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(Not) Speaking for Animals and the Environment:
Zoopoetics and Eco-poetics in Yoko Tawada's
Memoirs of a Polar Bear

The thoughts of animals were written clearly on their faces as if spelled out with an alphabet. I found it difficult to understand that this language was illegible to other people. (Tawada, *Memoirs* 102)

Giving Face

In animal autobiographies, which I have conceptualized as “literary autozoographies” elsewhere (Middelhoff 2-3), animals are represented as narrators of their lives. Rhetorically, giving animals human voices is known as *prosopopeia*, i.e., the bestowing of “a face, the mask (*prosopon-poiein*) through which the dead, the absent, and collectives are supposed to have spoken”¹ (Menke 7; cf. also de Man 926-30). Surely, the extent to which human and nonhuman voices, discourses, and concerns in these texts coalesce and compete with each other depends on the form as well as the generic and historical contexts of a text performing “acts of speaking-for that cross the species boundary” (Herman 6). Literary autozoographies may import moral messages and satirize social phenomena; they may challenge a reader’s perspective, produce sympathy for nonhuman beings, or argue on behalf of those considered “dumb” or “speechless.”

Similarly, in the history of environmentalism, “hypostasized Nature (with a capital *n*)” (Morton 162) or “the” environment (Moore) has been spoken for by various parties, individuals, and, of course, the authors of texts. Nature writing and eco-poetry have their non-literary counterparts in ecological agendas of politicians and banners of environmental activists. If humans are turned into proxies for oceans or “the” climate, *prosopopeia* moves to the public platforms of political representation. Yet the question remains:

¹ *Prosopopeia* gives “Toten, Abwesenden, Kollektiva, in der Fiktion ihrer Rede ein Gesicht, die Maske (*prosopon-poiein*), durch die sie gesprochen haben sollen” (Menke 7). All translations from the German are my own.

“If nature cannot speak (at least not in public forums), who has the right to speak on nature’s behalf?” (Cox 4). And: “If the dangers of speaking for others result from the possibility of misrepresentation” (Alcoff 23), how can we *not* misrepresent when speaking for “nature” and nonhuman animals?

It is hardly surprising that people find themselves obliged to speak for “the” environment in a time emotionally and conceptually charged with such powerful narratives as—to name just the most prominent—the Anthropocene (Zalasiewicz, Crutzen, and Steffen), the Capitalocene (Moore), or the Chthulucene (Haraway); narratives which are simultaneously challenged or even rejected by climate-skeptics. Speaking for or on behalf of nonhuman others, however, is a venture onto thin ice. Andrew McMurry, for example, cautions against “constru[ing] nature as voiceless and in need of speaking subject status” (55). Doing so not only privileges speech as the sole means of political representation but also, McMurry argues, “puts the onus of auditory responsibility directly on those special categories of ‘listeners’ such as natives, ‘country people,’ women, children—who have long been constructed as somehow more receptive to the voice of nature than the rest of humanity” (55). One might wonder then whether there can actually be a poetics which speaks for but does not undermine the existence of expressive nonhuman voices and faces.

Thin ice, language, and acts of speaking-for stand at the heart of Yoko Tawada’s latest novel *Memoirs of a Polar Bear*² in which the lives, experiences, and narrative voices of three polar bears unfold, guiding readers from the Soviet Union to the GDR and post-reunification Germany. This chapter first outlines two systematic and interpretive approaches to, and the implications of fiction speaking for animals. It then focuses on the critical potential of Tawada’s novel by investigating how the text challenges representations of animal experiences by acts of (not) speaking-for, i.e., by engaging in animal acts of speaking-for while simultaneously exhibiting the inability and inadequacy of speaking for other species and “the” environment. On the one hand, my reading focuses on the way the text foregrounds the epistemological and linguistic limits of speaking for nonhuman lives. Yet it is not only the very staging and visualization of the impossibility of high-

² The book was published in German in 2014, entitled *Etüden im Schnee* (“Etudes in the Snow”). The title of the English translation is not only at odds with the fact that it is not one, but three polar bears becoming (auto)biographical subjects. It also fails to acknowledge the playful and experimental character of the acts of cross-species speaking-for already indicated in Tawada’s German title.

fidelity nonhuman self-representation that this multi-perspective narrative is concerned with, but also the pervasiveness as well as the use and abuse of polar bears by means of language, symbolism, and anthropocentrism. On the other hand, then, this reading tries to challenge the notion that *Memoirs* can be labeled as *either* animal advocacy *or* environmental advocacy writing (Raglon and Scholtmeijer 122, 131). Tawada's animal life-writing straddles these categories by reflecting on, and experimenting with, different modes of speaking for polar bears and simultaneously exposes the implications of our cultural, and at times unimaginative, engagement with this species.³ In that respect, Tawada's (auto)zoopoetics is imbued by eco-poetical concerns.⁴

Speaking for Animals

Recent scholarship has probed what it means to read animal autobiography without letting the autobiographical animal vanish behind the screen of anthropocentric allegorical readings (cf., for instance, Keenleyside; DeMello; Middelhoff). David Herman has introduced a useful distinction between two different "acts of speaking-for that cross species lines" (7). Drawing on politeness theory and interactional sociolinguistics, Herman distinguishes between acts of speaking-for which "butt in" and those which "chip in": "When butting in," Herman writes, "a speaker voices an utterance of which he or she is not only author but also the principal, whereas when chipping in a speaker voices an utterance in which the spoken-for party or parties function as co-principal(s)" (2). A principal is constituted by the inferences and the discourse of a speaker or an author (4).

While *chipping in* "signals that one shares so much with another discourse participant that one can take up his or her position in talk, building solidarity," a speaker or author *butting in* displays his or her "more or less human-centric interests" (7) and disregards solidarity. When animals are turned into narrators or speaking characters, these acts of speaking-for can oscillate between the poles of butting in and chipping in "depending on the scope and quality of the humanimal co-authorship in a given segment of the narrative" (10). Furthermore, Herman regards irony and self-reflexivity in "cross-species speaking-for" (9) as acts which "not only reflect but also

³ Ursula Heise, however, reminds us that the image of the polar bear is subject to divergent cultural meanings in the face of climate change (241-44).

⁴ Cf. the introduction of this volume for the concepts of zoopoetics (Moe) and eco-poetics (Rigby).

help shape cultural ontologies marked by relatively prolific allocations of possibilities for selfhood among animal agents” (13).

Marco Caracciolo has discussed the functions and outcomes of speaking for animals in slightly different terms. Focusing on representations of animal consciousness, Caracciolo argues that autozoographical texts like Italo Svevo’s *Argo and His Master* (1927), “may sensitize readers to the puzzles of consciousness (both human and animal)” (488):

[J]ust as Svevo’s dog fails to understand what goes on in the human world of his master, humans should face their inability to grasp—to fully grasp, at least—non-human consciousness and its many instantiations across the animal world. This realization paves the way for ... a more intimate sharing: we can relate to animals not because their experiences are transparent to us but because our recognition of animal consciousness is complicated by a mutually partial and imperfect comprehension. (500-01)

Attributing mind, subjectivity and agency to literary animals, while at the same time acknowledging the limits set to linguistic representation and mind-reading alike, literary texts call attention to the limits of language as well as to the epistemological anthropocentrism mirrored in our conceptions and representations of animal phenomenology.

(Auto)Zoopoetics of Negativity

Tawada’s novel has been hailed by reviewers and critics as a fantastic, reckless leap into human-animal history (Matsunaga) and a “zooanthroposynthetic quasi-memoir” (Smith). The novel offers various readings—also depending on which of the three polar bear narratives one is focusing on—ranging from persiflage on commercial literary industry and migrant literature, to artist novel, and, of course—in a nod to Kafka—to “animal parable” (Saalfeld in Tawada, *Interview*).⁵ Yet, so far, Tawada’s experimental approach to animal (auto)biography and the link between animal life writing and environmental

⁵ In fact, Kafka and his pseudo-autodiegetic animal narrators play a vital role in the novel (cf., e.g., 49-53)—as does E. T. A. Hoffmann’s autobiographical *Tomcat Murr*, and Heinrich Heine’s *Atta Troll*. Due to the confines of this article, I cannot elaborate on the intertextual acts of cross-species speaking-for. Suffice it to say that references to other literary text occupied with the question of how (not) to access and represent the experiences of animals, are at the core of the first part of the novel which is particularly concerned with the question of how to write an animal autobiography.

issues in the novel has drawn little scholarly attention,⁶ which is what I will be focusing on in the following discussion.

Memoirs retrospectively narrates the course of the lives of three polar bear generations—grandmother, daughter, and grandson, starting with the unnamed grandmother in Moscow before the end of the Cold War, moving to her daughter Tosca in the GDR state circus, before coming to a close with Tosca's son Knut living in the Berlin Zoo at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although each of the three narratives integrates multiple references to the lives and relations of the two other bears respectively, the three narratives are distinct from each other, separated not only by the division into three chapters, but, first and foremost, by the different narrative approaches.

The text presents the reader with three modes of “acts of cross-species speaking-for” (Herman 10) in the course of its three-partite structure. The first chapter has the grandmother polar bear writing (*experiencer*) and relating (*narrator*) her autobiography; in the second chapter, the text follows Barbara, the circus trainer of polar bear Tosca, trying to compose the bear's biography in the first person. Yet from the very beginning Barbara is more concerned with the narration of her own biographical experiences than her role as bear ghostwriter. It is only at the end of the chapter that Tosca literally takes over (Tawada, *Memoirs* 158-65): A printed bear paw marks the break between Barbara's narrative voice, i.e., Tosca's biography, and the autozoographical narration of Tosca. The last chapter introduces Knut, the polar bear baby turned world famous in 2006/2007, narrated by a seemingly heterodiegetic narrator. The reader only learns that it is actually the bear himself narrating his life from a third-person perspective when Knut, during a conversation with a sun bear, finds out that individuals refer to themselves in the first person (208).

The novel thus starts as an animal autobiography (chapter 1) and then turns into what might be called a “humanimal (auto)biography” (chapter 2) insofar as both animal and human (auto)biographers materialize as “hybridized, ‘humanimal’ authors and principles” (Herman 10), blurring “the boundaries between auto- and heterobiography” (H. Schwalm). It closes with an animal's “autobiography in the third person” (Lejeune), which turns into a first-person autographical account in the course of the narrative (chapter 3).

All three of these acts of cross-species speaking-for involve shifts from *butting in* to *chipping in*, indicative of the oscillating movements between the construction and deconstruction of a “realistic” representation of animal

⁶ Notable exceptions are Hoffmann as well as O'Key.

minds and (self-)perceptions. Marco Caracciolo has pointed out that three elements are needed for a representation of animal experiences to be considered believably “realistic”:

[F]irst, the representation of nonhuman consciousness must resonate with readers’ expectations and beliefs; second, it must be sufficiently rich and detailed to offer a holistic account of animal consciousness;... third, it must draw on readers’ familiarity with everyday situations and events in a way that is sufficiently defamiliarizing to account for the assumed cognitive characteristics or abilities of nonhuman animals. (487-88)

If these criteria are met sufficiently, Caracciolo argues, readers can be drawn into a “cognitive illusion” (488): They believe to be presented with a plausible, phenomenologically sound representation of nonhuman cognition.

Memoirs engages with the readers’ common knowledge and imaginative projections of polar bears in order to first cater to the idea of “becoming polar bear,” and then upset this idea. Two examples from the first chapter might suffice to illustrate this point. The first chapter, the grandmother’s story, starts as follows:

Someone tickled me behind my ears, under my arms. I curled up, becoming a full moon, and rolled on the floor. I may also have emitted a few hoarse shrieks. Then I lifted my rump to the sky and slid my head below my belly. Now I was a sickle moon, still too young to imagine any danger. Innocent, I opened my anus to the cosmos and felt it in my bowels.... Without my fluffy pelt, I’d been scarcely more than an embryo. (3)

Anticipating a polar bear life narrative, not least due to the title of the book, the opening scene affirms and attends to readers’ notion of a zoomorphic infantile character with a furry body whose shape and color resemble the moon. Furthermore, the representation of the bear’s mind appears “nuanced and fine-grained” (Caracciolo 490) with the perspective of the child-bear noticeably defamiliarized, i.e., “animal-like.”⁷ As a consequence, readers are drawn into the illusion of observing a polar bear mind which is re-enacting childhood memories. Yet the process of aesthetic immersion may start to become more difficult in the next sentence: “I couldn’t walk very well yet,

⁷ Knut’s (first-/third-person) self-account is rendered in a similar way. The young bear’s naïve, limited understanding of his surroundings and the human practices observed corresponds with the way readers might conceive of the experiences of a young, comical polar bear in general, of Knut’s representation as “Cute Knut” in the media in particular (Tollmann 251).

though my paw-hands had already developed the strength to grasp and hold” (Tawada, *Memoirs* 3). The neologism “paw-hands” is at odds with Western culture and vocabulary. Only humans have hands, as Heidegger notoriously claimed, bears are supposed to have paws (Derrida). Juxtaposing words commonly used to describe animals in opposition to humans with terms usually reserved for humankind, the text highlights the linguistic arbitrariness and cultural contingency of the distinction between “paw” and “hand” reminiscent of what seems to be humankind’s desperate need to maintain its position as the sole user of language (and tools in hands). Furthermore, this juxtaposition also reminds readers that it is indeed hands writing lives and autobiographies, certainly not paws: This polar bear’s mind and her life are text, not “the real thing.”

The irritation is appeased shortly after, when the narrator recapitulates her training to become a circus act and indulges the readers’ “bearish” expectations: “One day, the man tied strange objects to my feet.... It hurt, so I pushed the floor away from me again. After several more attempts, I was able to balance on two legs” (Tawada, *Memoirs* 4). Even if readers are unfamiliar with the traditional (albeit now forbidden) practice of training bears to stand up by setting the floor of their cages on fire, the description suffices to imagine a bear being forced to get up on her hind legs. Yet the next paragraph, graphically detached from the last sentence, finally makes the illusion of “becoming polar bear” collapse:

Writing: a spooky activity. Staring at the sentence I’ve just written makes me dizzy. Where am I at this moment? I’m in my story—gone. To come back, I drag my eyes away from the manuscript.... I stand at the window of my hotel room, looking down at the square below that reminds me of a theater stage. (4)

In a rapid, unmediated shift from the protagonist’s mind to the narrator’s, the text foregrounds the conditions of its production, the means of creating and crafting animal first-person experiences. As a result, the passage manages to break the illusionary spell of being inside a polar bear’s mind. The pattern of the chapter is now plain to see: As soon as the text beckons to the readers’ cognitive illusion, it is also on the point of spoiling it, only to enforce it, and then dispel it again shortly after.

Additionally, the representation of the grandmother bear alternates between what seems like naïve anthropomorphism on the one hand, e.g., when the bear’s behavior as a grown-up is described in particular “human-like” terms—the bear attends conferences, speaks and writes in Russian with a “Mont Blanc fountain pen” (19)—in particularly “human-like” terms, and

what appears, on the other hand, to be a “realistic” representation of the remembered self of the bear growing up to become the star of the circus ring, actually performing like a human, riding tricycles and wearing “a girly, lace-trimmed skirt” (22). Sequences of the narrator’s *butting in*, suggesting a human-centric frame, alternate with modes of the experiencer’s *chipping in* where ethologically sound descriptions of bear behavior unfold.⁸ As such, these crisscrossing acts of speaking-for blur the distinctions between human and animal representations, thereby questioning anthropocentric ontologies and the axioms of anthropological differences. Eventually, readers are left to wonder whether the bear autobiographer has actually turned out what her circus training had forced her to become in the first place: an animal performing human tasks and techniques.

Despite their individual differences, all three “bear narrators” are self-conscious, subjective beings negotiating their place within the confines humans have erected for them and interacting across species and beyond linguistic lines.⁹ In this respect, the novel can be regarded as a hybrid-generic mode of writing: magical realism. Tanja Schwalm argues that

in its subversive critique of Western anthropocentrism, hierarchical orderings, material power structures and hegemonic discourse, and in its recognition of nonhuman subjectivity through indigenous belief systems and the carnivalesque, magical realism is essentially a posthumanist mode of writing. (7)

Tawada’s (auto)zoopoetics underscore the inherent hybridity of the bears growing up entirely removed from their natural habitat and made to adapt

⁸ This back-and-forth movement from *chipping in* to *butting in* is not limited to the first chapter. In the second chapter, Tosca describes the performed kiss exchanged between herself and Barbara in neutral terms, albeit subjectively focalized (159), then again claims to have “bought a computer” to “keep in touch by e-mail” (164) with her trainer. Similarly, Knut’s self-description in the third person might assume a form of *chipping in*, e.g., when the bear’s first bath is described: “Knut was placed in this bathtub. He put his right paw on the edge of the tub and then his left paw, because he wanted to jump out” (172); then again, the mode seems to be dominated by *butting in*, e.g., in the representation of Knut’s thoughts as narrow-minded and artificially infantile: “Knut grew more and more each day, while poor Matthias continued to shrink. Knut suddenly had the thought that perhaps the milk came from Matthias’ body, that he was being painfully squeezed dry day after day” (176). For a similar oscillation between *butting in* and *chipping in* within Knut’s first-person narration, cf., e.g., 220-23.

⁹ This becomes apparent not only in the grandmother remembering her young self-engaging with her trainer Ivan (e.g., 10) but also in Knut’s interactions with Matthias, (e.g., 186, 203-05) as well as in Tosca’s biography where a north pole dream sphere allows for Tosca and Barbara to converse with each other (e.g., 98, 104-05).

to human institutional practices but simultaneously insist on the bears' material, corporeal presence as bears.

Furthermore, the text stages its poetics as *poiesis*, as a particular form of *technē* or artifice. This becomes apparent especially in Barbara's self-imposed task of writing Tosca's biography: "I ... picked up the dwarf pencil, and began writing Tosca's biography in the first person" (Tawada, *Memoirs* 111). A new paragraph then exhibits this biographical writing "in the first person": "When I was born, it was dark all around me, and I heard nothing. I pressed myself against the warm body beside me, sucked sweet liquid from a teat, and fell back asleep. I'll give this warm body the name Mama-lia" (111). In this instance, the text mirrors cultural imaginations and projections constructed with regard to "animal experience." Moreover, it stages the conception of animal (auto)biography as a process that meshes fact and fiction, human and animal life. In these acts of speaking-for, Barbara's auto-biography and Tosca's biography converge. Barbara sets out writing from Tosca's perspective but smoothly slides into writing about herself:

Mama-lia's voice was terrifying, and I found myself feeling afraid for her, even though I knew perfectly well I was not in danger. Humans can roar too, to intimidate others. At first, they use words that mean something; after a while, however, all you hear is a bellowing that has grown out of speech, and a person being roared at has no other choice but to roar back. This made me suddenly remember how my father left us and went to Berlin. (124)

What has started with Tosca, ends with Barbara. The text illustrates that writing an "other" always means inscribing one's self. The dividing line between self and other, autobiography and heterobiography, human and animal, is not distinct but represents a rather blurry, dubious demarcation based on language and self-acknowledgement.

Tawada's answer to the dilemma of representing animal minds in literature can therefore be described as a self-reflexive performance of constructing and deconstructing animal experience in language. The text first indulges the readers' cognitive illusion, then denies and dissolves it by foregrounding the necessary linguistic techniques of rendering animal experiences "first-hand." What can be observed in this staging of the means of writing animal (auto) biography, and what I suggest calling "(auto)zoopoetics of negativity," is a constant shift, accompanied by auto-reflexive, ironic twists and turns between (1) fine-grained "realistic" animal phenomenology and blatant anthropomorphism, between (2) autobiographical and biographical narration, and between (3) animal and human narrative voice. On the one hand, these shifts stress the

discursive means of constructing animal life and experience in literary texts, and, on the other hand, persistently impede the readers' impression of witnessing a bear's thinking and feeling. Furthermore, a reliance on high-fidelity representations of animal experience is made more or less impossible by the unreliability of the narrators—be they animal or human: In the first chapter, the narrator pictures herself as half human, half animal; in the second part, Tosca's biographer Barbara is suffering from depressions and escapes from reality by meeting and speaking with Tosca in a fantastic "world of ice" (123). And in the third part, readers must concede to the fact that Knut seems to have developed a mental aberration after his human foster-mother left him: The bear thinks he has become friends with a character called Michael who turns out to be (the dead) Michael Jackson (cf., e.g., 240-46).

In this respect, Tawada's (auto)zoopoetics can be read as a challenge to anthropocentrism and as an ethical commitment to animal representation, rendering her (auto)zoopoetics a/n "(auto)zoopoetics of negativity." As Kate Rigby points out in her reflections on "ecopoetics of negativity," such a poetics "would need to be able to demonstrate how the work of art always, inevitably, fails to convey the experience of which it is a trace" (Rigby, *Topographies* 119). Insofar as such texts reveal the disparity of word and world, signifier and signified, they draw the readers' attention from the world of the text to the world which the texts refer to: a world in which polar bear habitats are currently threatened by global warming ("Threats," WWF), and in which polar bears in captivity are alleged to be depressed and prone to die of heat strokes ("Depressed," *BBC*). Poetics of negativity withhold what is promised, "if that promise is an embodied experience of the more-than-human world" (Rigby, "Come forth" 117), appealing to an experience of the more-than-human world beyond and behind those texts and pointing at the idea that we might be at the brink of losing this world that exists (and speaks) beyond language and literature.

Memoirs presents its readers with the constraints of human knowledge while also indicating the evolutionary affinities and cultural intricacies of human and animal life, underscoring the epistemological and linguistic limits of human *poiesis* to fully and accurately comprehend and represent what others—be they human or animal—think and feel. Tawada's (auto)zoopoetics of negativity are at pains to make readers aware that human representations of animal experience inevitably fall short of what they aspire to convey. Yet at the same time, these animal (auto)biographical "études" and unsuccessful acts of speaking-for guide our attention to that which lies beyond human language, and to what it means to disregard the value of these worlds.

(Auto)Zoopoetics and Eco-poetics

The image of an emaciated polar bear balancing on top of a tiny ice floe is just one of many that have become symbols of global warming to an extent that the actual animals seem on the point of dissolving under their heavy figurative burden (Tollmann). Tawada's text, I argue, is perfectly aware of this dynamic. The grandmother chapter, for instance, indulges in clichéd references to, and representations of, polar bears—exposing the superficiality of the image popular culture has conceived of this species, and thereby holding up a mirror to the reader's stereotyped knowledge about polar bear life. Not once does the narrator explicitly identify herself as a polar bear; yet it is the very contriteness and triviality of the polar bear allusions which point at the fact that our understanding of what might amount to “being polar bear” is dominated by trite images and one-dimensional figurations carried across the media and global warming discourse. Thus, grandmother polar bear stuffs herself with Canadian wild salmon (44); during a conference, she elaborates on the bicycle as “the most excellent invention in the history of civilization, ... the hero of every environmental policy” (6); and her first German translator is a man called “Eisberg” (32). The literary polar bear, therefore, mimics the narrow-minded symbolic figuration observable in popular culture's representations of polar bear life. The text draws the reader's attention to the various types of responsibility, not only for what amounts to our direct involvement in climate change but also for the circumscriptions of our cultural imaginations of polar bear life and the symbolic instrumentalization of the species.

Such an instrumentalization—and this is one of the numerous instances where the link between an environmental and an animal-advocacy orientation of the text is situated—becomes even more apparent when looking at the third chapter of the novel. As aforementioned, this chapter has polar bear narrator Knut recapitulate his short but turbulent life. Fact and fiction become firmly intertwined since the reader is confronted with a fictional first-person account of a fairly well-known bear whose life and death amounted to a global media event (Kulish). Knut's mother, in “real life,” was in fact no one else but Tosca, whose story is fictionalized in the second chapter.¹⁰ In 2006, Tosca refused to provide for her cubs, supposedly as a consequence of the experiences she made during her former life at the GDR state circus.

¹⁰ The character Barbara is the fictional equivalent of Ursula Böttcher, the first female animal trainer to perform with polar bears (Engelhard 21, 118).

In contrast to similar historical cases in which such newborns were killed, the Berlin Zoo decided not to euthanize the surviving bear but instead had keeper Thomas Dörflein nurse him with a bottle. When the little bear was first presented to the public, pictures and videos went viral on the web. The zoo had to put up extra toilets to accommodate more than two million visitors within its gates, and Sigmar Gabriel, then minister of the environment, even made himself Knut's godfather. Yet polar bears do not remain small and cuddly forever. After Dörflein had to stop performing with Knut because of the eminent danger posed by a fully-grown polar bear, public interest waned. Used to being with humans, Knut was bullied after being introduced to an enclosure with other polar bears and died—largely forgotten—in 2011 (Engelhard 19-22).

Tawada's depiction of Knut's life remains true to the external "facts" delivered by the media and the zoo's press agency except for the names of the human characters. Yet in this chapter, the novel is more interested in the question of how Knut actually became a performance star and how this literal media circus and the life in confinement might have shaped Knut's (self-)experiences. The text suggests a critical view of the events surrounding Knut's "career." *Memoirs* represents the instrumentalization of Knut, starting right at the inception of the bear as a public attraction. In a conversation with Knut's keeper just before the first time Knut is shown to his fans, the vet Christian makes this blatantly obvious:

When the television shows how happy and sweet Knut looks running around outside, the viewers will start to think seriously about climate change. The ice floes at the north pole can't keep melting like this, otherwise in the next fifty years the world's polar bear population will decrease by two-thirds. (191)

The zoo director is even more explicit, addressing the polar bear as "the ambassador who's going to put a stop to climate change" (198). In fact, this is not a metaphor. In May 2008, Sigmar Gabriel made Knut mascot of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, observing that it is difficult to imagine any other animal "symbolizing the consequences of climate change as clearly as the polar bear. No ice, no polar bear"¹¹ ("Sogar der Minister," *dpa*).

But Tawada's Knut is not only turned into a symbol of climate change implications; he is also regarded as the warrantor of the zoo as its director explicitly tells him: "I'm proud of you. The future of our institution rests on

¹¹ "[K]aum ein Tier symbolisiert die Folgen des Klimawandels so deutlich wie der Eisbär. Ohne Eis kein Eisbär."

your shoulders” (Tawada, *Memoirs* 198). The text gives voice to Knut, pointing out—being the nonhuman “non-person” he is—that he does not actually have a say in any of this. Finding out that the Berlin Zoo was caught up in a legal dispute over which institution was entitled to the money Knut had swept into the tills, the animal narrator remarks:

They were feuding over me, but I wasn’t even called to testify.... I lost my appetite when I saw a caricature in which my body was drawn in the shape of a euro sign.... [I]t would never have occurred to me to consider myself a source of financial gain. (232)

Throughout the book, Tawada questions the logic of anthropocentrism by reflecting on subjectivity, the meaning and rights of a legal person, and the hubris of human rights. Knut’s grandmother had been thinking about this issue more explicitly:

I began to realize that my fate and the fate of human rights were inextricably entwined. Still, I didn’t know the first thing about them. The concept of human rights had been invented by people who were thinking only of human beings. Dandelions don’t have human rights, and neither do reindeer, raindrops, or hares. At most a whale. (54)

Thus, in addition to a critical reflection on the cultural imagination and (inevitably) inadequate representation of nonhuman beings and their minds, the critical engagement with ontological anthropocentrism and environmental issues—as one result of this anthropocentrism—remains at the heart of the novel’s concerns. In this respect, the text’s (auto)zoopoetics and eco-poetics cannot actually be separated. They rather converge in a textual web, probing what is at stake in our commitment to and means of representing and instrumentalizing the more-than-human world.

Tracing the genealogy of polar bear life in captivity, the novel not only challenges the treatment of animals in “entertainment” and public institutions but also troubles our stereotypical conception of polar bears likely to fade away behind the screen of environmental symbolism and climate change alike. The text intertwines issues of environmental justice, human and animal rights, while persistently pointing us to the fact that language is doomed to fall short of our intention to make nonhuman others “speak their mind.” Foregrounding language not as that which distinguishes humans from their actual animal kinship, but as that which might initiate our engagement with other selves beyond language, the novel invites readers to consider why it

might be worthwhile to commit themselves to *action* which might transcend the *act* of speaking-for.

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