Reflections on Feminist Post-Humanist Theory: a Wittgensteinian Perspective

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Abstrakt:

This thesis analyzes ways in which distinctions such as the human/animal and the human/non-human are theorized and understood in post-humanist feminist scholarship. Post-humanist criticisms of the dichotomy of the human/animal and anthropocentric discourses in general are often articulated as a question of politics and knowledge production, and as a critique of the Western history of ideas. The political concerns articulated in this critique are important and need to be recognized. However, this thesis focuses on how debates around concepts and distinctions such as the human/animal and the human/non-human express certain epistemological commitments and preconceived notions (for example, about language and ethics) that are not always explicitly acknowledged or formulated. This thesis aims to describe these presuppositions, by applying Ludwig Wittgenstein's description of "pictures holding us captive" in order to show how these presuppositions or "pictures" influence the ways in which questions of language, ethics, philosophy and criticism are thought of within feminist post-humanist theory. The thesis also suggests that ordinary language philosophy and the descriptive "method" of Wittgenstein, or rather, his suggestion that philosophy should be descriptive, can clarify some of the issues debated, and provide an alternative to and a deeper understanding of the questions and concerns that are central to feminist post-humanist discussions.

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Introduction

Background

Post-humanist and feminist theories share the critique of man as 'measure of all things', and a critical stance towards the philosophical tradition, in particular, concerning its racist and sexist ideas, its notions of human exceptionaalism and anthropocentrism[1]. By emphasizing political aspects of the common-sense orderings of the world and the different ways in which ideas of the human and the non-human are circulated in our culture, practices of inclusion and exclusion, dehumanization and objectification are brought to the forefront (Chen 2012). The ways in which categories gain their meaning based on differences as not only exclusionary and mutually exclusive (man/woman, nature/culture and so on), but also as existing in a hierarchical relationship, are analyzed as part of a specific historical narrative that has formed culturally specific forms of self-understanding. A central idea in post-humanist criticisms of the sciences and our culture more broadly, is that power and knowledge saturates everyday language and everyday practices and experiences that uphold different notions of otherness, mirroring historically constructed ideas. Post-humanist approaches further question the implicit and explicit hierarchies of the philosophical tradition, such as human/animal, rational/emotional, nature/culture, man/woman, subject/object by offering alternative ways of thinking about these categories and concepts (MacCormack 2012, Braidotti 2013).

Against this background, post-humanist and feminist thinkers have emphasized the necessity of paying attention to the ways in which we need to *rethink* the notions of nature and culture, the human and the animal and other distinctions that have had a crucial but problematic role in the history of modern philosophy (Haraway 1994, Barad 2003, MacCormcak 2012, Braidotti 2013). A central feature in discussions of posthumanism is the idea of the human as being defined through different

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[1] I am not claiming that all scholarship that falls under the description of feminist or post-humanist theory considers discussions of race or philosophy inherently anthropocentric, but this is generally how critique against the philosophical tradition in feminist and post-humanist scholarship is presented

exclusionary practices, linguistic and material, or material-discursive as Karen Barad expresses it, and that these are expressions of hierarchical power relations[2]. Responding to the challenge that this power analysis confronts us with, namely how to speak, act and think beyond a reiterative dialectic of hierarchies and differences, Deleuzian feminists like Rosi Braidotti and Patricia MacCormack have suggested that we need to approach all living matter on the same level. A way of challenging the habit of thinking in terms of dichotomies and hierarchies is then to adopt a perspective where all living and non-living, the human and the non-human, subject and object are approached (epistemologically) on the same ontological level. This perspective articulates a kind of *flat ontology* that is introduced as a perspective to adopt in avoiding the problematic metaphors of the philosophical tradition. Another key idea in Deleuzian feminism is to invent new concepts, in order to avoid the old and problematic ones (Grosz 2010, MacCormack 2012, Braidotti 2013).

The human and the non-human, thus, are contested terms within the traditions of critical theory and philosophy, particularly within feminist and post-humanist frameworks. The emphasis on the human as a contested category relies heavily on critiques of the enlightenment subject, and its historical emergence as a part of a larger narrative of racial difference. There is also, however, philosophical scholarship in which the human (and recently also the non-human), human practices, language and life forms have become central to the field's understanding of philosophy and philosophical activity. I am here thinking about the traditions of post-structuralism and continental philosophy on the one hand, and Wittgensteinian philosophy of language and moral philosophy on the other. In both traditions, the concepts of the human and the non-human play a central role relating to moral, philosophical and political questions. Although these traditions are often understood and described as mutually opposite and exclusive, (post-structuralism being defined as explicitly political, critical philosophy, and Wittgensteinian scholarship as

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[2] Barad's concept of the material – discursive is an attempt to move beyond the linguistic paradigm and the emphasis in meaning as linguistically performative that dominated the field of feminist and gender studies over the last decades. By introducing the concept of *post-humanist performativity* Barad wants to bring in materiality and matter as key concepts in feminist theorizing (Barad 2003).

unpolitical, uncritical philosophy), they share an interest in language, the human, critique, morality and ethics[3].

Aim

In this thesis, my aim is to discuss the ways in which feminist post-humanist and Wittgensteinian inspired scholarship understands and envisions questions relating to language, power, critique, meaning, the human, and ethics. I examine some of the ideas regarding exclusionary practices, flat ontology, and the *need* to rethink our notions and concepts of the human and the non-human. I ask how central thinkers within feminist and post-humanist theory articulate these ideas as ways of thinking critically about the human and the non-human. To this end, I develop a close reading of four texts:

1) Judith Butler's introduction to her book *Undoing Gender* (2004) in which she elaborates on how "the norms that confer "humanness" on some individuals" rather than others, produces "a differential between the human and the less-than-human" (Butler 2004: 2).

2) Karen Barad's article "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" (2003), in which she develops Butler's concept of performativity in a post-humanist framework.

3) Mel Y. Chen's chapter: "Language and Mattering Humans" in the book *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* (2012) in which Chen argues that an animacy hierarchy saturates our culture.

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[3] Both ethics and morality are terms used within Wittgensteinian scholarship, whereas post-humanist and feminist thinkers mostly use the term ethics to refer to moral and ethical questions. Despite a commonly held view that there is a distinction between the concepts (for instance that morality concerns customs and 'norms' within a society and ethics is the intellectual deliberation concerning these 'norms'), I do not assume this kind of distinction, nor do I subscribe to a specific understanding of either concept. I use them interchangeably to refer to what I call ethical or moral questions, often as a way of underlining a distinction between an epistemological and a moral - existential perspective.

4) Patricia MacCormack's chapter "Animalities: Ethics and Absolute Abolition" from her book *Posthumanist Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory* (2012), in which MacCormack elaborates on an abolitionist position towards our relations to animals.

My aim is not to provide an overview of the thought of these scholars, but to highlight a few aspects of their work in an attempt to contextualize feminist criticism and address some of its contemporary forms. Despite the obvious differences in philosophical style, voice and scholarly backgrounds of the authors that I discuss, there are also striking similarities in the way these authors understand language and meaning as a question of power, difference, hierarchy and exclusion. These thinkers are all strongly influenced by the tradition of post-structuralist feminist theorizing and continental philosophy, in emphasizing power, normativity and exclusion, and in theorizing the role that difference plays in making 'the human' intelligible[4]. I discuss these writers in order to make visible shared ideas or pictures (in the Wittgensteinian sense) that I see as common in the field of post-humanist and feminist critique. These ideas often function as presuppositions and unnoticed ways of thinking, or theoretical outlooks – one could describe them as certain kinds of "epistemic habits" of critique. By turning to Wittgensteinian language and moral philosophy, I aim to challenge some of these pictures that I describe as "epistemic habits", and illuminate the ways in which these pictures and habits can be dissolved through Wittgenstein's philosophical "method"[5].

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[4] Although they can be situated as representative of particular fields, new materialist (Barad), Deleuzian (MacCormack), queer-theoretical (Butler) and interdisciplinary post-humanist gender studies (Chen) these labels overlap and the aim is not to situate either one of them in a specific kind of scholarship, but to pay attention to their ways of thinking, patterns of thought, ideas and arguments. These are ideas and pictures, ways of understanding that are of interest in themselves regardless of who authored or articulated them. This means I could have easily chosen other writers and examples concerning these topics. I have chosen these examples primarily to illuminate and to enter into a dialogue with certain ways of thinking, not to discuss a specific theorist, theoretical tradition or philosopher.

[5] Whether one can speak of a 'Wittgensteinian method or method's is a debated question and a detailed analysis of this topic is beyond the scope of this article. For an overview of the different positions and the debate see (Vyss 2015, Conant, Baker 2004, see also Backström 2015, Conant 2015 and McGuinn 2015). In section I, I explicate what I mean by Wittgenstein's suggestion that

One "epistemic habit" is the idea, inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure that words and concepts gain their meaning through their opposites, and the ways in which they come to signify is thus dependent on a hierarchy and on difference. The human is dependent on the meanings of the non-human, what is seen as natural is defined in relation to the unnatural, and so on. This is an understanding of language and meaning that post-structuralist writers reject, questioning language as having a fixed structure in the way Saussure understands it (Saussure 2011, Moi 2017). However, this picture of language and meaning, as based on conceptual dichotomies and hierarchies is often tacitly presupposed when, for example, claiming that we must give up speaking about the human or the animal as such[6]. What I aim to show is that the critique of humanism and the philosophical tradition in the literature I analyze articulate certain presuppositions of how to understand language, meaning and ethics that are completely metaphysical and theoretical in nature.

The larger framework and theme of this thesis is critique and criticism in post-humanist and feminist writings on the human and the non-human[7]. The question of how critique is understood, envisioned and practiced, I argue, is intimately related to how post-structuralist influenced scholarship understands "theory" or "philosophy" and the impact that "theory" has had on feminist and post-humanist scholarship[8]. An

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philosophy should be descriptive and throughout I use the expression 'descriptive method' to refer to this understanding.

[6] Toril Moi, writing about the impact of the post-Saussurean vision of language for "theory" and the ways in which it has affected the field of critique and the epistemology of literary criticism, has inspired my writing greatly. For an in-depth discussion of the post-structuralist vision of language, and Saussurean and post-Saussurean thought, see Moi (2009, 2017).

[7] An in-depth analysis of the historical background of critical theories and to situate feminist and post-humanist thinking within the tradition of philosophy is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, for a description regarding the role critical theory and the tradition of the hermeneutics of suspicion has had on contemporary academic criticism, see Moi, 1999, 2009, 2017, Felski 2015, Braidotti 2013, Love 2010, Felski and Anker 2017.

[8] I will talk about feminist and post-humanist theory and feminist scholarship and refer to these as traditions. When I speak about the influence of theory in these traditions, I mean the kind of work that is seen as central to the field, the requirements for defining something as serious, rigorous, well written and good scholarship.

aim of the thesis is to illustrate how a particular understanding of language, difference and exclusion, together with a suspicious and skeptic mode of critique articulates itself as an epistemological framework, and to show how this epistemological framework ("theory") is *politically justified*, in the name of critique and "the political". What I mean by this is that the vision of language and the understanding of concepts and meaning (the need to rethink or introduce new concepts), together with the analysis of power through exclusion/inclusion forms *a picture* in Wittgenstein's sense of what critical thinking is and can be and of how things are and must be political, and how we can recognize the politics and the political in and of everyday life. I end the thesis by discussing what it means to understand the human/non-human and the human/animal as primarily political categories, and the idea the political aspect of these categories is why critique is needed in the first place.

The structure of the thesis

Five sections structure the thesis. In the *first chapter*, I briefly contextualize the thesis in relation to contemporary debates on critique and post-critique and introduce three notions of Wittgenstein's philosophy that are central to the thesis:

I)   Wittgenstein's notion of pictures that holds us captive.

II)   The craving for generality and the contempt towards particular cases.

III) Emphasizing on how we need to *look and see* the workings of language.

I elaborate on Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy, as one aim of his critical approach is to make visible some of the epistemic habits in the tradition of philosophy. By epistemic habits, I mean ways in which we habitually have a tendency to think in a certain way or tend to pose questions in a particular way. These initial tendencies then tacitly guide the way we answer the philosophical questions. For example, the question 'do humans have a free will or not?' might easily lead one to think that the answer has the form of an either/or response: humans are either free or not. Wittgenstein's approach here is to take the question and start by examining what is already assumed in the question (either/or), and to further ask: how do we actually talk about free will in the context of human life and in relation to

human activities (science, literature, philosophy, everyday life, etc.)? His suggestion is to examine the ways in which notions of 'free will' are used, and then see if particular ways of speaking of having a free will or of not having one, make an sense, an if so, what sense they make.

In the *second chapter*, I turn to central debates in feminist and post-humanist scholarship. I examine two examples from contemporary feminist thought, including Judith Butler's understanding of *the politics of the human*, and Karen Barad's influential theory of *post-humanist performativity*. I look at the work on performativity in Judith Butler's thought and how feminist physicist Karen Barad has developed Butler's notion of performativity in her post-humanist theorizing.

In the *third chapter*, I focus on the work of Mel Y. Chen, discussing their notion of animacy. Mel Y Chen's work is of interest to me as they[9] have a background in linguistics and work with examples of ordinary language use, but their style and theoretical approach differs significantly from the tradition of ordinary language philosophy, in emphasizing the political aspects of language and language use. I am interested in investigating the kind of understanding of language and politics that underlies Chen's writing, as their work is exemplary of the trans-disciplinary attempt to bring together the insights provided by several contemporary areas of critical studies.

In the *fourth chapter* I discuss Patricia MacCormack's post-humanist ethics. Patricia MacCormack suggests that the distinction human/animal as we know it is inherently problematic and unethical. MacCormack's core argument is that we need to *rethink* ethics in a way that undoes our notions of 'us' as human and 'them' as animals. The political and ethical question for her is one of emphasizing life in its infinite heterogeneity, giving up categorical thinking (humans, dogs, insects, animals) and attending to the *singularity* of every life. I ask how we are to understand MacCormack's moral vision, conceptual politics and post-humanist critique of the philosophical tradition as a practice of critical thinking and philosophy? What kind

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[9] I have only seen gender neutral references to Mel Y. Chen and have therefore chosen to use the pronoun they as I have not found any references to Chen indicating a female or male gender identity.

of picture of critique, ethics, language and meaning does MacCormack embrace and how can we make sense of her abolitionist standpoint if we attend to the different meanings and forms that our relationships to animals take and can take?

In the *fifth chapter* I discuss an example from ape language research, of an encounter between an animal and a human. I consider philosopher Pär Segerdahl's experience of encountering *Panbanisha*, a bonobo in a laboratory where apes learn language (Segerdahl 2014, 2009). I examine this example in order to illuminate some of the different philosophical approaches concerning language and ethics that emerge in feminist post-humanist theory and Wittgensteinian philosophy. In conclusion I hope to show that moral meaning or ethics are interrelated with the ways in which we think about language and meaning, and that defining the meaning of 1) concepts, 2) human – animal differences or encounters, or 3) ethics in general terms, excludes the possibility of being open to the variety of ways in which human and animal life matter to us.

1. Misleading pictures

Rita Felski (2015) notes when writing about the moods and modes of critique in the legacy of post-structuralism and the hermeneutics of suspicion that: "modes of critical thought are also forms of orientation toward the world, shaped by sensibility, attitude, and affective style. Yet the role of such factors in the shaping of contemporary scholarship is rarely acknowledged" (Felski 2011: 219). What she points to here is the way in which a writer might reveal their own perspective and express an understanding of the world, not fully articulated or argued in a text. Felski describes how being critical also includes an attentiveness to what words we use, and how we emphasize particular words instead of others. She highlights how modes of critical thought also contain pictures, understandings and presuppositions that we might not always be fully aware of.

I will here discuss what this means in relation to Wittgenstein's descriptions of how "pictures holds us captive", a phrase he uses to show how we cling on to metaphysical notions of how things must be. In relation to the theme of this thesis these are ideas that are articulated as how things *cannot* be or how they *must* be ("knowledge *is* power", "epistemology is always a matter of the political"). I further introduce and discuss some of Wittgenstein's remarks in *The Philosophical Investigations* and in *The Brown and The Blue Book* that I reference in my analysis of feminist posthumanist thinkers. I use the debates over the meaning of the word woman as an example to illuminate how Wittgenstein's remarks are useful in dissolving some of the confusions that arise in debates over the meaning of words.

1.1 Wittgenstein's criticism of generalizing tendencies in our thought

We can read Wittgenstein as exposing implicit modes of thought when he describes philosophical problems as departing from "pictures holding us captives". He expresses this thought in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

> 115. A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.

This paragraph should be read in connection with his previous paragraph in which he describes how a particular understanding of sentences and linguistic meaning saturates philosophy, and how it was a picture in his own previous work, holding him captive. There he writes:

> 114. (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.5): "The general form of propositions is: This is how things are."——That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.

Wittgenstein describes how, when we are philosophizing or doing theory, we cling to certain presuppositions and thoughts of how language works, or of what a concept is. Wittgenstein diagnoses these kinds of tendencies throughout his work. In paragraph, 114 and 115, Wittgenstein describes how a particular way of looking at language and sentences as having a *general form* comes to form a picture of how language must work. When he writes that a picture holds us captive, and we can't get outside it, for it lays in our language and language seems to repeat it to us, one might easily misinterpret him as saying that *language* somehow tricks us. Yet this is exactly the picture he wants to contest. Wittgenstein wants to make us see *the general form of a particular way of thinking*. His criticism of how we are led to misunderstand the workings of language, and the aims of philosophy, is also expressed by him when he speaks of our "craving for generality". The "craving for generality", is related to what he describes as "a number of tendencies connected with particular philosophical confusions" and to our "*contemptuous* attitude toward the *particular case*" (1958/1965:17). In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein writes:

> Our craving for generality has [as one] source … our preoccupation with the method of science…Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really is "purely descriptive" (1958/1965:17).

When Wittgenstein speaks of the craving for generality, he points to the ways in which *we* are led "to look for something common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term" (Wittgenstein 1958: 17). Wittgenstein is writing about the ways in which philosophers have a tendency to want to give explanations and answers to philosophical questions according to the standards of

the natural sciences, and to generalize and thus overlook the details of a particular case. The point is to make us aware of the fact that not all aspects of life can be understood through the models of the natural sciences, and that explanations of natural laws serve a different purpose than aiming to understand how things become meaningful to us in our lives. Here, the distinction is roughly described as one between scientific discovery and moral-existential questions. However, Wittgenstein's approach is also useful for understanding the different ways in which we want to understand, explain, define and use our words and concepts.

1.2 Working with the example "woman"

Another aspect that I want to highlight, in connection with Wittgenstein, is his emphasis on how philosophers need to *look and see* the workings of language as it *is* used, instead of being caught up in pictures of how language *must* work, or generalizations of how it *should* work. Wittgenstein writes, regarding the workings of language, that there isn't one thing common to all words, but rather affinities, similarities and differences. In explaining how he thinks of language and words he uses the analogy of games. Just like not all games share the same aspects, but still have similarities and affinities in order to be classified as games, words also are used in different ways, and have different meanings, depending on context. Wittgenstein writes:

> Don't say: "They *must* have something in common, or they would not be called 'games'" – but *look and see* whether there is anything common at all. – For if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that (§ 66).

In the next section he speaks of "family resemblances" in order to illuminate what he means:

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.—And I shall say: 'games' form a family (§ 67)[10].

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[10] Other key Wittgensteinian terms here are "language-games", and "family resemblances" which he mentions in relation to the distinctions we make in language and the several uses and meanings that one word can have.

A way of becoming clear then, about what Wittgenstein means when he emphasizes language use as a matter of "family resemblances" and urges us to 'look and see', is to work with examples and descriptions of our actual uses of language. Here, Wittgenstein wants us to let go of what he calls the 'craving for generality', the tendency we have to think of one use only, when in fact there are *countless*. He writes:

> But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—
> There are countless kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols",
> "words", "sentences". And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all;
> but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence,
> and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get arough picture of this from
> the changes in mathematics.)
> Here the term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the
> speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.
> Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in others:
> Giving orders, and obeying them—
> Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements-
> Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)—
> Reporting an event—
> Speculating about an event— (§ 23).

The debates regarding the use and meaning of the word "woman" is a case in point. The heated debates over the word woman in feminist politics often assume that to speak about women in general (to *use* the word woman) is problematic, as it creates the illusion that there exists an identity such as woman, that all women are the same, and that it therefore excludes the differences that actually (empirically) exist between women (Butler 1990). Language is conceived of as the source of power. According to Butler's theory of gender performativity (Butler 1990), we become subjects in language, and the language we know is one that structures us hierarchically, depending on our belonging to gender, class, ability, race, sexuality, etc. This hierarchical difference-making is seen to be an articulation, *in* language, of power.

There are important senses in which Butler's theory is correct, we become who we are in communication with others, language is how we express understanding of ourselves and of other people. We give each other names for example, which is a practice that points to the moral character of our lives with each other (one can easily think of how eerie it would be to know a person with no name), but with naming

practices it isn't as easy to make sense of this linguistic practice as being one of inclusion and exclusion or as constitutive of power. The concept of women is perhaps one of the most debated questions in feminist scholarship over the last decades. However, it is worth noting that denying the essence of the *identity* of woman does not equate the claim that women do not exist[11].

Within the perspective of the debates around the word woman different meanings and uses are seen as paradoxical or mutually exclusive. However, this paradoxicality often emerges from the perspective of expecting coherence or relying on a single definition of the word woman (craving generality). In Butler's books *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009) and *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004b), for example, the same logic of exclusion and inclusion is expressed as the idea that what is human defines the non-human, and the idea that valuable lives are defined in relation to non-valuable lives, and so on.

Woman, however, is just as the word human, a word with multiple uses. Depending on the situation, we use different criteria: certain chromosomes, beauty ideals, conventional gender roles, official documents, genitals assigned at birth, the identity one lives by, names, or when describing a friend to a friend. The list goes on. If we look at how we talk about and use the word 'woman', we will see that different uses make sense and do so depending on the situation (the particular case). This means that I can use the words "man" and "woman" about the same person without this being a paradox, or necessarily an insult, despite the fact that on a conceptual level, these are seen as mutually exclusive (Segerdahl 2009a). We gender others and ourselves in manifold ways. It might also be the case that I *don't* use the word to describe somebody as a woman despite the fact that they 'look like a woman', that their identity cards state that they are a woman, and that they play sports on a women's team. I might call *myself* a woman, in certain situations, when using the locker rooms at the gym, but not *identify* as one in the way that I would understand myself as constitutively different from men, or as having something in common with

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[11] For a discussion of these questions, and particularly the way it shows in Butler's work see Toril Moi's *What is a woman?* (1999).

other women. The point here is to clarify the ways in which it makes sense to meaningfully dispute the uses and meanings of the words we use[12].

In Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, the emphasis lies on the ways in which sentences gain their meaning in particular situations, under particular circumstances. The meaning of a word, a concept or a sentence depends on who said it, to whom it was said in relation to whom, when and where it was used, and so on. This sounds almost like a thesis or a theory of meaning, but it is not supposed to be understood like a theory or even method. It is more, one could say, the point of departure for a philosophical investigation, where the work of clarification begins. Talking about the distinction human/animal as implicating a *generalized* hierarchy, instead of looking for *particular uses in particular cases*, can be seen as an example of the tendency to generalize, that, when embraced as an intellectual habit, as Wittgenstein says, only 'leads us into darkness'.[13] Wittgenstein's diagnosis of epistemic habits within philosophy, his understanding of language, and the role he assigns to philosophy as an activity in dispelling certain pictures, presuppositions or philosophical commitments, thus also becomes useful when reading the literature on the human and the non-human, and in diagnosing the epistemic habits of feminist and post-humanist theory**.**

1.3 Performativity as a picture, attitude and epistemological outlook

The emphasis on the *performativity of knowledge*, and the emphasis on *exclusion/inclusion* and the theorization of concepts through *historicizing their meaning*, are examples of 'pictures' and ideas that I have in mind when I talk about the epistemic habits within contemporary post-humanist feminist theory. One concerns the idea that there is an inherent problem on the conceptual level of the

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[12] For a critical discussion of criteria and gender nouns, see (Segerdahl 2013). For a critical commentary on the theoretical question of gender intelligibility in Butler's work, see (Ungelenk 2014).

[13] In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein writes about the craving to generality that "This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really is "purely descriptive" (11958/1965: 8)

human and the non-human. The concepts of human and non-human or animal are understood to be contingent, and a product of history. As such, they are something to be contested, for political, ethical and philosophical reasons, as they express and maintain relations of power and subordination. (This is MacCormack's position as we shall see later on). A different, but closely related idea (or picture in Wittgenstein's sense), is that knowledge and what is often referred to as knowledge production, is always problematic. Expressions such as "the violence of *all* scholarly research", (Love 2016: 347, emphasis in original) relate to the way knowledge production is understood and become a habitual way of framing research ethical questions. Again, we see an abstract and quite generalizing attitude being expressed that is unhelpful if we want to philosophically discuss questions of for example violence involved in "knowledge production" and scholarly research. In what follows, I will discuss "pictures" similar to these that often implicitly involve a theoretical and theoreticist (Moi 1999) understanding of language and power. These include the discussions of performativity in contemporary critical theory as well as the Derridean understanding of iterable citation, as well as ways of formulating and asking questions. I will show how J.L. Austin's work on performative utterances when taken up in contemporary critical theory, has in the aftermath of Derrida's and Butler's readings become a theory of language and meaning, quite different from the original work of Austin.

2. Butler and Barad on performativity and post-humanist performativity

The concept of performativity in connection to language was coined by J. L. Austin in his *How To Do Things With Words* (1962), in which Austin describes how certain sentences are performative, that is they have an effect that constitute the meaning of a sentence. His famous example is the one where he describes how a marriage ceremony only is valid if the right circumstances are in place, how the sentence "I pronounce you husband and wife", is performative when it marks a woman and a man becoming husband and wife (in contrast to for example a situation that is part of a theater performance, where the uterance "I pronounce you husband and wife", does not have a legal force).

Jacques Derrida discussed and critiqued Austin's account in the essay *Signature, Event, Context* (1988), which inspired Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990). This is roughly the history of the concept that, since the 1990s, has become one of the most cited, debated and used concepts in gender theory, cultural studies, and literary theory and criticism. Performativity, as it is understood within contemporary theory, is strongly associated with the work of Butler and her anti-foundationalist account or "refusal of ontology" (Mortensen 2015: 58). In her book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that this version of performativity has been so influential and widely used that it has become somewhat of a "signpost" for situating oneself within an epistemology of anti-essentialism:[14]

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[14] An in-depth analysis of the ways in which performativity was used by Austin or others following him (the take up of Derrida's reading and Butler's) is beyond the scope of this article. It is, however, worth noting that there are feminist scholars working on Austin and the concept of performativity outside of the Derridean/Butlerian framework of anti-essentialism and the debates Sedgwick is referring to. The writers I have in mind work within the tradition of ordinary language philosophy after Austin, Cavell and Wittgenstein, and have a different take on the relationship of language and reality than most commentators of Austin within contemporary theory (for example, see Bauer 2015, Moi 2017).

Austinian performativity is about how language constructs or affects reality rather than merely describing it. This directly productive aspect of language is most telling, for antiessentialist projects, when the utterances in question are closest to claiming a simply descriptive relation to some freestanding, ostensibly extradiscursive reality (Sedgwick 2003: 5).

In post-structuralist parlance, as Sedgwick defines it, the concept of performativity often works to underline the political effects of a concept: what it *does*, or the reality it *creates*. Performativity is understood in opposition to description, as being a critical and analytical account, and an explanation of how things come to have meaning. This has the effect that description, a central concept to Wittgenstein becomes an eschewed word within the traditions of anti-essentialist epistemologies, such as, for example, within queer theory (Love 2010). Sedgwick further writes that this anti-essentialist epistemology has also leaned on Michel Foucault's work on the productive force of taxonomies and discourses. These are presented as descriptive, but one of Foucault's key arguments is that taxonomies and discourses also have a productive aspect to them. Bringing together the Foucauldian analysis of the productive force of classifications and discourses with Austin's philosophical notion of performative utterances, becomes a way of conceptualizing performativity that end up in a *theoretical outlook*, or a *picture* in the Wittgensteinian sense. It becomes a picture in which concepts and words as such have a performative *force*.

2.1 Butler on performativity

That words are performative is the underlying logic behind Butler's famous (and strongly Foucauldian influenced) argument about gender performativity. Butler argues that there is no pre-existing ontological reality to gender, but that gender (or sex/gender) is described and thus "made" in language. It is the performative twist of language she claims, that creates the *illusion* of existing gender identities. Talking about gender identity, Butler would say, constitutes a kind of metaphysics of substance (Butler 1990: 27-30). The use of words like "woman" she argues, creates the impression that women exist as an entity, an identity or essence, despite there being no ontology or reality to gender. When feminists talk about women as the subject of a political movement, Butler argues, they are not only *describing* their political subject, they are also *creating* it through a politics of representation: "And

the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation" (Butler 1990: 4). This Butlerian phrase has become famous in feminist theory in the debates over the meaning and use of "women" as a category.

"The performative force" of a concept thus designates that language not only describes but also constructs, or has effects in different ways, on reality. The emphasis in this performative account is on what words do, and what they fail to do in the ongoing production of meaning, an idea that is influenced by Derrida's response to Austin in trying to answer the question of *how* we agree on the fact that things mean what they mean, and trying to answer the question of how words gain their meaning in the first place. How is it that we "agree that bets are bets, that marriage is a meaningful institution, that parents have a right to name their children?" (Chinn 1997: 296). Derrida, with questions like these in mind, develops Austin's original lectures on performative utterances and sets up an explanation that relies on a previous structure being in place, which he calls reiteration, or iterable citation.

"Iterable citation" is a theoretical outlook on language and meaning. It tries to answer the question of how words come to mean something, and more specifically, how words mean different things in different contexts. It is intimately connected to the question of representation, and metaphysics: how do words and world connect? What is the relation between language and reality? Derrida's "iterable citation" (Derrida 1988) can thus be understood in connection to the question of critique: what do we do when we philosophize and how is philosophy understood as acts and practices of critical thinking? I will return to this.

The concept of performativity, as taken up in the aftermath of Butler's work, is thus quite different from Austin's original philosophical project of describing the distinctions we make in language[15]. Despite Sedgwick using the notion of Austinian

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[15] On how Austin and ordinary language philosophy in general has been misunderstood in anti-essentialist projects, see Toril Moi (2009, 2017). On the differences (and similarities) of Cavell's and Derrida's reading of Austin, see for example (Wolfe 2009, Cavell 1995: 42-65).

performativity, the understanding of performativity she speaks of, seems to more closely resemble Butler's and Derrida's version of it. The Derridean and Butlerian versions of performativity together with the Foucauldian emphasis on power as productive has become one of the most dominant critical epistemological frameworks and habits in contemporary theory. What this means is that language is understood to have specific agency, or a 'force' that acts in the world in various ways. What is it that makes an utterance performative or non-performative? Despite having a particularly sharp eye for the manifold distinctions that we make in language and having explored the kinds of categories our expressions can make up, Austin, at the end of *How To Do Things With Words*, gives up the distinction he sets up at the beginning of his analysis. When discussing Austin, Sedgwick notes that in relation to him, it might be more appropriate to think about distinctions as a map-like set of relations (Sedgwick 2003: 5), a thought Sedgwick does not elaborate on, but which is one that resembles Wittgenstein's comparison to how language works:

> Our language may be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform house (paragraph 18 of the *Philosophical Investigations*).

Wittgenstein is here making the comparison to underline the way in which language and culture, or our forms of life, go hand in hand, but does *not* follow a specific, already defined pattern. Language evolves, as our life forms change; there is a spontaneity or unpredictability to the process, one that cannot be captured by a theory of meaning. Language does not have a performativity of its own. Some words and sentences can have the effect of being performative, as Austin describes, others do not. I will return to the distinction between Wittgenstein and Derrida later, to discuss how it comes to make a difference concerning how we can read and understand feminist post-humanist ethics, as well as the distinction between the human and the animal, and the human and the non-human. Derridas version of Austinian performativity has however had a huge impact on feminist theorizing, in particular through the uptake of the work of Judith Butler and her understanding of how language and language use constitute meaning.

2.2 Butler on the human

The theme of the human in Butler's writings relates to her theorization of norms and intelligibility. For Butler, the question of who counts as human is related to whose lives are considered livable and grievable, and who is *recognized* as human (Butler 2004). Butler takes up the human as a racialized concept, and focuses on ways in which its meaning has been historically crafted through discourses on race, in addressing Franz Fanon's well-known post-colonial critique of humanism in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon writes that 'the black is not a man':

> The category of the "human" retains within itself the workings of the power differential of race as part of its own historicity. But the history of the category is not over, and the "human" is not captured once and for all. […] If there are norms of recognition by which "human" is constituted, and these norms encode operations of power, then it follows that the contest over the future of the human will be a contest over the power that works in and through such norms. That power emerges in language in a restrictive way or, indeed, in other modes of articulation as that which tries to stop the articulation as it nevertheless moves forward. That double movement is found in the utterance, the image, the action that articulates the struggle with the norm. Those deemed illegible, unrecognizable, or impossible nevertheless speak in the terms of the "human," opening the term to a history not fully constrained by the existing differentials of power (Butler 2004: 13).

In the quote above, Butler highlights the historicity of the category of the human and its relation to power and race. Butler does not use the concept of performativity, nor does she use a Derridean vocabulary, but she does articulate the *picture* of how meaning works in language associated with performativity. Butler emphasizes power, language and norms of intelligibility. In drawing our attention to the politics of the human, she highlights the ways in which notions of the human are bound up with a history of violence and genocide, and that even if we can agree on the fact that all lives matter, some lives matter more than others[16]. These are important remarks, and ones that highlight the different ways of defining valuable lives, human and non-human, gendered and racial norms and what is meant by the human, when analyzing different forms of inclusion and exclusion, especially in political discourse[17]. What Butler's critique targets, however, is a specific understanding, or what I would describe as a picture of, or a representation of, the category of the human as developed in the discourses of science, history and colonialism.

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[16] Here the notion of "life" can, of course be extended to the non-human, animals and other forms of life that we can say matter.

[17] Questions highlighted recently by for example the *Black Lives Matter* movement demanding justice for black lives in the U.S.

Butler's rhetorical and interrogative style of posing questions that aren't answered but left hanging, and followed up by further questions, makes her at times difficult to read. Her constant use of questions means she rarely states any straightforward claims, which leaves room for interpretation. Perhaps her style can be understood as an invitation for the readers to think for themselves. When emphasizing claims that are made *in the name of* the "human" by "the illegible, unrecognizable, or impossible", Butler shows precisely the ways in which the politics of the human are *enacted* - how some humans are included, while others are not. This emphasis on enactment indicates the picture described above in the previous section. Words and the use of words are political acts, and thus meaning is made, performed, enacted. The meaning of the category of the human has been crafted over time, says Butler. When Fanon reveals our cultural understanding of the human by writing "a black is not a man", it means, writes Butler, "that the human in its contemporary articulation is so fully racialized that no black man can qualify as human". Fanon's critique, according to Butler, also suggests that he is "opening up the category to a different future" (Butler 2004: 13).

There seems to be a tension in the ways in which Butler approaches the category of the human here: on the one hand, power and norms emerge in language, crafting the meaning of the category, which seems to be a kind of fixed process: "that the human in its contemporary articulation is *so fully* racialized that *no* black man *can* qualify as human" (Butler 2004: 13, emphases added), while on the other hand, the meaning is 'open'. The question is, whether power works in language in this "restricted way" as Butler claims. The "struggle with the norm" that Butler talks about make sense as a description of the genealogy of "the human", its histories and uses. Likewise the act of speaking "in the terms of the "human"", is intelligible as a *political* claim. One the hand there is power "that emerges in language in a restrictive way", on the other hand, Butler emphasizes the openness of the category, and perhaps hints towards uses that aren't restricted by power[18]. The way she frames power as a part of the

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[18] One can also note that obviously the kinds of distinctions that Butler is speaking of also show themselves in ordinary language use and everyday situations, not only in theory or philosophy. But the point is that questions of power and privilege aren't the only aspects of how we talk about the

workings of language and meaning, while emphasizing a constitutive openness, is as we will see, paradoxical. It is, however, a dominant way of understanding language and power, as a matter of iterative meaning making processes, in contemporary feminist thought.

2.3 Post-humanist performativity: Karen Barad's alternative

Karen Barad is a feminist thinker that has developed Butler's notion of performativity in a post-humanist framework. She takes issue with Butler's understanding of language, claiming that she is too linguistic in her thinking. However, Barad also shares aspects of the theoretical framework she claims to criticize, describing discursive practices as defining what counts as meaningful statements. The question is: how much of an intervention is Barad's notion of post-humanist performativity in current feminist debates on meaning, language and power? Barad's opening paragraph of her article on post-humanist performativity expresses a sense of exhaustion over the linguistic turn and its focus on language and signification:

> Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing"—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. The ubiquitous puns on "matter" do not, alas, mark a rethinking of the key concepts (materiality and signification) and the relationship between them. Rather, it seems to be symptomatic of the extent to which matters of "fact" (so to speak) have been replaced with matters of signification (no scare quotes here). Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter" (Barad 2003: 801).

As a response, to the fact that "language has been granted too much power", Barad introduces the notion "posthumanist performativity" as a new concept and epistemological framework beyond the linguistic theories of Derrida and Butler. Post-humanist performativity is introduced as a shift from an emphasis on language and the intentional, speaking human subject, to the role of human and nonhuman factors, materiality and 'matter' in the production of knowledge (Barad 2007: 89). Barad argues that ontology (being), epistemology (knowing) and ethics cannot be

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human and the non-human, although these are the hegemonic ways of addressing the question of difference in this literature.

separated, and that the question of performativity shouldn't be understood as question of language only (Barad 2003: 802). According to Barad, post-humanist performativity "calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of "human" and "nonhuman," examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized" (Barad 2003: 808)[19]. For Barad, meaning is not only about the use of words, or language, but about the *ongoing performativity of the world*:

> Meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility. In its causal intra-activity, "part" of the world becomes determinately bounded and propertied in its emergent intelligibility to another "part" of the world. Discursive practices are boundary-making practices that have no finality in the ongoing dynamics of agential intra-activity. (Barad 2003: 821)[20].

Discourse, according to Barad's reading of Foucault, is not to be confused with linguistic practices, or "what is said" but is that which "constrains and enables what can be said". On this reading, discourse is intertwined with power, and this "power" enables and restricts what can and what cannot be said. Further, Barad claims that "[d]iscursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements" (Barad 2003: 819), and goes on to describe what a post-humanist account of performativity means, concerning the human and the non-human:

> [Barad's] post-humanist account of discursive practices does not fix the boundary

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[19] Barad distinguishes her understanding of understanding performativity from Butler's, as *iterative intra-activity*, rather than *iterative citationality*. Barad thus questions what she sees as an anthropomorphic understanding of performativity in Butler's work. For Barad, non-human bodies also come to matter through 'the world's performativity, its iterative intra-activity'. Barad, however, holds on to the idea of performativity and Derridean iteration (knowledge is political, has effects that are contingent, language/meaning is a structure of success and failure) as such, which means that her position ends up being quite similar to Butler's. Barad writes: 'practices by which the differential boundaries of the "human" and the "nonhuman" are drawn are always already implicated in particular materializations' (ibid). Her argument, thus, is one concerning theories of materialization as 'always already material-discursive', and not one regarding language use only.

[20] Barad speaks of 'performance of the world' here, but later (p. 823) and in other pieces, she talks about the performativity of the world while making the same point about the inseparability of matter and meaning. See, for example, the interview with Barad in (Dolphin & van der Tuin, 2012: 69).

> between "human" and "nonhuman" before the analysis ever gets off the ground but rather enables a genealogical analysis of the discursive emergence of the human. "Human bodies" and "human subjects" do not preexist as such; nor are they mere end products (2003: 821).

Barad can here be read as saying something similar to Wittgenstein, regarding how words and concepts gain their meaning, namely by their use. The difference is, however, that Barad assumes there to be *an internal mechanism to the discursive practices of language* – one that determines what is meaningful and what is not, what can be said and what cannot be said. This is the kind of metaphysical picture that Wittgenstein criticizes, and one that many anti-essentialist projects, despite their emphasis on the "metaphysics of presence" still assume. Barad reiterates here the basic premises of the anti-essentialist standpoint described by Sedgwick. I.e. she questions the 'givenness' and ontological basis of categories such as the human and non-human (or concepts like gender, identity, nature etc.). An interrogation into how categories gain their meaning, (genealogy, historicity), through what is excluded and included, how meaning is stabilized and destabilized (iteration), is accompanied by an effort to disentangle binary oppositions and theoretical assumptions that work with or create these differences.

Barad formulates her view of how the category of the human gains meaning in a slightly different vocabulary than Butler, but both understand the meaning and category of the human as open-ended. Barad's point, if I read her correctly, is to say that the ways in which the human and the non-human gain meaning is always contextual, or as Wittgenstein would say, meaning is revealed in the use of language. She adds, however, the aspect of power as an act of exclusion: "The differential constitution of the "human" ("non-human"), is *always* accompanied by particular exclusions and *always* open to contestation" (Barad 2003: 824, emphasis added). She thus paints a picture of language and meaning that is paradoxical to her own emphasis on open-endedness, precisely because it is a theoretical picture of how language, words (matter) and meaning work, abstracted from the particular cases she also highlights (human bodies and subjects do not pre-exist, nor are they end products, as she writes). My point here is not to engage with Barad's theory of post-humanist performativity in detail, but to describe the ways in which she shares a similar theoretical picture of *how* meaning emerges with Butler, despite the

differences in how they understand ontology and the role language and materiality plays in the process of signification.

2.4 Butler's and Barad's picture of language

Barad and Butler, despite their different vocabularies and philosophical approaches, analyze the framework in which the categories of the human and the non-human become intelligible in a similar manner. An example of this is the way in which they both express the idea that power is always implicated in language use and meaning making practices, and that forces of inclusion and exclusion are always operative, regardless of what the phenomena that is discussed or analyzed. We thereby have a picture where:

    a)   meaning arises because contrasts are always drawn (difference as the generator of meaning)

    b)   these contrasts are effects of power (exclusion)

    c)   meaning is always open to contestation (never 'fixed')

Barad and Butler are often seen as thinkers who represent different strands of feminist and post-humanist theory. What I have emphasized here is that despite their differences, they share a similar understanding of meaning. This includes the picture that meaning is an effect of power and historicity, it concerns processes of inclusion and exclusion, and meaning is always open to contestation. Underlying this picture is the idea that ordinary language, perhaps because of its historicity, is somehow contaminated or problematic, and thus must be replaced by newer, more 'complicated' vocabulary that can challenge the problematic of our existing concepts[21]. In the next chapter, I will discuss how this picture of language and meaning shows itself in more recent feminist and post-humanist thought regarding the human and non-human.

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[21] This idea is explicitly expressed by Butler in the introduction to the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, where she writes that she has in the tradition of Adorno, learnt that there is nothing radical about common sense, and that grammar imposes restriction on thought and the thinkable (1990: xviii-xix). This idea can also be found in versions of Deleuzian feminism that aims to produce new concepts (see e.g. Grosz 2010, Braidotti 2013).

3. Mel Y Chen on the political grammar of animacy

In their book *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* (2012) Mel Chen considers the political grammar of animacy and describes, among other things, how objectification and dehumanization as linguistic insults express a hierarchy of the animate and inanimate in our culture[22]. Chen calls this the politics of animacy: "what linguistics call animacy hierarchy, which conceptually arranges human life, disabled life, animal life, plantlife and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority" (Chen 2012: 3) Chen describes animacy as *a political conceptual hierarchy* and ordering of things, related to "lifeliness, sentience, agency, ability, and mobility in a richly textured world". Chen further considers this politically dominant hierarchy, as "one potentially affected and spread by the Christian cosmologies, capitalism, and the colonial order of things" (Chen 2012: 29-30). Similar to Butler and Barad, Chen describes a politically dominant conceptual ordering shaped by what or who counts as human, and what or who does not. Animacy is thus internally related to gender, race, sexuality, species differences, ability and disability.

Chen's guiding question is how animacy matters in the critical and political sense, how it shows as a pattern in our culture, in ordinary language, ways of thinking and understanding the world and degrees of living and non-living in it (2012: 55). In this chapter I analyze some of Chen's claims, in particular in relation to everyday language use. I also present and discuss Chen's criticism of J.L. Austin's use of the

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[22] Chen provides an example of dehumanization and objectification, by discussing a case where a Virginian U.S senator at a rally in 2006 pointed at the only non-white person (with South-Asian heritage) at the event with the following words: "This fellow here, over here with the yellow shirt, macaca, or whatever his name is. He's with my opponent. He is following us around everywhere. And it's just great…. Let's give a welcome to macaca here. Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia" (Chen 2012: 31). Chen relates this event to Franz Fanon's famous example of being hailed at by a boy on a crowded train station in Algeria, where a little white boy points at him and shouts, as Fanon writes: "Look! A Negro! … The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger" (Fanon 1967: 111-113). Similarly to Fanon, Chen points to the *historicity* of a racial politics of animality concerning the Allen case (Chen 2012: 34). Chen sees these as examples of the historicity of racialized acts of dehumanization and objectification, where the act of being an objectified subject becomes interchangeable with that of an animal (for an in depth analysis of the incident, see Chen 2012: 30-35).

word *monkey* and *colorable* in his discussion of performativity in *How To Do Things With Words*, and discuss how Chen's criticism can be seen as an instance of a political criticism that is ultimately an effect of the presuppositions of the thinker, in this case Chen.

3.1. Chen on the political and ethical aspects of language use

Like Barad, Chen emphasizes the political and ethical aspects of language use: "The sentience of a noun phrase has linguistic and grammatical consequences and these consequences are never merely grammatical and linguistic but also deeply political" (Chen 2012: 55). What I take Chen to emphasize here (it is a bit unclear to me what they mean by "the sentience of a phrase") is that language use is affective in that we express different forms of feelings and emotion in language, and that choice of words also reveals, and is internally related to, how we see things and what we think and how we feel. Now, this claim can be understood in different ways: Chen considers it as an aspect of the political. But there is also a personal level to our language use: The way we feel, react and express our thoughts in language also reflects who we are.

Unlike Chen, I don't see animacy as the source of affect in language. I don't see anything as the 'source' of affect, rather affects are a part of who we are, an integral aspect of how we see and understand things, as sentient human beings. Sentences of course work, function and signify beyond their grammatical and linguistic definitions. The ways in which we think about the personal and moral dimensions of language use and referencing categories cannot be explained or justified by referencing a theoretical model of language/meaning or power, but draws its 'justification' (if it at all needs to be justified) from elsewhere.

What I mean is that the ways in which we find things meaningful or meaningless is already an internal part of how we live and is not what needs to be explained but is already the origin of our explanation. Anything else would constitute the kind of metaphysical explanation that Wittgenstein and others have questioned. In making their case regarding how different dehumanizing practices express a hierarchical

ordering of the world, Chen investigates, among other things, phrases we use in ordinary language. Chen shows how objectification and dehumanization are expressed in language, by providing examples of phrases like:

1) "I just don't want to be a vegetable"
2) "Being treated like a dog"
3) "I don't want to be a stone"

The first example is discussed by Chen as an example of a sentence uttered by someone

who fears the loss of mental capacities, whereas the second is read by Chen as enforcing the hierarchy between human and animal. As plant life is generally valued lesser than human and animal life in our culture, and being treated like a dog means not being treated according to the standards of how we treat or should treat other people (human beings) or dogs, both a difference and a hierarchy is enforced. The sentence "I don't want to be a stone" is described by Chen as grammatically "ambivalent" or "incorrect", as it testifies to how the inanimate becomes situated lowest on the animacy scale in the ontology of affect.

> I just don't want to be a vegetable" while seemingly and imaginative fancy, also informs, microcosmically and iteratively, of what proper humanity resembles – nonvegetables – and, further, that humans *could* in some way become vegetables. Further it describes what discredited human subjects are like: vegetables. Indeed vegetables believed to be living, are not at the bottom of the animacy hierarchy as stones seem to be; for instance, when humans and nonhuman animals eat them, they have specific effects and can be either nourishing or toxic to bodily systems (2012: 41).

Chen's perspective might feel like a correct description of how value hierarchies are enacted culturally if we look at how systematic racism is in our society, or how systematic the maltreatment of farm animals are despite demands for better conditions. But this is only one interpretation or perspective that we can take on these sentences and the question of the human and non-human. Chen's work emphasizes ordinary language and language use, discussions that often seem to disappear in post-humanist critiques that express a fatigue regarding the legacy of the linguistic turn. Like Butler, Chen emphasizes, the *formal* aspects of language, grammar and meaning. On the one hand, Chen writes that they take a rather "uncommon" approach as a linguist by not focusing on the dominant animacy

norms" but on the "failings" of this conceptual hierarchy, the "ambivalent grammaticalities", which are seen as internal to the "system" itself (Chen 2012: 30). Language is by Chen understood as a *system* of failure and success, similar to Derrida's understanding of iteration, and Butler's view of the possibilities of subversion of grammatical norms regarding gender. On the other hand, one might argue that Chen's approach is anything but uncommon, precisely as they express a thought where language is seen as having some internal qualities, in itself detached from language as something that occurs between humans, and requiring its speakers. The idea that language carries meaning in itself is a metaphysical, scientist idea, common to linguistic theories of meaning. The question that leads my discussion here is how we are to understand the picture of language and meaning that Chen uses. Isn't language and meaning a much more manifold and complicated matter than merely a system of failure and success, or an expression of hierarchies? Chen writes that there are "ambivalent grammaticalities", but what exactly do they mean by ambivalence here? It seems as if Chen, despite the emphasis on ambivalence, still works with a *specific* idea of meaning as a question of structure or grammar. In their discussion regarding the sentence "I just don't want to be a vegetable" they write:

> This sentence simply *does not make sense* unless it is understood as a disavowal of the next relevant position on a cline, a position to which one could slide if deprived of certain subjective properties. Between a vegetable and animal lies a notable conventional difference in mentality, if we can call it that: the presence of an entity called the brain, which is commonly afforded the locus of thought. *"I just don't want to be a stone" … however seems to go too far within this dominant hierarchy (and thus receives a linguistics mark for ungrammaticality or unacceptability, the asterisk): some kind of animacy, some kind of thriving and sensitivity must be preserved for the person's denial to highlight the major locus of difference between what is desired and what is undesired. The varying acceptability of these phrases reiterates that subjective properties are assigned to various stations on that cline, running from human, to animal, to inanimate, stone" (Chen 2012: 41, emphasis added).

Here we are not offered "ambivalent grammaticalities" or openness of language use, but a strict structure of meaning and grammatical rules that serve as the framework for meaning. The phrase "I just want to be a stone" is marked as ungrammatical or unacceptable. But the point here is obviously that grammatical rules have certain functions and don't represent the way in which language works in its multiplicity, especially in how we actually talk to each other in everyday life. The meanings of words are not determined by their lexical meanings. The phrase "I just don't want to be a stone" can be perfectly 'acceptable', and make perfect sense in situations where

we actually use it, and when we talk to each other in everyday life. Perhaps I am expressing a difficulty of expressing emotions when talking to my partner, saying I don't want to be emotionally closed. An example of the phrase being used in a context like this, is when the convicted drug trafficker Jane McKenzie talks to a journalist about her experiences of life in Bankok Hilton jail and the hardness of life in prison.

> You have to be tough to survive and you get tougher as the years go by. But *I don't want to be a stone*. When I get out I want to be the person that I was before, at least the good parts of that person. I try to keep a positive attitude and a strong mind" (Baker 2002, emphases added).

The fact that the word stone is used here, points to 'unlively', or 'not-living', but one could also say 'But I don't want to be numb', or 'I don't want to be indifferent'. Now, these are other kinds of words and sentences where the word stone does not occur. But they are sentences that carry moral meaning when, for example, uttered as an apology, or as an outcry of fear, but importantly, in a different moral sense than Chen understands it. The point is that there are uses of the sentence "but I don't want to be a stone", or uses of the word "stone", that don't automatically provide evidence of the existence of an "animacy hierarchy". The meanings words or sentences have in a life are not always captured by linguistic analysis of difference and exclusion. It is only if we assume that the use of words functions according to the logic of iteration, or that they always are an expression of power, or a process of inclusion/exclusion, that it makes sense to make that claim. In addition, other aspects of the ways in which language use is moral in character, gets lost.

3.2. The politics of theory and philosophy

Another aspect of Chen's discussion of the animacy hierarchy concerns the roles theory and philosophy have in the larger context of cultural norms and conventions with regards to the animacy hierarchy. In this discussion, Chen too engages with the concept of performativity, and reads Austin's work as an aspect of a colonialist imaginary and history. In considering "the animality of one originary moment in what is called "theory"" (Chen 2012: 93), Chen takes J.L Austin's work on the performative in *How To Do Things With Words* as their example of how a colonialist past haunts contemporary critical theory. Austin's work on the performative is

perhaps best known through his example of the marriage ceremony, and how certain "conditions" must be in place for a sentence to fulfill its performative force (a marriage to be legal). For a sentence to 'do' something, to be successful it must have its performative effect in place, otherwise it must be considered 'unhappy'. In connection to this example, Austin provides the example of naming a ship, describing how someone seeing a 'vessel on the stocks', walking up, mashing 'the bottle hanging on the stem', and proclaiming to name the ship Mr. Stalin, is not enough for the ship to actually be named (Austin 1962: 23). The simple act of doing it is not enough to give an act its meaning. It needs to occur in the right context otherwise the act of naming is void. When discussing the conditions that need to be in place, Austin writes, and Chen cites him as follows:

> but one might also, and alternatively say that, where there is not even a pretense of *capacity*, or a *colorable* claim to it, then there is no accepted conventional procedure; it is *mockery like a marriage with a monkey* (Austin 1962: 24, emphasis by Chen).

Chen reads Austin as responding to a sensed threat that "someone's heteronormative and righteous marriage must be protected against the mockeries of marriage" (Chen 2012: 96). The example is read as a part of a history of colonialism, where his use of a monkey is seen as anything but innocent, and as a powerfully loaded racialized trope. Chen doesn't accept the humor in Austin's example, nor do they discuss Austin's theory of performativity as such. They focus on Austin's use of the words *monkey, mockery*, *capacity* and *colorable*, and claims that "to tease out the undertones of his language is to explore the contemporary hauntings or habits of epistemological projection with regard to animality, sex, and race" (Chen 2012: 97). The racialized and anti-queer undertones of these words are explored, and the context Austin was writing in is analyzed:

> Austin's monkey need not be innocent of this more generalized context. Already circulating was a long history of British and European associations of apes and monkeys with African subjects, fed, and conditioned by the imperialist culture of colonial relations (Chen 2012: 97).

Chen mentions arrests of homosexuals in the 1950s in Britain, and laws on immigration as part of the larger context at the time Austin was living in. Regarding his use of the word *colorable*, Chen writes:

I read this as a suggestive provocation regarding "color" as an intensifier, one that is imbricated with questions of legitimacy and the force of law under which utterances are enacted … As existing scholarship tells us from many different disciplinary sites and indeed, as everyday language practices also confirm, vivid links, whether live or long-standing, continue to be drawn between immigrants, people of color, laborers, and working – class subjects, colonial subjects, women, queer subjects, disabled people, and *animals,* meaning, not the class of creatures that include humans but quite the converse, the class against which the (often rational) human with inviolate and full subjectivity is defined (Chen 2012: 95).

Chen understands ordinary language as the site of power where a cultural subconscious articulates itself, and where the animacy hierarchy, practices of exclusion, dehumanization and objectification are enacted. Chen's work describes how the animacy hierarchy is reflected in our culture, and how a colonialist imaginary can be read into contemporary theory. The question is: do we have to accept this as an aspect *of language as such*? Perhaps it only makes sense as a description of a *feature* in our culture, *one* aspect of our history? Must we read Austin's use of a monkey in his example as part of a racist colonialist history, and as expressive of an animacy hierarchy, as Chen does? Could that also be the conclusion drawn from a perspective where *any* use of either monkey, or animal, alludes to this history? This is the Derridean picture of iterable citation, where every meaning is connected by definition to how language works, in the abstract.

I am not suggesting that the links described between racialization, gender and animals by Chen are unreal, or that exploitation of animals does not exist, or aren't real issues and concerns. I am also not suggesting that the effects of colonialism and imperialism are phenomena in the past. They are very much alive today and part of societal structures, popular cultures, everyday lives and ordinary language and affective encounters between 'us' and 'them'. My point is that there is a tendency to think about power, to critique difference and exclusion in a way where the *only* way of interpreting Austin's example is to read it as an effect of, or expression of, power. This becomes problematic, as the object of our critique becomes *produced* by the critic (in this case Chen), and the hierarchy and exclusionary process is seen to infiltrate *all* culture and *all* language. The fact that the critic produces their object of knowledge becomes another epistemic habit unless we critically examine the presuppositions for doing so.

One could also imagine Austin, as making a critical remark with his use of "a mockery, like a marriage with a monkey". One can interpret Austin as making exactly the point that Chen makes, in a critical vein regarding how monkeys are cultural symbols used to degrade some humans because of their skin color. The mockery might just as well reference the cultural practice of mockery, using monkeys, but this is not an option Chen even considers, due to their commitment to a particular theoretical understanding of language, meaning, and power. Other ways of thinking about critique, meaning, language and language use are excluded. Austin could obviously have written, "It would be a mockery, like a marriage with a car", or pillow, or elephant, or something else, and it would be more difficult to draw the connections Chen does. But he *did* use the word monkey – which is an affective trope in the history of philosophy. However, Austin's example can also be read as making a point about performative utterances. Chen doesn't seem to be interested in the performative or performativity, but seems to be reading Austin and post-Austinian theory as an expression of cultural anxieties and power relations, and obviously this is a reading one can make. But, what about Austin's understanding of language and differences? How does he relate to distinctions, differences and hierarchies in language? In 'A Plea for Excuses' (1956), Austin writes:

> When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not merely at words (or 'meanings', whatever they may be) but also at *the realities we use the words to talk about*: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena (Austin 1956: 8 emphasis added).

I would say that Austin himself better articulates the problem with the realities we use the words to talk about than Chen does, exactly because he works with a concept of meaning and language that is one of constitutive openness. He acknowledges the historicity of our words and the many distinctions we make. Earlier in "A Plea for Excuses" he writes: "our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations" (1956: 8). He does, however, write in a different spirit than the tradition of critique than Chen (and Butler and Barad) does. Again, I am not contesting that the connections that have been made culturally and historically between humans and animals in degrading ways are a part of our intellectual legacies. That they are is true. But to read Austin's use of the word

'monkey' when making a point about his theory of performativity as an expression and effect of that history becomes problematic with regards to how to think critically, and to understand the workings of power in our culture. If the *use* of the word is enough to express 'prejudice', it is hard to imagine alternatives to thinking about our lives as nothing but a reiteration of our histories of oppression and meaning as defined by structures of power.

In this chapter I have showed how Chen is held captive by a particular picture of how language and meaning works, not much different from the pictures Butler and Barad work with. I have discussed the ways in which Chen's understanding of language, power and differences and the use of everyday language articulate a theoretical standpoint that gains its justification from its own theoretical presuppositions and is thus questionable as an instance of genuine critique. By contrasting Austin's own words regarding the many distinctions we make in language with those of Chen, I have wanted to highlight the differences between a poststructuralist understanding of language and the understanding of language that Austin and ordinary language philosophers work with (Moi 2017).

4. Patricia McCormack on post-humanist ethics

My final example of how the thematic of the human and the animal and language, meaning and power is articulated in contemporary feminist theory comes from Deleuzian feminist thought. A key voice in the literature is Patricia MacCormack and her work on post-humanist ethics. For MacCormack, the answer to the political and ethical challenges of the animacy hierarchy described and analyzed by Chen, especially with regards to the distinction human/non-human, is to *replace* the epistemological traps of humanist philosophies with a new vocabulary. MacCormack thus emphasizes a vocabulary influenced by Deleuze's and Guattari's philosophy, as one of relationality, assemblages, singularities, and intensities. MacCormack attempts to replace a hierarchical perspective with one that assumes what I earlier described as a 'flat ontology'.

MacCormack does, in her book make several arguments, and I will here only focus on her abolitionist standpoint towards animal ethics and the philosophical ideas she articulates in relation to this. MacCormack states in the first paragraph of the chapter "Animalities: Ethics and Absolute Abolition": "What this chapter seeks is an absolute abolitionist stance on all interaction with – conceptually and actually – any nonhuman" (2012: 57). MacCormack thus takes the "insight" of the claim that language is a matter of differences and hierarchization (that she shares with Barad, Butler and Chen) even further in claiming that this must mean that we should give up all our ideas, thoughts and activities with animals. She justifies her position by claiming, with a reference to Derrida that the universal erases the particular, a claim that can be read as similar to Wittgenstein's criticism of our craving for generality and to our "*contemptuous* attitude toward the *particular case"* (Wittgenstein 1958/1965:17). However, I argue that there is an important distinction in their perspectives and attitudes towards language and meaning and that this distinction becomes crucial when related to the moral meaning of critically assessing the different relations we can have to animals, and the role that these relations can play in our lives. In the last section of the chapter I return to Chen's perspective on language and meaning and discuss Chen and MacCormack together in order to show how they, despite being seen as different thinkers engage in similar questions and are in the thrall of similar pictures and understandings of language.

4.1. MacCormack's post-humanist ethics

MacCormack defines post-humanist ethics as primarily a deconstruction of the human subject. MacCormack's Deleuzian vocabulary is one where all lives are seen in their *singularity*, and thus not valued hierarchically through difference or exclusion, that is, by using concepts such as 'human beings' or 'animals', or by using phrases like "being treated like a dog". For MacCormack these kinds of expressions already presume a categorization that is problematic as she claims, any use of these words will reiterate difference and hierarchy, atleast on a symbolical, conceptual level. MacCormack's criticism targets the ways in which the distinction between human/non-human is and has been used in different ways to create an animacy hierarchy. In developing her ethic, McCormack claims she follows the insight of continental philosophies in arguing that "whenever we speak of the I/Other we are speaking of the self" (MacCormack 2012: 5-6). MacCormack understands the difference between human – animal (or human – non-human) as formed in language, and thus formative of our thinking that articulates itself as an importunate contrast, and only seems to be able to articulate itself as a contrast reflecting back to our understanding of ourselves. According to MacCormack, as our relations to animals and discourses about them is an effect of the ways in which humans have exploited and used, needed and wanted animals, she sees the relation as *parasitical*. She argues that we should simply stop thinking about the animal.

> From the irrefutably important work done by animal rights philosophers and activists, unfortunate in its necessity, seeking equality, thinking needs to go further enough to accept thought itself as inherently unethical in reference to the nonhuman (MacCormack 2012: 57)

> … what gives us the audacity to ask any non-human life any question? The animal cannot be thought. Therefore ethically the animal should not be thought (MacCormack 2012: 68).

Perhaps one could read MacCormack as having in mind the gesture of talking about non-human animals, instead of just using the word animal, as a way of highlighting the political aspect of language use? But, her point seems to be more radical. MacCormack wants to give up *any* language use of the human and the nonhuman. This idea is based on the thought that one wants to avoid the problematic uses of "animal" as it entails a distinction that is problematic in and of itself

(human/animal). Another thought is that by talking about 'the animal', we are crafting a universal category, as Derrida seems to suggest (Derrida 2002)? For MacCormack, universality is in and of itself something that is to be avoided, as it is understood as epistemological violence, and neglects the singularity (or perhaps, the *particularity*) of every life. Universality functions, according to her as a generalization and in making this argument she references Cary Wolfe's reading of Derrida as follows:

> buried under the definite article here ['the animal'], is all the heterogeneity that makes the starfish so different from the ringtailed lemur; the eel from the zebra, (that makes the *homo sapiens* by the way, closer to their kin the bonobo and the chimpanzee than those great apes are to many of their fellow 'animals') (Wolfe, quoted in MacCormack 2012: 59-60)[23].

Within this perspective, both ordinary language and philosophical discourse are seen as reiterating an order of hierarchical differences, and thus violence. The particular is seen as being erased under the universal. MacCormack seems to side with Wolfe in arguing that the conceptual erases any empirical differences. The task then, according to MacCormack, is to end all talk and thinking about humans and animals, as she too, as we shall see, understands any use of these concepts as *inherently* problematic. McCormack's post-humanist ethics involves an absolute abolitionist standpoint regarding our relations to animals. She writes "posthumanist ethics of grace requires nothing more than leaving all animals alone; in interacting with them, in thinking them, in involving them at all with a human world" (MacCormack 2012: 69). All speech, all thinking about animals, is thus, for McCormack, a question about reiterating the signifier 'the animal', which gains its meaning through the dialectic of human/non-human (similar to the ways in which 'woman' or 'the subaltern' are thought as signifiers in post-structuralist and post-colonial theory), which enacts a power relation. MacCormack's position thus entails a generalization of the question or the human/animal where humans are always morally corrupted. MacCormack writes:

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[23] It is interesting to note that Chen quotes Agamben for making a point about the making of the category of *homo sapiens* as a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. The dialectic of 'same' and 'different' appears here too, but without commentary on the difference in grammar regarding human and homo sapiens.

> There is no shared language between humans and non-humans. Any sympathetic argument about what interactions we may have or share with nonhumans is always limited to our thinking the encounter, even via abstracted language, thoughts from outside which delimit language. Many sympathetic to the wonder of encounters with non-humans elevate these encounters to some kind of mystical experience because they demand another kind of thinking of the encounter itself. But still the experience is human (2012: 58).

In addition to being an example of a "craving for generality" in generalizing all encounters between human and nonhuman to anthropomorphism, her position on the human/animal also resembles feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray's critique of the logic of sexual difference that Irigaray says saturates all being and all knowledge[24].

> Woman and animal are human conceits, defined through denigration, the precise nodes which majoritarian humans wish to and need to reject to maintain human dominance. There are not and never were 'women' and 'animals', they were the phantasies of those with the right to signify (2012: 64).

MacCormack's critical remarks here can be understood as an argument against identity politics and against the kind of generalizations that Wittgenstein sees as "holding us captive", still she ends up habitually seeing all instances of the human and the animal in the same way.

4.2 Chen and MacCormack's picture of language

MacCormack's radical passivity with regards to ethics, I would argue, is only understandable within *a certain picture of language,* one that expresses a general account of how things come to mean. This is a perpective within which "meaning", both moral and political is defined and decided in abstract, in philosophy.[25] Here we

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[24] When Irigaray speaks of 'the sex which is not one', she refers to the idea that 'woman' cannot be represented within a masculine phallogocentrism. As all knowledge and being is defined by the masculine, the feminine is thus a product of this 'system of representation'. The feminine could be described as a symptom in Irigaray's thinking, that which is repressed but needed in order for the masculine to remain masculine.

[25] MacCormack is critical towards most thinkers who have tried to address our relations to animals. She denounces Donna Haraway's (2008) attempts to discuss our relations to animals through the

have a *general* picture where meaning entails differences, this difference always entails an act of exclusion, and were meaning is always contestable. In other words, MacCormack, as does Chen, seems to work with generalized pictures of language and meaning that in one way or another are focused on exclusion, difference, meaning and power. The alternative (to the problem of reiterating suspicious dichotomies and meanings) often consists in an emphasis on relationality, intra-activity and assemblages, and presenting an ethics of relation as the departure for moral inquiry[26]. But how are we to understand ethics, and change within the descriptions that Chen and MacCormack provide us with?

It is clear that the words human and animal have multiple meanings, and simply using the words, does not mean that a politics of inclusion and exclusion ("animacy hierarchy") is necessary in place, or that a "politics of the human", is being reiterated. This would only be the case, if we assumed that words carry inherent meanings, that their use is determined by previous uses, or are expressive of an absolute logic. Chen for instance in her analysis of sentences like "I just don't want to be a vegetable", or someone being "treated like a dog", pays attention to how these sentences "describes what discredited human subjects are like" (Chen 2012: 41). Chen reads this as an expression of a disavowal of the next position to which one could glide if one lost certain "subjective properties". She treats them as insults, and obviously they can be read as such, but there are also other ways of understanding these sentences, where their meaning and use depend on the context. Here Wittgenstein's emphases on the notions of *family resemblances* and *meaning as use* are significant. One can easily think of other examples. The phrase "I just don't want to be a vegetable", can be a plea, an expression of fear for losing one's cognitive abilities, or a child uttering a request regarding their role as an actor in a

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concept of *companion species*, and Derrida's (2002) discussion of the animal. Haraway, according to MacCormack oedipalizes our relationships to dogs and attempts to naturalize an unnatural participation of dog and human, while Derrida's discussion of the gaze (the cat watching him naked) is problematic, as the concept of the gaze is a human concept. This is also why she repudiates a Levinisian ethics, as his emphasis on the face is a human face.

[26] Levinas' ethics consists precisely in this insight, but he is also dismissed by MacCormack for being too humanist in his thinking, as he emphasizes the face. This consists, for MacCormack, of an "exclusory ethics of external other" (MacCormack 2012: 15).

play where there are different roles: vegetables, humans, animals, and so on. One can think about a game being played at a tournament with competing teams: stones, vegetables, animals and gods and someone saying "I want to be a god", "I just don't want to be a stone" indicating what team they wish to play with.

My point is not to deny that there are many ways in which distinctions between the human and the non-human are drawn that entail exclusions or are reflective of how power works, or how racialized and sexualized meaning making practices work. The point is rather that asserting a general principle of "difference as exclusion" means that one will never see uses of the words human or animal as not being corrupt in one way or the other. This is why so many use the expression non-human animals instead of just saying animals, or saying inhumanization instead of dehumanization. In assuming that power is always present, either in the various uses of language or in "processes of material-discursive reconfigurations of the world" (Barad 2003), or that the use of a word, concept or thought as 'animal' or 'human' is always unethical (MacCormack 2012), constitutes a *kind of metaphysical assumption where all cases are seen under one description only*. MacCormack cannot see the relations or questions of the human/animal in any other way, due to the terms of her own argument, and the pictures that hold her captive (Wittgenstein, PI § 11).

With regards to the human/animal distinction, she claims that "The other is outside discourse therefore unspeakable" and that posthumanist ethics needs to attend to the fact that "when we speak of the I/Other we are speaking of the self" […] (MacCormack 2012: 5-6). Readers of continental philosophy will recognize the influence of Foucault, Derrida and others in her work. But the point of my reading is not exegetic in that sense. Rather, I want to bring into focus where her understanding of language and meaning take us, revealing those philosophical pictures that she works with in order to make her arguments. Here, I have in mind the kind of meaning that shows itself in our use of concepts such as 'trust' and 'friendship'. My point is not to say that there is one kind of moral meaning to the concepts of trust or friendship, but that the kind of meaning we give to these concepts is internally related to how we are willing to see meaning in our relations to others – human and non-human. Even if we might not speak of our dog as our friend (although sometimes we might do that as well, imagine a child petting a dog and being a bit

hesitant in approaching it, and the parent saying, "go on, he is a friend"), we might apply the word trust for example in describing our relationship with the dog ("the dog trusts that I will take him out for a walk"). But we might not speak of an animal being ironic or showing contempt. Speaking of differences between the human and the non-human in these cases, makes perfect sense. These differences (for example speaking of irony or contempt) are part of the grammar of the human and the animal, but are not always a question of power, hierarchies or difference as exclusion. There are moral (and political) concerns when it comes to human and non-human relations that are rooted in our lives *with* animals, but that are of a different form than the ones addressed by animal rights discourses, or the ethics that derives its insights from the theories of 'flat ontology'.

In what follows I want to conclude my discussion by arguing that the post-humanist critique of decentering the human, and of understanding human and non-human interactions as relational or as a form of *assemblage*[27] in Deleuzian terms, makes perfect sense. This insight or perhaps fact, is however, rooted in our forms of life, not in a theoretical understanding of conceptual politics, in a way that disrupts the notion of the *necessity* of a contrast. I hope to show that when the questions of the human and the non-human are thought of in this light, it becomes obvious that what we are considering here is also not purely an intellectual matter (Hearne 1986: 39).

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[27] The term assemblage comes from Deleuze and Guattari's *AThousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1978) and is used as a metaphor or concept to designate an anti-structural ordering of things. An assemblage can thus be the forming together of several parts or pieces, that together form an assemblage, but there is no specific order in which parts come together. Their language is metaphorical, suggestive, and elusive, but the point here is to stress a change of perspective, to avoid dichotomous thinking.

5. Pictures holding us captive and the craving for generality

In order to understand Wittgenstein's 'method' or 'methods' in the *Philosophical Investigations,* one must understand the aims and questions he is working with. Wittgenstein's philosophy is difficult, not only because his ideas and criticism deeply challenge the epistemic habits and the technical vocabulary of the tradition of philosophy, but because oftentimes, in order to understand his perspective and criticism, one must, as it were, 'change one's attitude' (Wittgenstein 1993: 161). Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy predominantly means becoming clear about one's own ways of thinking, confusions and presuppositions. He does not provide straightforward answers, theses or methods through which to solve philosophical problems. Rather, his aim is to bring our attention to the ways in which we formulate our questions, set up an argument, how we think about them, and how we formulate them. This is where his approach bares similarities to the epistemologies of critical theories such as post-structuralism and post-humanism. Especially in questioning metaphysical underpinnings of questions or discussions, these traditions come close, but they are also significantly different in the conclusions they draw in their respective critical 'anti-metaphysical' inquiries (Moi 2009).

In this chapter I return to Wittgenstein in order to illuminate how his remarks are useful in the reading of contemporary posthumanist theory. I discuss how he describes how a change in attitude is needed in order to dissolve some of the current pictures that function as habitual ways of explaining how language and difference matters in feminist theory. I also discuss paragraph 116 in the *Philosophical Investigations,* in which Wittgenstein describes how philosophers end up in metaphysics when they "try to grasp the essence of the thing" for example the essence of meaning regarding different concepts and words. I discuss how Wittgenstein's philosophy helps us to dissolve the ideas central to the post-humanist feminist thinkers I discuss in previous chapters, about differences, hierarchization and power as residing *in* language. This chapter paves way for discussing how differences and the distinction human/animal can make sense in relation to language and also to the moral meaning of us being language users and speakers.

5.1 Wittgenstein on the problems of philosophy

Under the heading 'Philosophy' from the so-called *Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein describes the problems of philosophy as not an intellectual difficulty of the sciences, but as "the difficulty of a change of attitude" (1993: 161). That is, he brings our attention to the ways in which we approach and understand philosophical questions and concerns, and the presuppositions that guide them. Describing philosophical arguments as the difficulty of changing one's attitude, rather than focusing on intellectual difficulties and argumentation in the traditional philosophical sense, also means that his philosophy involves a moral-existential dimension (Backström 2011), and a self-critical gesture, not unlike the emphasis on 'situated knowledges' in feminist epistemology (Haraway 1988) [28]. Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophy emphasizes the need to attend to everyday language use, as well as the human subject and human forms of life. Wittgenstein's philosophy serves thus as a valuable resource for thinking about *the personal* and linguistic dimensions of the lives that we share with various others. In large part it does so by providing a different outlook on language, meaning and philosophy, and on the ethical dimensions of us being language users than the ones currently provided by the post-humanist theoretical frameworks. His approach takes our ways of talking and acting in everyday life as the departure for our investigation but does not assume that it is something that needs to be justified or explained by this or that theory.

As mentioned, in the beginning of this thesis, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein describes the philosophical task as combatting misunderstandings of how language works. He describes how unnoticed presuppositions guide our thinking that aren't always made explicit, when speaking of pictures holding us captive. Wittgenstein draws attention to how philosophical, metaphysical pictures of

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[28] The similarity here concerns the ways in which the emphasis on 'situatedness' involves a criticism of understanding science and knowledge through the idea of objectivity, where the knowing subject is ignored. Donna Haraway speaks of a 'disembodied viewer' as a scientific ideal, a picture of a scientific ideal. An in-depth inquiry into the differences and similarities between Wittgenstein and feminist science studies approaches is beyond the scope of my discussion here, but I find it important to notice that both problematize a scientific or scientist attitude to knowledge and objectivity as a generalizable attitude.

language and meaning can hold us captive, when he, in paragraph 116 of *Philosophical Investigations*, says we need to look at the actual use of language, at the grammar of a concept. He wants to draw our attention to the metaphysics underlying many of the ways in which philosophers have addressed questions of ontology and epistemology. He writes:

> When philosophers use a word -- "knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "proposition/sentence", "name" -- and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home? –What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use (§116).

Wittgenstein is here is talking about the difference between theorizing questions, in ways in which words and concepts in a theoretical language only become meaningful within that theoretical vocabulary, and between philosophizing about them: when the way we think, talk and use language in the context of our everyday lives (which includes theorizing of course) is what is scrutinized. The point is not to make a clear distinction between theoretical and ordinary language, but to bring the attention to our *attitude* in thinking about language, and language use, be it theoretical or not. Marie McGinn writes about the difficulty of understanding Wittgenstein's philosophy as a question of understanding the nature of what she calls the "*theorizing* or *theoretical attitude*" (McGinn 1997:16). She underlines that one must understand the workings of this attitude (or epistemic habit) in order to understand Wittgenstein's criticism of it.

Wittgenstein does not in that sense provide us with a general theory of language, meaning, power or difference – but emphasizes how words gain their meaning in *various ways,* by pointing out how the *same* word can have many differences and similarities, where meaning is constituted by use and where use is seen under certain descriptions. This paragraph (*PI* §116) can thus be read as similar to what Barad, Butler, Derrida and others say, when they stress the contingency of concepts, effects of power, and that the different meanings a word can have are indeed seen under different descriptions (of exclusion, inclusion). So, what is the difference?

Let us take a look again at what Wittgenstein writes in the *Philosophical Investigations*, regarding our use of the word *games* (we can here think about the concept of the human):

> Don't say: "They *must* have something in common, or they would not be called 'games'" – but *look and see* whether there is anything common at all. – For if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that (§ 66).

A way of becoming clear then, of what Wittgenstein means when he emphasizes language use and urges us to look and see, is to work with examples and descriptions of our language use. Here Wittgenstein wants us to let go of what he calls the craving for generality, the tendency we have to think of one use only, when in fact there are several. Here we can think about the word 'human' (rather than 'games'), as a word that has different uses. Some uses are expressions of power, others are not. *Look* and *see*. It is only if we let go of the idea that "the differential constitution of the "human" ("non-human"), is *always* accompanied by particular exclusions and *always* open to contestation", as Karen Barad (2003: 824) formulates it, that it makes sense to talk about human beings without incessantly having to focus on the question of difference and exclusion.

There are uses of the word and the concept of the human, that gain its meaning from the life forms that we share with others (human and animal), in the sense in which we speak of humans as having language and as living lives, where birth and death constitute limits for our existence. Again, an example might be helpful. We can think of phrases like 'be a little human', or 'we are all human'. Here, the word 'human' functions not as an erasure of difference within the category, but as an expression of the fact that I am urging someone not to be so harsh in their judgment, or where I pass judgment on someone who has made a mistake. 'We all make mistakes' is another way of saying the same thing, without introducing the word 'human'. Obviously then, one could argue that it makes sense to stop talking about the human altogether. The point is, however, that this won't solve the problem of hierarchization, difference, or people being racist, but instead draws us towards policing language use, a practice that is justified in the name of the political, but ultimately only comes to serve the image that the critic has of herself as 'critics'.

These examples I just gave about saying that "we all make mistakes" might seem strange or odd: What do they have to do with the *political* critique of the *philosophical category* of human? Here the point is that the uses of these words are not epistemological and do not answer the question of who counts as human but point to a moral dimension of language use. This is different from applying the perspective of 'flat ontology' onto *all* kinds of language use, as a theoretical standpoint regarding 'what is'. That is, referring to the fact that our life form is human, also means that part of what makes it human is that it has a moral dimension. But what does this mean? If we take the post-humanist critique seriously and look to decenter the human speaking subject as the provider of meaning, and instead emphasize an ethics of relation, must we not then also complicate our understanding of that life form and the place of moral meaning in it?

5.2 Language and ethics: The human/animal continuum

Cora Diamond has written extensively on questions concerning meaning, philosophy, humans, language, ethics, and animals. In her article "Eating meat and eating people" (1978/2005) she writes about the ways in which the distinction human/animal is reflected in our culture:

> We learn what a human being is in – among other ways – sitting at a table where *we* eat *them*. We are around the table and they are on it. The difference between human beings and animals is not to be discovered by studies of Washoe or the activities of dolphins. It is not that sort of study or ethology or evolutionary theory that is going to tell us the difference between us and animals: the difference is, as I have suggested, *a central concept for human life* and is more an object of contemplation than observation (though that might be misunderstood; I am not suggesting that it is a matter of intuition) (Diamond 1978: 470, emphasis added).

In this quote, one might hear Diamond saying something similar to those anthropocentric thinkers that post-humanist philosophers like MacCormack critique, by asserting that our understanding of what humans (or animals) are is a matter of a conceptual difference. Isn't Diamond's claim exactly the kind of argument that post-humanists like MacCormack dispute? Diamond seems to uphold a notion where there is *a* difference between humans and animals on one hand, and a central concept to human life (essential to human life and hierarchical?), and differences and

similarities that are of a second order on the other hand (the fact that we can eat animals but also call animals companion species). The distinction between *us* and *them* is reflected *and* created in language, Diamond seems to suggest, it is part of our understanding of what makes us who we are. This is the picture McCormack assumes, and one that she opposes, and it is a picture that Chen describes through the animacy hierarchy. It is a conceptual difference and a practice that we learn, among other places, at our dinner tables, and a difference that is part of everyday life, something taken for granted, almost like a fact, which in turn acts as justification for the criticism of Chen and MacCormack.

The question of how to understand this difference between human and animal as both a conceptual and a practical matter, however, is more complicated than what both Butler, Barad, Chen and McCormack seem to suggest. Because, one might ask: why hold on to a notion of *the difference* created in language, when the point of Wittgenstein (and often also by the feminist posthumanist thinkers I discuss) is to show that there are differences, and similarities, that criss-cross in our various ways of speaking of humans and animals in?

It is important to note, however, that despite the similarity on the surface of Diamond and MacCormack's accounts, there is a significant difference, regarding the conclusions they draw, which is also reflected in the different spirit in which they write and think about humans, animals, philosophy and life. Despite the fact that Diamond raises questions about the meaning animals have and can have in our lives, and describes the logic that is used to justify *a* difference between the human and the animal, she doesn't assume difference to automatically mean exclusion or hierarchy[29]. Diamond's essay points us in a direction to start thinking about these questions philosophically, without assuming a specific way or perspective from which to think about them, such as a particular theoretical understanding of language, power and meaning.

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[29] This is the conclusion, but also the point of departure for many of the authors I discuss. Because of their theoretical understanding of power, language, meaning and differences, they actually assume the picture that is presented as their conclusion.

Diamond seems to say that it is the moral dimension of language use and human lives that is the basis for the human/animal distinction, and that there are certain actions, like naming people, that are expressive of what kind of beings we are dealing with. Diamond talks about people, about us and them, experiences, and the affective aspects of our relations to animals, but not as a question of theoretical contemplation, or as an *effect* of language use. Rather, she points to something that runs deeper, I would say, something that concerns the role concepts have in human life (not only in philosophy). Diamond describes the difference as related to the fact that we don't eat our dead, we don't eat our own limbs, and that these are facts related to the difference between burying a dog and burying a human being. If we take this point further, we could think of other cases, for example, a situation where a city has been hit by a natural disaster and we are faced with a two or three-year-old child and a dog walking towards us. In a situation like this, it makes sense to say that seeing the child demands something from us, in a way that seeing the dog perhaps does not, and that it relates to how we see and understand the life of a dog and the life of a child or human. The child might not survive without our help, whereas a dog could.[30]

Looking at the sentences that Chen discusses here, to 'treat someone like a dog' or 'treating a dog like a human being' do not necessarily have to reference a constitutive difference on an ontological level, but might refer to the different ways in which we might respond to a dog and a child in different situations, for example in a situation as described above. Clearly, this is a kind of example where MacCormack's 'flat ontology' would emphasize that the comparison in the example is problematic *as such*, as what matters is the life of *that* dog and *that* child, in their singularity, no matter what differences there are in how we see and understand dogs and children, and most importantly regardless of the context. There is a level of abstraction in MacCormack's reasoning (despite her emphasis on singularity), that doesn't quite capture exactly what it means for these lives to *matter*, or that they matter to us differently depending on the situation. This should not be understood as a matter of relativism, as if the criteria for how things come to matter to us are completely arbitrary. While MacCormack seems to work with a concept of an

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[30] I want to thank Camilla Kronqvist and Be Nordling for providing me with this example.

abstract difference, that is an effect of historicity, that is expressed in all cases, and one that is inherently unethical regardless of what a description or situation entails, Diamond talks about a moral meaning that in different ways *constitutes* our relations to others (human and animal) in concrete situations in our lives. The question of encountering animals for example, as companion species, as pets, does engage us in relations of responsibility, friendship and joy, concepts that are intelligible to us beyond the generalized account of them being anthropocentric.

I have emphasized the ways in which we talk about the human and the animal in different ways and how the same words and sentences can vary depending on the situation. In the article "Being humans when we are animals" philosopher Pär Segerdahl (2014) gives examples of the language games we use, the ways in which we talk about humans and non-humans, when we, for example, teach children language. Segerdahl uses as an example the sentence 'humans are animals' (a phrase and thought central to post-humanist discussions). He points out that there is a difference between how we talk about 'humans as being animals' in a scientific or biological sense, and when for example explaining to a child that 'even humans are animals'. A central theme in Wittgenstein's philosophy is to make the distinction between scientific ways of explaining and understanding things (craving for generality) and everyday ways of talking and acting. This means that a sentence like 'even humans are animals' (Segerdahl 2014: 127), will come to mean different things, depending on if we are thinking about the human as an animal in the natural scientific sense (sharing DNA for example), or when we are trying to critique hierarchies of speciesism, introducing a 'flat ontology', where the vocabulary is seen as having political and ethical relevance. The point is that the different kinds of distinctions we make, make sense in different ways, in different situations. Not all are determined by "THE *DIFFERENCE"*, as Segerdahl describes it, of the metanarrative of the philosophical tradition regarding the human/non-human. Segerdahl writes:

> Most people know and can recite that humans are animals, a species of apes. Still, it is awkward to try to apply that knowledge directly to oneself: "I'm an animal" or "My parents are apes". We can visit the biologist's workshop and appreciate the fact that we are a primate species. But when we return home, it is embarrassingly difficult to figure

out how this fact should be understood there (2014:127).

Segerdahl is addressing the fact that we use different language games, different *descriptions* when we talk about humans and animals and the relations between them. He makes a point about the grammar of humans and the grammar of animals, and the different ways in which the words 'animal' and 'species' come to signify, in multiple ways. I discuss Segerdahl here because he describes how him being reprimanded by an ape comes to disrupt the notion of there being *a* difference between the human and non-human, in the constitutive sense, and introduces us to the phenomena of what he calls ape-human morality. In the following, concluding section, I want to use his example, to show that despite the critique of MacCormack, Chen and other post-humanist philosophers, there are ways in which encounters with animals can make a difference philosophically, but that the value of these encounters can only be seen under certain descriptions. Namely if we let go of pictures holding us captive, such as "we cannot think the animal" (MacCormack), or that "the differential constitution of the "human" ("non-human"), is *always* accompanied by particular exclusions" (Barad 2003).

5.3 An ape rebuking the philosopher

The main topic of Segerdahl's essay is to reflect on his experience of feeling "metaphysical vertigo" in encountering and being reprimanded by an animal in a laboratory for ape language research. Segerdahl is visiting the lab with the aim of observing linguistic behavior in apes. During his visit he meets the apes *Panbanisha* and *Kanzi*. The background for his visit is the discovery of how a young ape has learned to communicate in the laboratory. The young ape, Kanzi has not been part of the experiments and efforts to teach apes language, and the discovery that the young Kanzi has picked it up *spontaneously* is of interest to Segerdahl. Previous attempts to teach apes language have not succeeded, and the discovery that Kanzi communicates with the humans in the lab has also led the researchers in this particular lab to completely change their methods regarding language teaching. In reflecting on the discovery later on, one of the researchers in the lab, Sue Savage- Rumbaugh writes: "I decided to abandon all instruction and focus my attention instead on what was *said to Kanzi* rather than on what we could teach him to say" (Savage-Rumbaugh et

al. 1998: 26-7). In this laboratory, ideas about humans and animals, language learning and language use, are altered when the experiment is ongoing. The researchers start doing things with the apes, and becomes in a different way engaged and entangled in the lives of the apes. In reflecting over the fact that Kanzi had learned language in a similar way that children learn language, being around people, Segerdahl notes that speaking to Kanzi "presupposed *having* things to say that could be of significance to both ape and human" (2014: 139). The lab thus becomes a space, a context where people and apes do things together, take walks in the forest, and cook meals, where they form a group and learn things together. In this context, Segerdahl notes, the practice of eating together does not mark a difference between the human and the animal, as they in fact share meals together.

The apes learn to communicate via symbols on a board (as they can't speak only make noises and communicate through signs) and learn to ask questions and communicate things in their surroundings. Segerdahl notes that the laboratory seems to be a place where "the humans seemed to be subjects of the experiment as much as the apes" (Segerdahl 2014: 138). Segerdahl further describes how he at first enters the lab from the vantage point of "an anthropologist", how he goes in as an observer, "secure in his form of humanity" expecting to see what it could mean that *we* teach *them*. What he didn't expect was the existence of an *ape-human context* and what it would mean to be addressed as a person within this ape-human morality[31]. His experience visiting the lab and encountering the apes, came to have a philosophical impact on him. This is how he describes what happened when he entered the lab:

> What I didn't expect was that the apes would make eloquent demands on me. When I small-talked with a caretaker outside Panbanisha's enclosure, disobeying the instruction I recently was given to "sit quietly and observe", the bonobo inside looked troubled and said on her keyboard – quiet! I shivered and felt shame. When I later touched her baby Nathan's hand, she ran up to me and called me a *monster*. The language that I thought I should observe safely on the other side of the divide instead hit me in the face and I felt metaphysical vertigo. The safe-guarding contrast that initially shaped my visit was down for the count. My first response to Panbanisha's rebukes was shame, because I was caught in the act of doing wrong. My shame instantly turned into metaphysical vertigo, for it unveiled the presence of someone who saw me and scrutinized my conduct: precisely what my manner of visiting the laboratory excluded. The vertigo could be described as speechlessness, for the language that I had at my disposal when I

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[31] This description could be read as an example of how Segerdahl assumes the subject/object standpoint of humanism when entering the lab, but in fact experiences the kind of 'flat ontology' that post-humanists are calling for.

went to OBSERVE APES was disrupted by my meeting with Panbanisha. Or that is what I want to say. Panbanisha extended her moral notions to me. She talked to me and tried to improve me. And I felt the demand to become who she made me, above all in her presence. The wire between us no longer protected my all-too-human understanding of my visit to the laboratory (Segerdahl 2014: 140-141).

Now, how are we to understand what is going on here? Isn't Segerdahl's description only an expression of the humanist prejudice that man is the maker of all meaning, and an example of the hierarchical and violent relation between humans and animals? It is a laboratory after all, and surely the apes were there as a part of an experiment. Primatologist Frans de Waal thinks of the research in this lab in these terms. He describes it as a "thoroughly anthropocentric enterprise" where "a communication system for which evolution has specifically hardwired us … is being imposed on another creature to see how far it can go" (de Waal quoted in Segerdahl 2012: 27). This would be MacCormack's position too. But perhaps there is something we can learn from this example, something of political, philosophical and moral significance. Segerdahl acknowledges the objections that can be made against the undoing of the contrast or difference that seems implicit in Diamond's and explicit in MacCormack's accounts, regarding the human/animal. He writes: "it might be objected that Panbanisha, through being enculturated, mirrored the language I thought was disrupted. Wasn't the meeting made possible by language that originally was formed by humans who produced themselves as other than animals?" (Segerdahl 2014: 144).

Segerdahl is thus aware of the criticism that MacCormack, Derrida, de Waal, and others express in their work, but for him it is not an epistemological standpoint that is valid in all cases. He acknowledges the criticism, the perspective and the question of power, but he also takes another look at the example, and situates himself and Panbanisha as active agents in the encounter. Segerdahl writes:

> *But did I meet an animal*? *Did an ape rebuke me*? It is true that Panbanisha was an animal in the child's language and an exemplar of Pan paniscus in the scientific sense, but wasn't her animality too impure, didn't she reflect too much of my humanity, to motivate a claim that the contrast (moral contrast between humans and animals) was unmade? What is significant is that I met *Panbanisha*. Meeting *her* made me incapable of using the language of these purifying demands, which conforms to the notion that WE succeeded in teaching THEM. Her enculturation was no impurity, unless we insist on forms of language that I lost in her home (2014: 147-148, emphasis in original).

Segerdahl here is emphasizing a personal dimension, both regarding his experience and Panbanisha's. *He* is being addressed by Panbanisha. *She* makes him feel shame. This encounter seems to undo any strict division between human and non-human as being based on language and morality, as it is usually thought of it. It also seems to be an example of the kind of flat ontology that many post-humanist and new materialists speak of. Panbanisha talks to Segerdahl, demands something of him, and it is something he cannot ignore. He is ashamed by his behavior and for being told (by an *animal*) to be quiet. A moral vocabulary is used in the description of what makes this encounter meaningful, not a theoretical idea of what the human and the non-human means and *must* mean, or what the encounter *can* or *cannot* be an example of. Or rather, the meaning that the example has for Segerdahl is based on his experience of the encounter, of what the animal says to him, rather than on a beforehand-decided perspective of what the 'human' and the 'non-human' must mean, or what human/animal encounters amounts to.

If we think about the example through Karen Barad's statement "The differential constitution of the "human" ("non-human"), is always accompanied by particular exclusions and always open to contestation" (Barad 2008: 142), what sense does it make to apply this to Segerdahl's example? Does it even make sense to talk about there being something like the differential constitution of the human and the non-human, and if so, what does it add to Segerdahl's example, other than pointing to the fact that we can here speak of an encounter between a human and an animal? The encounter can be theorized via Barad's sentence here, and it is in some ways a good example of how the human/non-human distinction starts to glide, or is indeed not a priori defined, nor an end product. But what Barad's sentence does not capture is the *moral existential dimension* of the example, nor the moral-existential dimension of the entire problematic or theme of the human and the non-human.

Cora Diamond writes: "The ways in which we mark what human life is belong to the source of moral life" (Diamond 1978: 471). Diamond points here to the internal relation between human life and morality and *can* be read as saying that what makes human life different from other forms of life, is its morality. But again, what does 'human life' mean here? I would say it makes sense to talk about a realm of human meaning and of our understanding of human lives as having a moral dimension only

if we let go of the idea that speaking of humans or human life in this way must entail a process of exclusion, that this involves, per necessity, some kind of contrast, or hierarchy, or act of unacknowledged self-reflection, or meaning making practices of a discourse structured by *difference*. But it does not mean that the different meanings words such as 'human' and expressions like 'human life' can take, are not 'open to contestation'. Meanings, concepts and circumstances in which we make sense of things *change*, sometimes spontaneously, unprovoked, and sometimes as an effect of major efforts. This aspect of language being fluid, in a sense, does not equal saying that meaning in general is always open to contestation. There are situations in which it is of equal importance to claim that something is not 'fluid', saying 'no, this is how I mean it', where what you say is not contestable. To claim that meaning is always open to contestation, as a theoretical idea, becomes a picture, a way of thinking that holds us captive.

This does not mean that the sentence 'meaning is always open to contestation' wouldn't be useful, applicable or make sense. As Martin Gustafsson notes in his article "Notes on life and human nature" (2015), "the open-ended variability of human languages and cultures" is astonishing and holds an "open-ended variety of possibilities" (2015: 67-96). However, this open-endedness also doesn't mean that anything goes. Gustafsson discusses Wittgenstein's remarks on language use as games, and reminds us that Wittgenstein too held that although the concept of a game is open-ended, it doesn't mean that anything can count as a game. As a theoretical idea about meaning and language, the use of concepts, and the historicity of meaning, "meaning is always open to contestation", is attractive. But it is exactly an example the kind of craving for generality Wittgenstein speaks of.

In his discussion of the human and the animal, Segerdahl notes that seeing animals as fellow-beings (Diamond), or companion species (Haraway) also means perceiving them through notions like friendship (Segerdahl 2014: 135). Friendship is one of the concepts Segerdahl uses to describe the ape-human community he visited. The culture in the lab, he writes (trips in the forest, cooking, daily activities, playing games, joking), formed a community, where the difference between us and them was not the difference between humans and the animals, but involved 'us' in the ape-human community and 'them', as visitors, forming the outside. In the language of

Karen Barad and others emphasizing that agency is not only something belonging to the human subject alone, in this encounter, the bonobo Panbanisha and philosopher Segerdahl both "constitute meaning". Their encounter makes sense within the context of a shared human-ape culture that has developed in ape language research. Here one can speak of a post-human ethics, in the way Rosi Braidotti does, one that "rests on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or "earth" others" (Braidotti 2014: 243).

What the example above shows is that we can make distinctions between the human and the non-human, we can talk about humans and animals in different ways, but it becomes difficult to maintain a conceptual distinction that is relevant in *all* cases. One must, as Wittgenstein says, look and see, as "the language we speak is contingent on the circumstances of our lives*"* (Hertzberg 2011: 351). Lars Hertzberg points out that the relations between the concepts we use and the world we live in *is as varied as life itself*, and that: "in order to get a clear view of human concepts we must be open to that variety" (2011: 353). In these remarks, I find a sense of openness towards matter and meaning that the post-structuralist theorization of language and power seeks to address, but often fails to achieve, due to its own philosophical commitments. There is an emphasis on forms of life (another Wittgensteinian term) that are internally related to the meanings of our concepts, but there is also openness towards change, as the meaning and use are not determined, defined by or an effect of a linguistic system, discourse or any other external factor. In Segerdahl's account, the idea that language and morality are constitutive notions for our understanding of humans and human life can be understood in two different ways. Language and morality as constitutive for understanding human life, can be taken as the point of departure for any kind of investigation or inquiry of meaning on the one hand, while on the other, it can as a *philosophical idea* be disrupted, as it is in his experience, encounter and engagement with an ape. It is not disrupted by a theory, an abstract idea or generalized view of what morality, language or meaning is.

In conclusion what I want to say with regards to the philosophical relevance of this example is that the experience of 'metaphysical vertigo' of the undoing of the human sense of self that Segerdahl describes, becomes impossible within the post-humanist

ethical framework provided by MacCormack. She claims that the only thing that can be done is to deconstruct the notion of the human, (though it is unclear how to do that) but that we should not, may not, engage with animals, and what cannot be done is to think that encountering animals can have any philosophical relevance. Similar to de Waal, she writes: "Any sympathetic argument about what interactions we may have or share with nonhumans is always limited to our thinking the encounter" (2012: 58). In a sense, she is right, it is up to us to think about what ideas make or do not make sense, when thinking about these encounters. But her emphasis on limits (that thinking about these examples is always limited) expresses the craving for generality, a suspicion of meaning, and becomes what Wittgenstein calls a picture holding us captive. For I would say, following Wittgenstein, that the example of an ape rebuking a philosopher in a laboratory shows that experiences and notions of both the personal and of moral meaning (or power, violence, and differences) gain their meaning in the life we share with others, where it makes sense to give an account of how language comes to have a place in our lives, but where the notion of language (or morality), indeed no longer belongs to the human subject alone.

Concluding remarks

A central feature of my discussion has concerned the contrast between the theoretical framework of Butler, Barad, Chen and MacCormack and their focus on language and power and a matter of difference, and Wittgenstein's approach to language and philosophical understanding. Through emphasizing this contrast I have aimed to show how Wittgenstein's understanding of language and critique of philosophy, and his philosophical 'method' that encourages us to 'look and see' at language use in its multiplicity and open-endedness, constitutes a *radical* alternative to current feminist practices of critique and criticism. It offers a perspective, I argue, where *we* need to do the hard work of critique, and where our attitude towards language and life matter.

To place the justification of politics in a theoretical understanding of language and meaning risks becoming the kind of metaphysical picture and justification that the tradition of critique wants to expose and question in the first place. It articulates itself as a tautology; the reason for critique is justified by the ways in which language and power operates, whereas critique is also what *reveals* this operation of power. The reason for thinking about language and concepts in this way is 'justified' by referring to the political. These are presuppositions that have become "epistemic habits" as they function as pictures of how things must be.

Critique as an attitude and form of cultural understanding, I argue, must thus be characterized by a constitutive openness in our attitude to language and meaning, rather than as generalizing theses about meaning and language. Critical thinking in this understanding is a perspective that is rooted in our forms of life with each other, rather than in metaphysical abstract speculation about 'the subject' and its 'others'. It is radical in the sense that it allows us to approach and understand questions of meaning, both epistemological and ethical, anew. It allows us to dissolve the epistemic habits of the philosophical tradition that keeps us circulating in tautologies and theoretical impasses, as well as helping to make sense of the kind of questions that feminist and post-humanist concerns express.

I have argued that the moral dimension and the questions of moral concern addressed by feminist posthumanist ethics are not primarily questions of justice, rights or the use of this or that concept of identity (human, non-human, man, woman, brown, white, gay, Finnish, secular, Christian), but of meaning in a broader sense (Gaita 2006). A theoretical idea or 'picture' that I have discussed in relation to ethics, is the one where moral meaning or ethics is discussed or defined a priori, in the abstract, independent of the situations we are faced with in our lives, or independent of the examples we are working with when we are doing theory or philosophy. The contrast I have highlighted in this discussion is the difference between locating moral meaning in an outside, abstract realm or theory and in locating it inside the lives we share with each other and with the non-human.

Svensk sammanfattning

Denna pro gradu avhandling diskuterar frågor som är centrala inom den feministiska posthumanistiska teorin. Detta teoriintensiva forskningsfält karakteriseras av ett kritiskt förhållningssätt till humanismens arv som en kulturell, politisk, filosofisk och akademisk tanketradition. I denna avhandling granskar jag hur frågan om det mänskliga och distinktionen människa/djur förstås inom feministisk posthumanistisk teori och analyserar dessa med hjälp av Ludvig Wittgensteins språkfilosofiska iakttagelser. Jag diskuterar fyra exempel ur den samtida feministiska teorin: 1) Judith Butlers teoretisering kring det mänskliga i boken *Undoing Gender* (2004), 2) Karen Barads vidareutveckling av det för Butler centrala begreppet performativitet i artikeln "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" (2003), 3) Mel Y. Chens bok *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* (2012) i vilken Chen argumenterar för existensen av en kulturell hierarkisering baserad på grader av livlighet, samt 4) Patricia MacCormacks bok *Posthumanist Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory* (2012) där hon talar för en abolitionistisk ståndpunkt gällande våra relationer till djur.

Alla dessa exempel tar på ett sätt eller annat upp frågan om hur det mänskliga och det omänskliga eller det icke mänskliga begripliggörs och ges mening i vår kultur. Butler, Barad, Chen och MacCormack är alla tänkare inom den feministiska teoribildningen som är starkt influerade av den poststrukturalistiska tanketraditionens filosofer. Den posthumanistiska ansatsen till att decentrera det humanistiska subjektet, att visa på en kontinuitet mellan vetenskapernas självförståelse, praktiker och politiska och etiska frågor är en välkommen utveckling inom humanvetenskaperna och framför allt ansatserna till att utveckla allt mera tvärdisciplinära forskningsprojekt bör ses som fruktbara. Det är likaså välkommet att man börjat uppmärksammat det icke-mänskligas roll i en posthumanistisk anda. Det finns ändå skäl att fråga vad det är som står på spel i dessa diskussioner och förskjutningar i debatter. I avhandlingen ställer jag därför frågan vad det är som posthumanismen tillför. Är det något annat än ett perspektivskifte, och i så fall vad? Vad innebär detta perspektivskifte för den feministiska teorin och filosofin och vad innebär det för en kritisk politisk filosofi?

Avhandlingen diskuterar därmed den feministiska posthumanistiska teorins politiska och kritiska ansatser och även hur vi skall förstå de moraliska dimensionerna av den feministiska posthumanismen. Avhandlingens sista kapitel diskuterar ett exempel ur den svenska filosofen Pär Segerdals forskning, där han möter en apa i ett laboratorium där forskare bedriver ett projekt om språkinlärning hos apor. Segerdahl beskriver hur han blir tillrättavisad av en apa då han bryter mot de anvisningar han fått av en av skötarna, och hur denna *erfarenhet* av mötet med apan kommer att upplösa vissa filosofiska "bilder" som har präglat hans tänkande. Jag diskuterar detta exempel för att belysa ett kontrasterande filosofiskt förståelsesätt av "det mänskliga" och distinktionen "djur/människa" som utmanar många av den posthumanistiska feministiska teorins invanda tankemönster.

Posthumanistisk feministisk teori

Den feministiska posthumanistiska teorin har särskilt kommit att beteckna ett nyväckt intresse för "tillblivandets processer" och "materiellt-semiotiska" förhållningssätt till de fenomen som studeras. Posthumanism betyder i detta sammanhang en betoning av ontologiska frågor, inte att förväxla med materialism i en marxistisk vokabulär. Denna vändning mot det ontologiska bör förstås som en reaktion mot tidigare rådande paradigm inom humaniora och kulturforskningen överlag, som primärt diskuterat kulturella fenomen som en fråga om språk och betydelser. Ansatserna har framförallt varit att historisera olika frågor och fenomen (till exempel kön, sexualitet, emotioner) som en effekt av språk, betydelsesystem och diskursteorier. Denna "språkliga vändning" influerad av tänkare som Jacques Derrida och Michel Foucault synliggjorde kopplingar mellan makt och kunskap, och kom därmed (enligt kritikerna) att utesluta frågor om sakers natur, materialitet, kort sagt: verkligheten och konkreta förhållanden.

Posthumanismen kunde karakteriseras som en vidareutveckling av den tanketradition som skapats av den kritiska teorin och feministisk, postkolonial och poststrukturalistisk forskning, vilket även är det intellektuella arv som den akademiska feminismen på sätt eller annat förhåller sig till. Den röda tråden utgörs av att man vill politisera den akademiska forskningen, vilket aktualiserar frågan om

relationen mellan teori och politik och i synnerhet hur man tänker sig att ett teoretiskt tänkande kan förändra våra förhållningssätt till världen. En central aspekt av posthumanistiska angreppssätt är att inte a priori anta eller skapa motsatser mellan natur och kultur, människa och djur och så vidare. Fokus är på uppluckringen av hierarkiska dikotomier, skillnadstänkande (man/kvinna, subjekt/ objekt, människa/djur, natur/kultur) och ett ifrågasättande av människan som ett självklart centrum för vetande, kunnande och för världen i allmänhet. Detta tankesätt präglar även Karen Barads, Judith Butlers, Mel Y Chens och Patricia MacCormacks tänkande, i vilka de beskriver hur saker och ting blir till genom både språkliga, historiska, lokala och globala maktrelationer men också genom specifika biologiska och materiella villkor.

Den första delen av avhandlingen introducerar och beskriver den filosofiska och idéhistoriska bakgrunden till posthumanismens centrala teoretiska anspråk. Därefter introducerar jag de centrala aspekterna av Ludvig Wittgensteins filosofi som diskuteras i avhandlingen. Dessa berör framförallt hans kritik av filosofers tendenser till generaliserande förklaringar och tendensen till att förakta det han kallar de enskilda fallen. Jag diskuterar även hur han beskriver filosofer som varande "fångna av bilder" och hur det filosofiska arbetet måste utgå ifrån att *se efter* och granska hur vi de facto använder språket. I relation till Wittgensteins filosofi och inspirerad av hans kritiska anmärkningar, använder jag uttrycket epistemiska vanor ("epistemic habits") för att synliggöra hur de tänkare jag diskuterar på olika sätt fastnat i "bilder" som håller dem fångna i vissa tankesätt. Dessa är framförallt olika förståelser av hur språket fungerar, hur språkanvändning alltid ses som en fråga om ett skillnadskapande och hierarkisering av betydelser. I denna del av diskussionen tar jag upp hur de olika tänkarna förstår språk, mening, politik och etik.

Judith Butler skriver t.ex. att det mänskliga alltid bestäms utifrån dess historiska bestämning, hur begreppet människa alltid handlar om normer och maktrelationer. Samtidigt påstår hon att begreppets framtid är "öppen" och att dess betydelser inte är på förhand givna. Med hänvisning till den teoritradition som Butlers tänkande utgår ifrån, som diskuteras i del två, visar jag hur Butler är fångad i en bild av språket influerad av Jacques Derrida och en maktförståelse influerad av Michel Foucault.

Jag visar på en spänning och paradox i Butlers tänkande och hur frågan om att språk alltid handlar om makt genomsyrar hennes tänkande.

I min diskussion av Karen Barads vidareutveckling av Butlers tänkande, visar jag hur Barad, trots sin kritik av Butler även hon är fångad i samma bild av språket som skillnadskapande och hierarkiserande. Även Barad hävdar att det mänskliga och det icke-mänskliga *alltid* görs begripligt igenom en skillnad som är hierarkisk. Samtidigt vill Barad också hävda att det finns en öppenhet i språket. Hos Butler och Barad är alltså slutsatsen den att mening skapas för att vi kan göra kontraster (skillnad ses som orsaken till mening), dessa kontraster är alltid en effekt av makt, betydelser och språklig mening är alltid "öppet" och därmed aldrig "låst". Jag kritiserar denna bild och dessa slutsatser för att bestå i ett missförstånd av vad språklig mening handlar om, igenom att påpeka att det blir obegripligt hur ett kritisk tänkande eller en kritisk filosofi överhuvudtaget är möjligt, om inte vi kan göra en skillnad mellan språkliga uttryck som *inte* är en följd av makt, och dessa som är det.

I det tredje kapitlet diskuterar jag Mel Y Chens teoretisering kring hur grader av levande och icke levande visar sig i vår kultur. Chen diskuterar bl.a. frågor om vardagsspråket och ger exempel som "jag vill inte vara en grönsak", "jag vill inte vara en sten", "att bli behandlad som en hund". Dessa är alla exempel på en hierarkisering mellan dött (stenar) och levande (människor och djur). Inom denna skala finns det gradskillnader menar Chen, som bland annat påstår att meningen "jag vill inte vara en sten" är obegriplig eller ambivalent eftersom den i lingvistiken ges en asterisk för att markera obegriplighet. Vad Chen förbiser, och som jag påpekar i avhandlingen med hänvisning till Wittgensteins språkfilosofi, är att denna sats kan vara fullt begriplig då vi ser på den och dess användning i ett mänskligt liv. Vi kan tänka oss ett barn som talar med sina föräldrar om vilka roller som finns för ett teaterstycke som skall spelas under skolans julfest, och att barnet säger "jag vill inte vara en sten" som ett uttryck för en önskan om att få spela en annan roll i pjäsen. Ytterligare diskuterar jag Chens kritik av J.L. Austins användning av ord apa i hans filosofiska verk där han diskuterar språkets performativa aspekter. Chen påstår att Austins val av ordet apa är ett uttryck för en kolonialistisk och rasistisk maktordning och att detta visar på den rasism som ligger till grund för den kritiska teori som utvecklats i diskussioner kring performativitet. Jag ifrågasätter Chens anspråk och

drar slutsatsen att det enbart är begripligt att konstatera att användningen av ord som apa är problematiskt för att det har rasistiska undertoner, om vi redan på förhand har bestämt oss att varje fall och användning av ordet apa är problematiskt p.g.a. dess rasistiska undertoner. Jag lyfter fram att vi måste kunna dra en skillnad mellan icke rasistiska och rasistiska användningar för att överhuvudtaget kunna bedriva en kritisk filosofi, visa på politiska betydelser av språkanvändning och moraliska dimensioner av våra delade liv med varandra.

I det fjärde kapitlet diskuterar jag hur bilden om språk och makt som varande skillnadskapande dras till sin spets hos Patricia MacCormack då hon i sin bok *Posthumanist Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory* (2012) hävdar att vi bör ge upp tanken på att överhuvudtaget filosofera om djur. Jag visar i min diskussion att hennes kritiska tankesätt är förankrad i en förvirrad bild av språket och en förvirrad bild av vad det innebär att vi lever liv i vilka djur ingår. MacCormack är ett exempel på hur den epistemiska vanan att alltid se vissa begrepp som uttryck för makt gör en blind för den mångfald av betydelser som begrepp och människor och djur kan ha i våra liv.

Mångfalden av respons, tänkande och språkanvändning i våra liv är temat hos de filosofer som utgör min diskussionspartner i avhandlingens sista och avslutande kapitel. Jag tar upp Cora Diamond och Pär Segerdahls diskussioner om distinktionen djur/människa och hur denna är grundläggande för vårt begrepp om ett mänskligt liv. Cora Diamond skriver i sin artikel "Att äta kött och att äta människor" att det finns en skillnad mellan djur och människa som är grundläggande för hur vi förstår vad ett mänskligt liv är. Segerdahl vidareutvecklar Diamonds exempel där hon skriver att vi lär oss vad en människa är bland annat igenom att vi sitter vid ett bord där vi äter dem, vi sitter runt bordet medan de är på det" (Diamond 1978). Segerdal diskuterar ett motexempel där apor och deras skötare som äter tillsammans. Segerdahls poäng är att visa på att trots att det finns skillnader som vi kan göra mellan människa och djur, finns det inte en skillnad som vi kan dra en gång för alla och som gäller i alla fall.. Detta är även Diamonds poäng. Segerdal visar därmed på relationen mellan det begreppsliga och det empiriska, och hur erfarenheter (i detta fall, hans egen erfarenhet av att blivit tillrättavisad av en apa) kan utmana invanda filosofiska tankemönster. Jag diskuterar Diamond och Segerdahl som exempel på hur det

posthumanistiska feministiska tänkandets fokus på politiska och etiska frågor, inte behöver innebära en teoretisk förståelse av hur makt och skillnader skapas i språket och därmed får ett uttryck i våra liv, utan visar på hur de är ett radikalt alternativ till existerande tankesätt inom den traditionen.

Segerdahls exempel visar också att de föreställningar som ofta förstås som riktgivande för hur vi tänker kring människor och djur (att människor kan språk, som djur inte kan och att människor har en moral, som djur inte har) utmanas då vi ser på fall som på språkinlärningen hos apor. I detta exempel utgör djur och människor kontexten för samhörigheten, de kommunicerar med varandra, de delar ett språk och de delar en moral: Segerdahl blir tillrättavisad av en apa. I detta fall är det svårt att applicera MacCormacks ståndpunkt om att allt engagemang med djur är ett uttryckt för antropocentrism, utan att avvisa det moraliska krav som apan ställer på en.

I avhandlingen visar jag alltså hur en kritisk och politisk feministisk posthumanistisk teori måste ge upp vissa invanda tankemönster (epistemiska vanor) och upplösa tanken om att språkanvändning *alltid* ingår i maktrelationer, att begreppsanvändning *alltid* handlar om skillnadskapande praktiker och att teori *alltid* handlar om politik. Jag avslutar min sammanfattning med hänvisning till Toril Moi (2009) då hon säger att det som är nödvändigt för att överhuvudtaget kunna skapa visioner av en annorlunda feministisk teori, är upplösandet av det starka grepp som den poststrukturalistiska språkteorin haft kring feminismen. I denna avhandling har jag visat på hur ett sådant upplösande kan se ut.

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