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Animals Outside in the Teaching Machine

In recent years, the advantageous influence of animals in the classroom, whether as direct objects of study and interaction or as companions with which social competencies as well as the ability to concentrate and to form meaningful relationships are fostered, has been repeatedly shown in research of animal-assisted pedagogy and psychoneurological studies on the effects of oxytocin and cortisol. However, working with animals in class is far from common. This is not only because from an ethical perspective, using animals in that way is by no means without its problems, as has been maintained by scholars from the field of Critical Animal Studies, but because, on the level of quotidian practice, legal frameworks, questions of hygiene, care liabilities, and financial and logistical obstacles pose challenges to such cross-species forms of schooling. In contrast, animal imagery, which comes to us in all kinds of narratives, media, and metaphors, is much more readily transported into the classroom. And indeed, as Colleen G. Boggs reminds us, "[t]he fictional use of animals for didactic purposes reaches back to antiquity and Aesop's animal fables" (2009, 535). This tradition is unbroken, as a quick glance at the curricular frameworks for German schools with their suggestions to encourage pupils to speak and write about 'pets' reveals. The so-called Kernlehrplan (core curriculum) for primary schools distinguishes four different fields of experience (Erfahrungsfelder) adherence to which is supposed to guarantee an orientation towards the pupils' life worlds and interests. In addition to the criteria "at home here and there," "every day and year," and "learning, working, leisure time," there are the two fields of "environment and a world for all" and "flights of the imagination," both of which, I will argue, can and should be directly concerned with animal narratives (see MSW NRW 2008, 76, my translation).

Most teachers – including those teaching at universities – will probably be familiar with the popularity of animal narratives amongst pupils and students. This popularity aids intrinsic motivation in the process of language learning, and it facilitates a sustained engagement with these texts. Yet, while fables and allegorical tales that include animal characters are a core element of language learning classes, their popularity comes at the price of reducing the complexity of human-animal relations, of taming, as it were, the creaturely excess of literature. Further, recent years have seen an increasing interest in questions of environmental education, in schools and academia as well as in the broader cultural sphere. This has led, in turn, to the development of ethical and epistemological critiques of our imaginative engagement with nature and animals, particularly in the scholarly field of Anglophone literary and cultural studies. Ecocriticism, the new materialisms, human-animal studies, and posthumanist critique all call, in their specific ways, for a shift in theoretical approaches to texts and textuality while education for sustainability, ecopedagogy, or cultural-ecological pedagogies show a similar shift of interest and orientation in teaching methodology and educational theory regarding our dealings with nonhuman

1 The University of Cologne, for instance, offers information and classes on tiergestützte Pädagogik in the context of special education. See www.tipi-koeln.de.
others (Bartosch and Grimm 2014a, Garrard 2012, Mayer and Wilson 2006). Indeed, as Laurenz Volkmann avers, this development is part of a larger shift towards "global issues" and "global education," which is not restricted to "a question of content and topic, but is an educational principle. It entails transformational dimensions" as it deals with issues of sustainability, climate change and environmental crises and, more generally, human ways of relating to their social and natural environment (2010, 202-203, my translation). Geared towards a holistic, responsible and multifaceted understanding of our world(s), these approaches primarily challenge a prevailing anthropocentrism which many scholars in the field believe to be one reason for the current crisis and a human disregard for nature (see Grimm et al. 2015, 165).

With regard to the fictional representation of animals, this shift in focus points to an impasse. "The fable tradition," as Boggs puts it, "uses animals as stand-ins for human beings; it is not interested in animals as such" (2009, 535; see also Bartosch 2014). This contradicts the non-anthropocentric ambitions described by Volkmann and others, but it also glosses over the question what exactly we mean when we say "animals as such." In fact, while clear distinctions between animals are viable for disciplines such as biology, traditional ecology, or ethology – that is sciences grounded in positivist epistemologies – cultural studies has repeatedly stressed that 'the' animal does not exist and that clear demarcations between humans and animals are the result of constant discursive work. The effect of such negotiations of relationality can either be described as an evaluative anthropocentrism "from the summit of which humanity gazes down on lesser creatures" (Tyler 2012, 21) or, preferably, from a more humble stance of epistemological explorations of the nature of such relations (see Borgards 2015, Haraway 2008, Ohrem and Bartosch 2016).

Thinking about animals as cultured word creatures also allows to put educational approaches in the context of education for sustainability: In their call for a "decade of sustainability," UNESCO has explicitly asked the humanities to contribute to the process of the so-called "Great Transformation" of societies towards sustainable futures (see UNESCO 2012, WGBU 2011). Although the decade project ran from 2005 to 2014, one may rightly expect our academic engagement to be enduring and, indeed, sustainable. Education, as Berbeli Wanning, head of the German Forschungsstelle Kulturökologie und Literatur (e.g. 2014), and Reinhold Leinfelder have argued, is foundational for such processes of transformation, given that critical thinking and an understanding of the current challenges underway can make pupils "change agents" who participate in the "open, pluralistic search process on the road to sustainability" (Leinfelder 2013, 23-24). Rethinking 'the animal,' I want to argue here, must be understood as part and parcel of such endeavours.

Within the normative framework of education, literary animals are indeed "outside in" the teaching machine, to borrow a phrase from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, from a postcolonial perspective, has described the tensions between academic and educational engagements with subalternity in this way. And just as she focuses on the power/knowledge nexus critically explored by postcolonial studies of alterity, addressing the question of literary and cultural 'animal texts' challenges us to question our stance towards nonhuman creatures of all kinds as well as the implications for human beings on the levels of ethics and epistemology. This sounds very abstract and most likely exceeds the scope of school education and language teaching. But I will argue that, contrary to this intuition, dealing with animal texts in class lends itself readily to the task of questioning our "evaluative anthropocentrisms" – precisely because this is what literary animals ask us
to do, and because this is what any student-centred, creative work with texts that takes reader autonomy seriously asks us to do as well.

Two concepts, portmanteau neologisms both, promise to be most productive here: *l’animot* (Derrida) and *Ciferae* (Tyler). The first admonishes the general singular in which 'the animal' is invoked in order to emphasise its difference from 'the human' and thus ties in with critiques of the Other and Othering as formulated in gender and postcolonial studies. The second term refers to the strategic potential of the necessarily 'feral' semiotic qualities of the ciphers that are our literary and imaginary animals. In other words, while Derrida, in his exploration of the history of Western thinking as a philosophical history of the conceptual degradation of the animal as inferior Other, could deplore the usage of the very term 'animal' as an "asininity" – "The animal, what a word!" (Derrida 2008, 23) – Tyler's notion of 'Ciferae' embraces the instability of textual creatures and praises their semiotic and semantic wildness: "Inside any Ciferae, [...] we find untamed Ferae, just as within every *Canis familiaris* there remains an ancestral *Canis lupus*" (Tyler 2012, 41).

How, then, can both the critique of animal othering and the potential of Ciferae be considered in English classes? Firstly, taking into account what animal philosophy, cultural studies and human-animal studies have to say about the relationality that brings forth humans and animals in the first place, it becomes possible to recognise that EFL classes are not the right place to discuss biological notions of animality and species affiliation. Rather, we ought to look at texts in ways that allow for a specific, creative and, in Greg Garrard's (2015) words, "unprecedented" take on issues otherwise discussed in rather distinct ways: in literature and language classes, the focus must be on 'ferality' – on the ambiguity of meaning, the polyvalence of metaphoric and non-propositional speech acts, the ongoing negotiations of meaning, etc. – rather than dogmatic takes on representation. Such teaching not only helps us to understand and, in moments in which it might be necessary, to not understand animals (see Bartosch 2014), it also increases language awareness by pointing to the discursive means and compositional or rhetorical devices used to construct a certain animal image or text. As recent studies have argued, language awareness can be directly linked to questions of cultural ecology and sustainability (see e.g. Zapf 2016), an insight that should affect pedagogical practice as well. In the form of three brief model-case discussions of the endorsement of ecopedagogical ideas in an EFL context for different age groups and across different media, I will try to show that literary and cultural texts offer a unique avenue for thinking through environmental and creatural complexity by way of their aesthetic qualities. By learning about perspective and narrative framing (see also Bartosch 2016a) as well as through linguistic competences and literacy, for instance with regard to concepts such as focalisation (see Bartosch 2016b), the EFL classroom benefits from literary and cultural approaches to, as Derrida would have it, 'the question of the animal.'

"The animal, what a word!" – Following *The Rabbits*

As argued above, the question of the animal, prevalent and crucial as it is in current cultural studies and philosophy (e.g. Cavell et al. 2008) as well as the growing debate on the "posthumanities" (see Wolfe 2009), is a fruitful starting point for the teaching of literature and culture in the EFL context. Moreover, because such an approach can also be situated in the current discourse on (education for) sustainability and the task
to engage with 'global issues' in class (see Volkmann 2012), the 'question of the animal' brings together current demands for a transcultural, global education for a world society at risk and the more circumscribed curricular calls for literary competences concerning reading and writing, analysis, composition, or the workings of metaphors. Such a focus on textuality and discourse, a focus literary and cultural education is best able to cultivate, has also been recognised by UNESCO, whose 2012 World Report calls for educational approaches to volition, attitude, and the fostering of awareness and critical thinking rather than technoscientific fixes for the environmental crises at hand (see Bartosch and Grimm 2014b, 13).

English Studies and educational research in the Anglophone sphere have embraced the concept of education for sustainability and developed frameworks that can help to constitute a 'greener' curriculum and teaching practice. It is in such a context that, in a piece on approaches towards climate change (fiction) that seek to "both enlighten and empower" pupils and students, Hayden Gabriel and Greg Garrard suggest Steve Pratchett’s "Curriculum Model to Underpin Education for Sustainable Development" (2012, 122-123; see also Pratchett 2009, 26). The model is based on four steps – awareness, analysis, evaluation, and participation – and lends itself, as Gabriel and Garrard note, "readily to ecocritical and ecocentric writing courses" (123). In their suggestions for teaching exercises and tasks, "awareness" always translates as reading exercises, and the ensuing aspects of analysis and evaluation, and ideas on participation, always ground in classroom discussions of these texts as well as individual text production. This is not entirely suitable for primary or secondary education and does not sit well with modern principles of and criteria for EFL teaching in Germany (see Schäfer 2015). However, Gabriel and Garrard point to important aspects of critical engagements with literature, and it is possible to adjust their criteria for a student-centred, differentiated teaching practice. In fact, as my first example aims to show, it is possible to engage with these topics in early English classes by using picture books and storytelling approaches.

As I have discussed elsewhere (Bartosch 2014), John Marsden and Shaun Tan's *The Rabbits* is an impressive example of the importance of text-image relations and poses an interpretive challenge to young learners of English. On one level, it allegorises the history of Australian colonisation by the British, and it does so by employing anthropomorphic rabbits as colonisers and numbats as colonised. Marsden's rather bleak narrative – there is a reference to the stolen generations, the destruction of environment and society is explicit, and the story ends with one marsupial recounting that eventually, they lost the fight against the rabbits and addressing the reader: "Who will save us from the rabbits?" – stands in stark contrast to the lush, richly detailed, and powerful illustrations by Tan. Through aesthetic abundance and their unsettling use of anthropomorphism, these illustrations serve to trouble the allegorising impulse of reading the animal characters (merely) as stand-ins for humans. The use of anthropomorphism in this book in fact invites speculation about the uses and functions of anthropomorphic representations and thus also about anthropocentrism.

The image of the arrival of the British is arresting on many levels: it presents, in lavish colouring, a grotesquely large ship with dozens of sails that stretches across a full double page; the lower right-hand corner shows a group of strangely formed,
uniformed rabbits about to explore the new continent. Both beautiful and highly
demanding in terms of the visual literacy needed to decode the anthropomorphism of
the rabbits and the intimidating sublimity of the naval machinery, the picture can
serve as a 'mute impulse' at the beginning of a session and/or unit and as an avenue
for aesthetic experience. Instead of verbally introducing the topic, teachers can use
such a mute impulse to engender a communicative need and allow creative responses
by pupils without having restricted the range of what counts as a correct answer
beforehand. My own experience with teaching this book to primary school children is
that many pupils comment on the distorted proportions as well as the effect this form
of representation has, while it takes much longer – but comes no less suggestively – to
realise the (animal) form and make sense of the twisted physiology of the literary
creatures. Using the image at the beginning of the session thus lays full stress on the
aesthetic impact of graphic rendering that, beyond mere factuality, underlines the
feeling of being overwhelmed by the colonisers' aesthetic and technological alterity.
At the same time, the use and success of anthropomorphism is alluded to: what do the
pupils recognise, animals, stand-ins, or hybrid critters?
Both of these moments of aesthetic recognition can be subsumed under the first
rubric of the framework developed by Pratchett: awareness. Rather than introducing a
text with a set of facts that can later be discussed and juxtaposed with other narratives,
in the case of my example, teaching visual and other literacies directly and sui generis
leads to learning outcomes that can be situated within an environmental or sustainability
context. Questions of anthropomorphism and the ecological and/or technological
sublime are being addressed in age-appropriate ways and can be processed
pedagogically through storytelling: it is through this method that implicit knowledge
and metaphoricity can be acknowledged, and dealing with implicit knowledge and
metaphoricity is, at the same time, at the heart of sustainable education. What is more,
because it allows for open task formats that, in turn, follow modern criteria of ELT
methodology on many levels of competence and ability, working with stories in this
way is also possible in an inclusive educational context (see Schäfer 2014, 2015).

Moving from the question of awareness to the challenge of analysis does not
mean that we have to abandon the focus on aesthetic experience. The history of
colonisation is of course relevant for an interpretive engagement with the text. As a
historical topic, however, it might be slightly too complex and lead to reading the
book only as an animal allegory, instead of pointing to the porous boundaries between
the human peoples and animal species affected by colonisation also portrayed in the
text. The aesthetic rendering of the characters – and this includes, besides the rabbits,
not only the indigenous marsupials but also cattle and machinery which are
mechanomorphised and theriomorphised, respectively – emphasises the fact that the
history of colonised peoples is also a history of invasive species and ecological
imperialism (see Crosby 1986). What the book offers in addition is not so much to be
found in such facts themselves but in the potential of a picture book to graphically and
aesthetically bring this topic home to young learners. Sasha Matthewman suggests, in
a comparable context, engaging with different types of anthropomorphisation and
their functions rather than resolving the question what specific animals 'stand for' in
fables and other animal narratives, thus leading to a better understanding of the
inextricable entanglement between human and animal characters. She distinguishes
no less than seven types of anthropomorphisms (2011, 64-65) and suggests tasks in
which pupils discuss animal texts around them – from literature and film to
advertisement and other imagery. This, she argues, will help them to decode the specific function of anthropomorphisms or tell their own creative stories to others. It does not mean that pupils are required to come up with engaged stories of animal rights, but that an analytical engagement with anthropomorphism and, consequently, the human-animal divide blends easily with creative tasks geared towards aesthetic expression. I therefore disagree with Frank Haß and Werner Kieweg (2012, 59) when they suggest that in inclusive settings, analyses of aesthetics are not advisable because of their difficulty. It goes without saying that we cannot expect sophisticated literary criticism or skilful interpretive manoeuvres from either special needs pupils or from young learners. But aesthetic engagements mean more than that anyway: the contemporary concept of texts expands definitions of literature as well as interpretation and suggests that aesthetic learning means playful takes on language and an awareness, however minimal, of the specificities of artistic, rather than merely fact-based discourse (see also Albers 2014).

The next step, evaluation, is therefore also closely tied to the intricacies of aesthetic discourse: neither verisimilitude nor literary quality can be the yardsticks through which pupils can critically assess the text. The first would subscribe to a scientific model of factuality rather than engage playfully with the creative ways through which the text enacts its own ambiguity. The latter, the question of quality, is closer to literary criticism but poses many problems if we accept, from a post-Kantian perspective, that criticism is always highly subjective and cannot be measured objectively (cf. Loesberg 2005). What pupils need for a creative response to the text is a different kind of measure. Two options offer themselves readily. The first, aiming at social competences and cooperative learning formats, introduces different texts and text types, varying according to learners' abilities and needs, from animal images children are familiar with already (from Disney to Pixar) to short poetry that explicitly readjusts our focus on animals. The differentia specifica of fiction – and this is most obvious when it comes to animal representations – is clearly seen in many different texts and text types so that a discussion will be possible on the basis of many diverse texts whose insights into the fundamental ambiguity of discursive representations are nevertheless comparable.

The second form of evaluative engagement, which is, moreover, directly linked with the aspect of participation, lies in the creative production of texts. Such a production-oriented approach will ask pupils to write their own texts. This activity might entail either responding to the text encountered in the storytelling context, writing a letter or short response dealing with the question asked by the endangered marsupial – who will save us? – or (re)telling the story from a different perspective (of the rabbits or of a single rabbit who begins to understand what is going on and formulates either an apology or tries to convince his own species of the ethical faults in their behaviour). It is also possible to have a closer look at the actual environment of the pupils and ask them to think themselves into the animals they are confronted with on a daily basis. Current research in new materialism, for instance, stresses time and again that everything around us is "storied matter" (cf. Iovino and Oppermann 2014) – but being able to read these stories is a competence that can only be

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3 See Volkmann (2012) for a more thorough engagement with poetry in context outlined in this essay.
cultivated by careful empathetic endeavours to think oneself into another’s place. The options are numerous, and it is of course up to the teacher to choose a specific, fitting task and adapt it according to the needs of the specific learning group and environment. The most important principle behind every educational measure, I think, has to be defined by an openness to the semantic polyvalence of the animal figure in literature. Just as in The Rabbits, we are never entirely sure how to read the characters, either as stand-ins or as “real” animals. And since all of these “Ciferae” are at the same time cipher and feral agent, reading animals is never a question of pinning down their ultimate meaning but of allowing our interpretive engagements to flourish. In this lies a potential that is emphatically endorsed by literary fiction, which is why we are well advised to carefully cultivate an awareness of it through our teaching practice.

(Narrative) Perspectives on (Bio)Diversity: The Hunter

A second example of a strategic and pedagogically viable use of the inevitable ambiguity that characterises (literary) animals is Julia Leigh’s The Hunter. The text is considerably more complex and demanding in terms of length, vocabulary and other aspects, and thus more suited for older learners at the secondary level. The novel, first published in 1999, was turned into a successful film in 2011, which offers a number of educational options that I will discuss below. Both novel and film are concerned with the last remaining specimen of the thylacine, or Tasmanian Tiger, assumed to be extinct since 1939 but still the object of debate and speculation. The narrative follows these rumours and imagines them to be true, only to confront us with a hunter – lonely, callous, and strikingly masculinist – who sets out to find and kill the last specimen for a ruthless organisation that plans on using its DNA for unspecified purposes. The text is focalised strictly through the eyes (and senses) of the hunter, who in a complex and well-staged process imagines himself as a primordial hunter, able to literally “become animal” during his hunt. It is this focalising technique that eventually complicates matters for readers: When the hunter finally meets and kills his prey, it is his interior world of thought and perception to which we have been given privileged access that we witness to deteriorate and impoverish. Thus, the novel’s narrative frame, rather than any environmentalist message, forces us to ponder questions of human superiority and the right to kill other animals, and the devastating effect of such human exceptionalism on our social and creaturely existence. The film, however, differs remarkably from the novel in that it depicts the ending in more harmonious and reconciliatory terms, with the hunter recognising his responsibility and, triggered by the touching gaze of the animal he eventually encounters, deciding against the execution of his task. This difference is anything but insignificant so that the film offers rich grounds on which both media can be compared and analysed in tandem.

What makes the text(s) particularly interesting with regard to the idea of literary animals outlined above is that the hunted animal is officially declared extinct. The thylacine exists, in other words, primarily in the imagination of humans. Thus, the knowledge we have is cultural, rather than scientific, sometimes even veering into the domain of cryptozoological beliefs, not unlike those in the Nessies and Bigfoots of our collective imaginaries (see Crane 2010). This again underlines the potential for creative, imaginary engagements with the particular animal: instead of with factuality, we are confronted with attitudes, hopes, and projections the animal traces to be
discovered in the texts are supposed to confirm or challenge. From this vantage point, again, the specific contribution of literary writing to understanding animals and human-animal relations is apparent: the distinction between 'real' and 'fictional' animals is a difficult one in fiction anyway, but the porosity of this boundary allows us to engage with the necessarily imaginative investment in all taxonomies of animality and offers unusual takes on 'natural' others. This is not to say that the ecological and historical narratives of the actual extinction of the thylacine do not matter. To the contrary, I think they are important in helping us understand the novel's importance, and they are sure to incite interest and engagement in the pupils who through this may learn relevant things about biodiversity degradation and anthropogenic extinction. Yet, particularly in the context of the educational aspect of "awareness" mentioned above, being able to understand the role of fiction in this regard remains pivotal.

Reading fiction in the context of EFL classes is usually structured according to three phases, the pre-reading, the while-reading, and the post-reading phase, all of which have different functions and point to different options for tasks and activities. For the pre-reading phase, intended not only to 'set the stage' for the reading experience but also to activate knowledge of both content matter and generic as well as structural specifics of the text (see Grimm et al. 2015, 188), discussing such imaginary animals – from our collective cultural imaginaries as well as those from the more confined realms of cryptozoological vintage – could thus open avenues for thinking creatively and cooperatively with (literary) animals. Pondering the porosity of the boundaries between real and fictional animals as well as natural animals and cultural humans blends easily with the ensuing while-reading phase and the task of analysis and evaluation. The form of Leigh's novel is peculiar in its radical restriction to the focalising perspective of the hunter who, in sparse and emotionally detached ways, describes his attempts to think himself into the animal (and other human beings he warily becomes fond of). This conflict between the desire to become – family man, primordial hunter, animal – and the static focalising technique is felt in many passages and can be discussed by endorsing a text-centred approach as well as more subjective reading forms interested in readerly responses. In fact, the novel explicitly frames the reader as an active respondent to the bleakness of the plot and the role of the dialogic imagination endorsed by the hunter, as I have argued elsewhere (2016c).

Because it asks for and requires a direct reader response, this novel detaches the question of species extinction from the scientific discourses of zoology and ecology and moves it towards the more subjective fields of character and reader experiences, inciting, as it were, a direct and individual response through which concepts such as hunting and thinking oneself into animal others become a matter of personal imaginative action. Text, plot, and readerly activity cannot be detached from each other, and the novel's most significant effect is the reader's taking part in what happens; this is relevant for an understanding of the text's narrative as well as its ethical demands. This reflects current models of interpretation that are being discussed as textual "intra-actions" and the role of "material" engagements with stories (see Iovino and Oppermann 2014). Moving these debates from the realm of art towards educational discussions of reader response and questions of understanding the other (Fremdverstehen, see, for instance, Bredella 2007, Nünning 2007) aids greater comprehension of how these processes take place 'in the flesh' and what educational and pedagogical research has to offer to these debates.
As I have noted above, the film version differs from the novel in remarkable ways, most obviously by constructing a happy ending that resolves many of the tensions enacted in the novel. Teachers may choose this version nevertheless, since it presents moments of compassion and resolution of conflicts in a more easily digestible manner. Another option lies in the comparison between both novel (or chapter) and film (or scene): why do the texts differ, and how do they achieve their respective effects? This links with the task of evaluation and might also help sensitise pupils to the melodramatic effect of soundtracks and the idea of the animal gaze, posited so prominently as a moment of epiphany in the film. The direct gaze of the animal, not unlike the breaking down of the narrative dialogue in the novel version, directly asks readers and viewers to respond, and this response should inform the post-reading activities as well as their emotional dilemma. "What would you have done?" invites a discussion of ethical obligations, and the difficulties of moral reasoning can be explored by making pupils write a letter to their employer (or family) in which they discuss their decision and reasoning. Role play and methods from drama pedagogy may also help in *staging* the conflict in creative terms – and why not from the perspective of the last specimen of the thylacine? As argued above, its reader address, its agency, if you will, is the most effective aspect of the novel. It is the question of the gaze that will inform my third, and final, example as well.

**Where Nature Lies: Facing the Animal**

With the first two examples, I have argued that an animal-oriented class can make strategic use of the ambiguity inscribed into literary representations of animal others, and that this can be done with a variety of texts and on many levels of complexity. Key to such creaturely readings is the conviction that animal characters are not to be decoded as mere stand-ins for humans, as traditional *Fabeldidaktik* has suggested, but to take full advantage of the ambivalence of animal representations and the commentary they provide on human-animal relationality. However, since "the generic notion of 'the animal' has provided modernity with a term against which to define its most crucial categories" (Armstrong 2008, 1), it is of course possible to detect, and make pedagogic use of, this ambivalence in other cultural texts as well. With an eye on the demand for 'authentic' cultural texts taken from the life worlds of many pupils, my final example will be one of the new media: internet blogs. There are, it goes without saying, numerous other possible ways to bring into fruitful dialogue new media and eco- or animal-oriented approaches. Especially with regard to film and TV, the examples are legion and well researched and range from nature documentaries (Wilson 2006) to popular environmental disaster films (Mayer 2006). My focus, however, will be on the creative power of the Web 2.0, and on human-animal interactions that can be read (critically) in light of what has been said above.

Environmentalism has long moved into the collective mind, and the plight of the planet and its many inhabitants continues to concern large numbers of people. While this underlines the relevance of dealing with such topics in the classroom, it also warrants a certain caution lest 'teaching' comes to be seen as a form of 'preaching.' In Andrew Stables's words, "no fashionable movement in didactics, including ecodidactics, must ever influence the teaching of literature to the point at which works of literature are seen merely as vehicles for the delivery of politically-correct themes or concerns" (2006, 157). Of course, the fear that any form of ideological influence is mostly damaging...
could be had about any of the volitional aspects of education – be it Western conceptions of rights and personhood, consumer culture, or indeed the anthropocentrism at the heart of most modern cultural practices. For me, the question should rather be about the effectiveness of one's teaching methodology to create an environment for critical thinking, and this might include, as Kylie Crane avers, "[a] careful, gentle, nuanced approach" that is ultimately "more likely to engender long-term engagements" (2014, 100) in pupils (and teachers). In the case of animal studies-oriented teaching, which inquires into the cultural imaginaries and discourses of animality and subjectivity, it is true, as Cary Wolfe writes in an article outlining the theoretical implications of the field of human-animal studies, that "taking animal studies seriously has nothing to do, strictly speaking, with whether or not you like animals." (Wolfe 2009, 567). This is why looking critically at human-animal interactions within the new media environments of our pupils is rather indebted to the fact that, "[a]lthough an ecocritical approach would stress the value of real environments, these new virtual worlds are part of children's cultural landscape and they require pedagogical attention" (Matthewman 2011, 154).

I have commented above on the importance and the pedagogical potential of engaging with the 'animal gaze' as a meaningful encounter. This is a common trope in ethics and epistemology that has been discussed by philosophers such as Lévinas, Derrida, Haraway, and others. Working through some of these texts and the challenge of teaching the popular film *Babe* to her students, Crane acknowledges the potential of the gaze as a narrative moment of recognition that, at the same time, may sit uneasily between meaningful encounter and the claim of anthropocentrism (Lévinas notably did not assign "face" to animals) (see Crane 2014, 106-108). Instead of commenting on the ethical and philosophical intricacies of this debate, I am interested here in pedagogical engagements with such moments of interpellation and of assigning "face" and constructing "gaze moments" in popular media and through their human users. I am referring, of course, to blogs and sites on the internet which, as a popular saying has it, has been created exclusively to show cat pictures to others. The genesis of the World Wide Web might have been a different one, but the popularity of animal-related content is undisputed. It might therefore warrant a closer look.

In *Animals and Society*, Margo DeMello reminds us of the increasing popularity of animals on the internet: "since the launch of YouTube in 2006, animal videos have become some of the most popular features on the Internet. Sites such as Cute Overload and I can Has Cheezburger? feature nothing but cute photos of animals with funny captions" (2012, 13). However, the phrase "nothing but" may be misleading. The structure of the internet meme is culturally highly interesting because it resembles the medieval emblem in many ways and can be approached from such a cultural-historical angle. Traditionally, emblems are said to express an idea in often enigmatic ways and thus invite interpretation through the combination of an image, or icon, with, usually, the lemma and the epigram (fig. 1). Compare this to a modern meme depicting one of the internet celebrities, "awkward moment seal" (fig. 2). The picture of a seal that apparently has a facial expression of awkwardness is used to name a situation (often introduced by "This moment when..." or simply "When...") and is accompanied by an explication at the bottom. Awkward moment seal, just like his beastly companions—"confession bear," "satisfied seal," "insanity wolf," or "baby

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4 For a comparable argument in the case of literary fiction, which could also be utilised in secondary English classes, see Bartosch (2016a).
“insanity wolf” – expresses the feelings of a human who imagines his/her selfhood through animal expression. At the same time that creating a meme means subscribing to a tradition of cultural expression, it reinstates the animal as cultural interpreter and somewhere between its indexical, iconic, and feral existence.

As in the examples above, discussions of cultural animals can underline the historical continuity of beasts of semantic burden and thus be geared towards traditional rhetorical, narratological, or art-historical vocabularies. Likewise, these examples all grounded on the porosity of human-animal boundaries. In figures such as the “confession bear,” there are even moments of articulations of the complicated shame/recognition relationship Derrida explored in *The Animal That (Therefore) I Am* – we just have to look closely and discuss with pupils what these texts, with which many pupils engage on a daily basis anyway, can be understood to mean. Combining the critical explorations of everyday media environments, their historicity as cultural texts, and a creative approach, for instance through guided uses of meme generators, can help to foster media or, rather, multiple literacies (see Grimm et al. 2015, 200-203). Moving from analytical to productive, open formats acknowledge different learner types in an inclusive learning environment just as they empower students as “change agents” to deal creatively with different popular media formats and explore their media ecologies.

A final example for such media ecologies is the blog format “Dogshaming” (the site has by now also been manufactured into book format and may thus be used ‘offline’ as well, see Lemire 2013). It is funny and entertaining because of the initial idea – angry dog owners take pictures of their misbehaving dogs next to a sign on
which the dog's deed is outlined in a tone of (self-)accusation – as well as the absurdity of some of the sins and the attempts by humans to express them in a dog's voice or mind. This latter aspect is, it goes without saying, also highly interesting from an animal-studies-related mindset. As users of the site engage in processes of verbalising their relationality with companion species, they are also tackling the intricacies of overly uncritical anthropomorphisms (some signs refer to the owners as "mommy" or "daddy," for example). Further, the creative works presented online all in one way or another deal with the question of what constitutes companion species. Figure 3 even does all of these things and combines them with the question of literary value and meaning. The shame sign reads "I have no respect for American literature." Interpreting (the owner's interpretation of) the dog's expression as well as a highly likely disinterest in Whitman are starting points for educational engagements with "dogshaming." Figure 4, on the contrary, provides a meta-commentary on the site's very idea, showing a playful dog and the caption "I have no shame." Derrida and Haraway's work, critically concerned with the notion of shame as well, may be an unlikely choice of literature for the EFL classroom, but their central concerns can be traced in so many human-animal interactions that it would be a shame to neglect them. Browsing the site, and engaging with the meta- or intertextual dimensions of content its users have started to generate over time, we find creative engagements with the limits of language and evolution, for instance. Figures 5 and 6 are examples of this kind of creative interrogation of the boundaries of sign and species affiliation: the first shame sign reads: "I keep going into the fireplace and get covered in soot. I am a bad prairie dog" (my emphasis). And the second one says, "I'm Hayley the lazy loach. Swimming is overrated, I'd rather lay on my plant. I'm a shame to all fish." Shame, the porosity of species divides and taxonomies, anthropomorphism, and even a rich selection of vocabulary and grammar: there is no reason these examples of authentic media usage cannot be explored in the EFL classroom, from analytical as well as production-oriented angles.

Conclusion

The examples presented here, which can help EFL classes to approach the myriad human-animal relations in our shared world, all thrive on various ambiguities concerning the concept of clear-cut boundaries between humans and animals in cultural imaginaries. A focus on these ambiguities and the aesthetic ways of engaging productively with them, I have argued, will benefit the task of teaching literatures and cultures in the EFL context outlined in this essay. I have tried to keep concrete educational suggestions to a minimum because I am convinced that they should be developed with a specific class, learning environment, and framework of competence acquisition in mind. I am confident that teachers are able to find the right means of teaching these and other texts and can only encourage them to integrate animal-studies related aspects into their EFL or education-for-sustainability classes. Another reason why I am opting for diverse and individual approaches lies in the fact that we need such forms of variety for what could be called a cultural ecology of approaches. That is not only to stress that texts work as "ecological forces," as Zapf has argued (see Zapf 2016, especially chapter 4: 27-38) – critical, reflexive pedagogy itself comprises a system that thrives on discourse and
diversity. In an insightful piece that has lost nothing of its relevance, especially at a time when we move smoothly from talking about 'education for sustainability' to 'education for sustainable development' without inquiring into the consumerist subtext, John Parham admonishes the normative tone of much ecologically minded pedagogies and explains their eventual ineffectiveness: normative, if well-meaning, ecological lobbying may indeed clash with the demand of "a democratic classroom practice that encourages free expression," and if we set out to teach environmental awareness, we have to deal with the fact that we also try to "engage students in an oppositional [...] critique of society" (2006, 7). Are we ready for this in the context of
the pressing issues ahead? Or is it true that "environmental pedagogy invariably fails to practice the 'dialogic' approach that it preaches" (8)?

Surely, not all environmental teaching is preaching, but it is helpful to remember that "a more abstract education in critical thinking might come prior to, even take precedence over, a specific commitment to an education that 'raises environmental awareness'” (Parham 2006, 19; an example of how this can be done is Küchler 2014). I have tried to circumvent these issues by deliberately not tackling questions of 'the' environment but by exploring environments and their inhabitants around us – in books and other media ecologies. In engaging with animals and their literary rendering, pupils can acquire a critical stance towards discourses on both nature and culture that enables them to become agents of change in the future without compromising their right to develop an individual ethical position (cf. de Haan 2008). This may supplement more normative approaches of "greening textbooks" or “greening the political agenda” (cf. Volkmann 2012, 397). It does not mean, however, that a critical view of teaching materials is not in order. To cite one example: in a special issue on "Ecodidactics," one article suggests engaging with a cartoon on meat production by way of a talk show staged and conducted by pupils who are asked to play different roles and develop arguments against (and for) factory farming. One role is that of the "fierce animal lover" and "hardcore vegetarian" who is uncompromising in his or her stance that no animal may be killed. On the other hand, we have a "pragmatic meat eater" (Kieweg 2014, 31). The bias in the construction of these, arguably not very realistic, positions becomes apparent through substitution, as one may replace the animal figure and think of a "fierce feminist" or "pragmatic wife-beater," respectively. Accordingly, this is not a call for politically correct task design but for an awareness of the role of language and our often stereotypical imaginaries when it comes to a topic deeply enmeshed with complex discourses and questions of power and ethics.

The complexity of the issues at hand may thus warrant approaches that consider diverse perspectives which are inclusively negotiated and refrain from moralising in one or the other direction. "Complex competence tasks,” as developed in Hallet and Krämer (2012) are a case in point, as is the idea of project work using a "common subject" (Gemeinsamer Gegenstand) (see Bartosch and Köpfer 2015). Not only would this allow for more diverse and sustainable takes on the subject(s), but it moreover includes aspects of heterogeneity and diversity among pupils – asking, in other words, for a redefinition a educational premises and pedagogical principles in line with current developments in theories of inclusion. It may be a long way from occasional glances at animal motifs in fables to a reformulation of teaching principles and methodology, but if human-animal studies advocate a challenge to anthropocentric modes of reading, engaging with animals in the classroom may foster a re-evaluation of teaching methodologies and objectives as well. As Crane puts it:

A careful, gentle, nuanced approach is [...] more likely to engender long-term engagements, particularly given the shock and horror strategies of media outlets that tend to polarize, particularly on environmental issues. [...] [It is more helpful to educate] people who are prepared to do the footwork as it were and carefully walk their way through the issues, rhetoric and forms. An English classroom can be a place to do this. It is not a biology classroom or a religious classroom, but a classroom that looks
towards language, and the ways in which language works to reveal and critique our relations with the world. (Crane 2014, 100)

Animals "outside in" the classroom are not there to admonish us or turn us into activists; at least this is a moment in which the aims and intentions of critical pedagogy are impeded. Teaching literary animals rather suggests reconsidering our mediated ways of relating with the world and its inhabitants, human and nonhuman, and the textual mazes, traces, and gazes through which we come to better understand our own place in them. Mediation and interpretation are some of our core competences, and we do not need any environmentalist rhetoric of decline or apocalypse to foster critical – sustainable – thinking.

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