215)

The great grandmother's questions echo the problem of how to narrate *le vivant* given both its everydayness and its rhizomatic complexity.

I do not want to suggest that there is one single form for narrating *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité*. On the contrary, the two novels I have chosen to discuss here adopt a form that is inflected by the subject of the story being told, whether plant, human, or animal matter(s). As Simon suggests, it may very well be because literature has so many different forms that it is best suited to rendering the specificities of *le vivant* ("Qu'est-ce que la zoopoétique?" 116). This brings me back to an earlier quote about each language being a vision of the world and performing a world (Cassin). Literature's diverse genres are embedded in these visions of the world, requiring further differentiation between languages that give expression to various facets of the living world. The point is not to create so many gaps that we are each left standing on our own individual island, but instead to arrive at a kaleidoscope view in which the pieces–words such as *le vivant* and *l'habitabilité* or *die Lebenden* and *Bewohnbarkeit*–are colored by the language being spoken.

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11 "*How to reconstruct this story, simple and banal to the point of being mundane, but also entangled, obscure? How to render what must to be perceived all at once, to understand the line of the narrative that I am getting ready to tell you for lack of anything better, not in a horizontal form, but simultaneously, as a single point?*"

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