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(Un)Thinking Otherness:
The Entanglement of *Bios* and *Zoē* in Rahel Hutmacher's
Animal Stories

Difference, or "Otherness" to the dominant paradigm, has long posed a challenge to societies. Human expectations of conformity and preferences for homogeneity frequently result in the marginalization of Others, who are subjected to discriminatory thoughts, speech, and practices. Animal figures are often poster children for Otherness, utilized in philosophical discourse as the ultimate Other through and against which the human species is defined, but also used in political and social discourse to justify the allocation or withdrawal of protections and rights. The concept of the animal shows the clear ethical distinction that determines the binary value and status of life in a society. While *bios* – political, discursive life – is reserved for humans and only includes those who meet the requirements for it, *zoē* describes bare, bodily life – animal(istic) life – that falls outside of the realm of the qualified *bios*, and the legal protection *bios* offers. The figure of the animal, especially in animal stories, can help us bring Otherness into focus.

Swiss Jewish author Rahel Hutmacher's short stories, especially from the collections *Wettergarten*¹ (1980) and *Tochter*² (1983), investigate the realms of *bios* and *zoē* by introducing a range of animal-like characters that challenge societal structures and reveal the implications of falling into one of the two categories of *bios* and *zoē*. Her short stories, or rather vignettes, draw on the familiar arsenal of "evil" fairy tale characters such as witches and wolves, yet reverse the perspective by putting the reader in the shoes of these traditionally "bad" and therefore marginalized Others. In her vignettes, Hutmacher draws attention to the entanglement of Othering, animality, ethnicity, and gender, and she exposes the workings of *bios*, which adheres to expectations of and conformity to a majority. Her texts demonstrate the violence inherent in the exclusive nature of *bios* and propose an alternative venue for dealing with Otherness by embracing *zoē*, which opens up avenues of inter-relation and for the co-existence of both realms of *bios* and *zoē*. Since Hutmacher employs a range of animal aspects without restricting herself to one kind of animal, even within the same text, her use of animals is closer to Deleuze and Guattari's definition of *becoming-animal*, in which the specific animal, along with its cultural and historical meaning, recedes into the background, which is how I will treat it. My reading of Hutmacher's animal hybrids shows that the texts offer a posthuman re-conceptualization of life not according to the binary of *bios* and *zoē* that structures processes of Othering, but rather with a deep appreciation of *zoē* as a potent vitalist force that connects humans and animals. In doing so, I rely

1 Rahel Hutmacher: *Wettergarten*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand 1980. Subsequently abbreviated as *W* and cited in the text.

2 Rahel Hutmacher: *Tochter*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand 1983. Subsequently abbreviated as *T* and cited in the text.

on the work of Rosi Braidotti, who developed an understanding of *zoē* that does not perpetuate its exclusion from the political and social sphere, but embraces its vitalist, materialist potential that connects all creatures (human and non-human) in their shared ability to become and in their physical (embodied) embeddedness in a certain (shared) environment.

Bios, qualified life that has political power, is not automatically granted to every human. As a Jewish writer and as a woman, Hutmacher is especially aware of positions at the margins of power, or even completely excluded from power. Born in 1944, Hutmacher grew up in the aftermath of the persecution of the European Jews. Though relatively secure in Switzerland, she was nonetheless excluded from political power until 1971, when women were finally allowed to vote there. At the time Hutmacher's first collection of short stories was published, woman's suffrage in Switzerland was only nine years old, and the political sphere was dominated exclusively by men.³ Both Jewish and female identity are important undercurrents in her texts, though the former is less explicitly treated than the latter. Hutmacher's protagonists, who are mostly female, show signs of a hybridity that blurs the lines between human and animal and thus highlight how both women and animals are linked to the zone of *zoē*. This is in line with how Braidotti characterizes it:

The structural link between women, "native others" and animals has a dense and complex unity; women and "others" personify the animal-human continuity, while men embody its discontinuity. [...] the former are structurally closer to *zoē*, men to *bios*. The structural link between women and *zoē* is also a matter of sharing a second-class status, as shown by the relative marginalization of animal life (*zoē*) in relation to discursive life (*bios*).⁴

This prevalence of men in defining (political) life, while Others (animals, women) are excluded is central in the work of Swiss female authors of the 1970s and 80s, who struggled for a subjectivity not defined by men, as literary critic Beatrice von Matt describes.⁵

In the case of Hutmacher's literary texts, the attention given to (female/animal) positions of Otherness justifies a reading of her texts as a "minor literature" with a feminist, posthuman twist. Minor literature, a term first coined by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, confronts established power structures and re-organizes the world. It is a writing from the margins of society, challenging the norms of the majority and introducing not only diversity, but it is also a writing that is deeply political⁶ – and in Hutmacher's case, biopolitical. The focus of Hutmacher's prose vignettes on animals and animality deterritorializes classical anthropocentric discourses. My argument will first outline how Hutmacher's texts establish *bios* as the classical anthropocentric world and where the specific forms of one's embodiment determines one's place in (or exclusion from) society. I will then go on to show how, through the inclusion of *zoē*, the texts can be read to support a posthuman, nomadic theory of subjectivity as developed by Braidotti. In this theory, the "nomadic view of the subject [is] composed

3 Beatrice von Matt: "Aufbruch der Frauen (1970-2000)". In: *Schweizer Literaturgeschichte*. Ed. by Peter Rusterholz a. Andreas Solbach. Stuttgart: Metzler 2007, pp. 400-434, here p. 400.

4 Rosi Braidotti: *Transpositions*. Cambridge: Polity 2006, p. 104.

5 See Matt: "Aufbruch der Frauen", p. 401.

6 See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: "What Is a Minor Literature?" *Mississippi Review* 11.3 (1983), pp. 13-33, here p. 16.

by multiple internal and social differences. Consciousness is redefined as an affirmative function in the sense of synchronizing complex differences and allowing them to coexist.⁷⁷ In her texts, Hutmacher frames the human subject as a human animal and demands respect for animal Otherness in the way Braidotti calls for, namely “by stepping beyond anthropocentrism and trying to look at the world from a dramatically different perspective, which does not assume a passive nature and a consciousness that must be by definition human”⁷⁸. Hutmacher’s minor literature employs a new aesthetics of shattered forms and unstable structures, aiming for a “Terraingewinn jenseits der vorgefundenen Verhältnisse”⁷⁹, according to Matt.

Being *Bios*: Expecting Conformity

Hutmacher’s vignettes depict a world in which one’s place in society is determined by one’s physical body as well as by one’s willingness to comply with the behavioral standards of the majority. This majority, always represented as human and male, dictates the norms and conditions for being included in *bios*, political and discursive life. Hutmacher locates her stories in archetypal places void of historical markers¹⁰ just like fairy tales, suggesting that Otherness is a timeless, omnipresent concept. The figures of the Others Hutmacher turns to, such as the witch or the wolf, are negatively connoted in fairy tales and seen as a threat to society throughout history. She thus activates pre-conceived notions about Others by suggesting that they are dangerous, yet their behavior in Hutmacher’s stories, which runs counter this assumption, reveals this as unjust discrimination.

The narrator of the collection *Wettergarten* is part of the village community, yet often transgresses – voluntarily as well as involuntarily – the narrow confines of life as defined by the villagers, who inhabit the discursive space of *bios*. This is especially prominent in the vignette “Wohnen”.¹¹ The transgressions take place in the physical appearance of the protagonist’s existence rather than in her behavior: her body has bird feathers as well as cat fur, which she hopes to hide from her partner:

Dort liegen sie: das Vogelgefieder, der Katzenpelz. Wie lange noch, und du wartest frühmorgens und siehst mich heimkommen, ins Fenster springen spitzohrig und mit weichen Pfoten, über dem Haus kreisen mit ausgebreiteten Flügeln. (W, p. 19)

The specific hybrid nature of this bird-cat-woman, morphing from one shape into another, activates associations with witches and wise women,¹² which were popular in the writing of Swiss women in the 1970s and 80s.¹³ Morphings like these – involving

7 Braidotti: *Transpositions*, p. 111.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

9 Matt: “Aufbruch der Frauen”, p. 404.

10 See Dagmar C. G. Lorenz: *Keepers of the Motherland. German Texts by Jewish Women Writers*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1997, p. 189.

11 Hinze offers a gendered reading of this text that takes the intertext to *Undine* into account. Diana Orendi Hinze: “Rahel Hutmachers Schriften. Botschaften aus dem Bereich des Unbewußten”. In: *Orbis Litterarum* 48 (1993), pp. 39-50, here p. 43. However, her analysis subsumes animality under the topic of masks and roles, and does not attend to the political and posthuman aspects.

12 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 42.

13 Cf. Matt: “Aufbruch der Frauen”, p. 412.

largely female protagonists – have led critics to read Hutmacher’s characters in the tradition of the wild woman, “the ultimate ‘Other’ to project their [woman author’s] alienation onto”¹⁴. Yet the animal aspect of the protagonist’s physical description, which is often overlooked in literary criticism on Hutmacher, is significant beyond the witch reference. It challenges an entire tradition of thought: through the attribution of several supposedly mutually exclusive species aspects in the description, the text rebels against traditional scientific categorizations, since they challenge Linnaean classifications.¹⁵

The protagonist worries for how long her blurred species belonging and the animality of her embodiment can go unnoticed, which points to the limited ideas about acceptable bodies in her village community: *bios* can only be achieved through physical conformity. Since her body does not conform to those of the human majority, she knows that, once discovered, her deviant animal features will be reason for exclusion. In particular, she worries about her partner finding out: “ich sehe den Argwohn in deinen Augen. Bald werde ich wieder nirgends mehr wohnen, es wird nicht mehr lange dauern” (*W*, p. 19). The sentences suggests that he is already suspecting her Otherness, and she begs not to ask any questions: “Frag nicht” (*W*, p. 19). She must be assuming that her exposure as a morphing bird-cat-woman would automatically shift her partner’s loyalties. This world is defined by abstract categories and rules rather than physical embodiments or emotional attachments: the partner seems to subscribe to a set of rules that render a loving relationship with someone who does not meet certain physical requirements impossible. Since he seems to have the power to exile her, he is a part and guardian of *bios* as political life, from which her body excludes her. The title of the vignette, “Habitation/Dwelling”, and the pending threat of homelessness show that Otherness and animality challenge the preconceived notions of the villagers –in this case, specifically men – to such a degree that they cannot be tolerated. Yet, the unacceptable body of the narrator is described quite sensually as soft and smooth, furry and feathery. This rather vibrant *zoē* contrasts with the cold, detached world of *bios*. In accordance with Braidotti’s observation that women and animals are structurally closer to *zoē*, Hutmacher plays with the stereotype of a sensual, physical femininity and thus aligns the discursive, normative world with men like the narrator’s partner, while suggesting that the sensual aspects of life cannot find their place in it. What Hutmacher seems to envision as an alternative, then, is a way of inter-relating and co-existing that is not based on species belonging or specific physical parameters, but rather on a posthuman embracing of the Other and an un-scrutinized appreciation of physical connection.

This aspect becomes even clearer in the vignette “Ein Gesetz brechen”, which explores the question of embodiment and species belonging (and by extension, racial belonging) with regard to social circles, traditions, and partners. While the title, “Breaking a Law”, seems to suggest a serious legal transgression, the text is riddled with prescriptions of behavior which have no apparent rationale, let alone legal codification that would apply to the non-fictional world:

14 Dagmar C. G. Lorenz: “The Motif of the Wild Woman in Felix Mitterer, Rahel Hutmacher, and Adalbert Stifter”. In: *Felix Mitterer. A Critical Introduction*. Ed. by Nicholas J. Meyerhofer, Karl Eugene Webb. Riverside: Ariadne Press 1995, pp. 161-176, here p. 162.

15 Lorenz: *Keepers of the Motherland*, p. 191.

Die Bären-Leute dürfen nicht auf Bäume steigen, sagt er; wir sitzen und hören ihm zu. Die vom schwarzen Wolf dürfen keine Hunde schlagen [...] Ich sitze zwischen einer Bärenfrau und einer Frau vom Specht. Meine Ohren hören zu [...] Seine Stimme geht auf und ab und zählt die Gesetze auf, gegen die wir verstoßen haben, du und ich und alle, die hier sitzen. [...] Ob du bereust, oder ob du dir sagst, was ich mir sage: Ich würde es wieder tun. (*W*, p. 38)

An anonymous “he” reads a long list of apparently arbitrary laws, without justification or explanation. The laws seem to apply exclusively to figures who are identified with animal aspects and appear as either animal Others or hybrids of some kind. In this scene, those Others are being sentenced according to these seemingly random regulations by the “he”, whose reading of the legal code places him in the sphere of discourse, or *bios*. The specific species embodiment of each accused Other determines the “proper” behavior for them (for instance, bears are not allowed to climb trees), which makes the rules of this sphere biopolitical ones. The eventual rejection of her verdict by the female narrator of the vignette is a “Prozess der Emanzipation aus der Empirie analog zu einer Loslösung von den Machtverhältnissen patriarchaler Gesellschaftsformen”¹⁶, since she participates in discourse and rejects the notion of having done anything wrong. However, this gendered reading overlooks the species hybridity of the text and neglects the political aspect of animalization. The laws in the text prescribe permissible actions based on species belonging, especially match-making. According to this biopolitical regulation, the narrator, who is “von der Wildkatze” (*W*, p. 39), is not allowed to be with her lover, who is designated as “grauer Wolf”. The formulation “von” in combination with an animal species encodes descent “from”, both in terms of group belonging and genetic origin. These laws about procreation created by a dominant culture suggest a collective attitude according to which certain ethnic groups are not allowed to intermingle, echoing, for instance, the Nuremberg laws against “Mischen” during the Third Reich. Hutmacher points to the xenophobic fears that outlived the Third Reich and remain ingrained in dominant – and often phallogocentric – discourses. The laws against the mixing of two kinds entail a fear of interbreeding and further hybrid offspring, which makes biopolitical in a eugenic way. Hutmacher’s use of animal figures widens the interpretative potential beyond the context of the Shoah to any biopolitical system regulating reproduction and cohabitation, such as debates about interracial marriages and marriage equality.

While the legal authority in the vignette seems to distinguish distinct species, the narrator contends that the difference between them is not real: “Es sind unsinnige Gesetze [...] Du bist kein grauer Wolf, sondern ein Mann; weshalb sollst du nicht in meinen Armen einschlafen, du bist müde. Ich bin keine Wildkatze, sondern eine Frau” (*W*, p. 38). Her insistence on their humanity reveals that their difference is merely perceived by the dominant group. The fact that the narrator can see beyond the biopolitical labels that are assigned to them also suggests that the members of the *bios* group who make the law are not as homogenous as one might assume, but rather try to enforce a certain homogeneity and “purity” among themselves with these laws. This is a posthuman perspective on the world that resonates with what Braidotti would call “life beyond species”¹⁷: instead of subscribing to a transcendental dualism of human versus animal that subscribes to the idea of an essence that clearly distinguishes one

16 Hinze: “Rahel Hutmachers Schriften”, p. 42.

17 Rosi Braidotti: *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity 2013, p. 55.

group from the other, the narrator subscribes to what Braidotti calls monistic, “vitalist materialism” which does not divide the world into dualistic entities according to principles of internal and external opposition¹⁸, but rather argues for an interconnected, embodied, and embedded existence within contexts and environments that are ever changing. Accordingly, there is no “real” difference between the narrator and those regulating her life, but there is a difference in their political standing: one inhabits the protected, powerful realm of *bios*, while the other inhabits the realm of *zoē*. Yet, as the narrator reveals, both groups belong to one monistic whole, and seeing a difference between them is a choice of perception in order to exert power over someone Other. If read with Braidotti, the text “relocate[es] difference outside of the dialectical scheme, as a complex process of differing which is framed by both internal and external forces and is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others”¹⁹. Hutmacher’s text thus contributes to a posthuman, monistic understanding of the world by drawing attention to the fact that biopolitical laws are based on a tilting effect that attempts to enforce binaries where they do not necessarily exist.

The collection *Tochter*, whose first unit of vignettes is entitled “Wolfskind”, criticizes mechanisms of inclusion in and exclusion from *bios* by focusing on the coming of age of a “hybrid child”, told from the perspective of its mother. The title “wolf child” evokes the term for children raised by animals, without human contact. This particular child, however, lives among the villagers, but is shunned due to its animal-like physical characteristics: similar to the protagonist in “Wohnen”, the child has raven’s wings one day (*T*, p. 17) and fins another (*T*, p. 13); her body morphs from one animal shape into another and she emulates the respective animal behavior by, for instance, catching flies, spreading her wings, and swimming. While the mother describes these metamorphoses and perpetually oscillating embodiments of her daughter, the villagers fixate on the predatory aspect of the wolf, a dangerous human-wolf hybrid that needs to be controlled. The choice of the wolf as the central animal once again evokes traditional fairy tales with a dominant moral code, simplified world view, and the traditional depiction of the wolf as a character that eats children. Hutmacher’s vignette both points to the prejudice transmitted in such simplified moral stories and inverts their typical roles. In “Wolf”, the human aspects of the child have receded behind the villager’s perception of the dangerous animal:

Deine Tochter läuft auf Pfoten [...] Deine Tochter ist ein Wolf, sagen sie und beobachten mein Gesicht. Sie beschreiben mir, wie du nachts vor ihren erleuchteten Fenstern stehst. Daß sie danach voll Angst ihre Fenster vernagelten, beschreiben sie mir nicht. [...] Sie beschreiben mir deine Wolfsaugen. Deine Tochter hat Wolfsaugen, sagen sie. Sie beschreiben mir deine Wolfsfüße. Ich sehe mir deine Füße an. Narben hast du an deinen Füßen, Töchterchen. [...] Sie beschreiben mir deine rauhe Wolfsstimme und wie du sie nachts weckst mit deinem Geschrei. (*T*, p. 28-29)

The villagers, who represent the majority that sets the “norm” for inclusion in society (and thus *bios*) are jointly described as a “they”: a faceless entity that lacks empathy and is driven by irrational fear of the Other. Their decision to label the child as an animal is solely based on superficial physical aspects: paws, eyes and voice serve as sufficient grounds for the call to ban the child from the collective, yet the villagers do not inquire any deeper and choose to ignore the child’s scars as well as questions

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁹ Ibid.

about why it might be screaming at night. The choice of the animal in this text, as in “Ein Gesetz brechen”, is ironic, since these wild predators could potentially endanger humans, but are, at the time of the writing of these stories, already severely endangered or even extinct species in Europe due to the prejudice against the “dangerous creature”. The wolf child thus serves a double function in the text: for the villagers, she seems to embody an obvious threat (as the real wolf in Europe once did). This perceived Otherness causes them to highlight the animal aspects to the mother in the hopes of driving a wedge between her and her child. For the child, the accusations of the villagers embody the threat: she stands to lose not only her place in the village (where she is barely tolerated), but also the care of her mother – should the villagers be successful. Thus, the child is caught in an impossible existence as both the threat and he one who is threatened.

The villager’s perception of the child is contradicted by the caring responses of her mother (aligned with a feminist ethics of care), who invites the reader to adopt a different view of the wolf child. Though her caring stems from her role as the mother of the child, she nonetheless models a nomadic view of the subject that is able to affirm multiple, complex differences that coexist.²⁰ The mother sees both the wolf and the human, affirming both aspects of her daughter’s existence, which are not mutually exclusive to her: “Du trinkst meine Milch und sprichst zu mir mit einem Menschenmund. [...] da legst du mir in den Schoß, dein schönes Fell“ (*T*, p. 29-30). The mother’s attitude illustrates a world view in which the daughter’s human aspects, such as her mouth, can be accepted and acknowledged as much as her animal characteristics, like her beautiful fur. Furthermore, her caring attitude allows her also to see the scars on her daughter’s feet. Even though the vignette does not provide a reason for these signs of injury, the real treatment of wolves in Europe – hunted to extinction by the twentieth century – suggests a connection between the rejection of the child by the villagers and the scars. The mother’s behavior lays the groundwork not for a generalized, universal ethics that is based on similarity, but instead an individualized ethics of care and an affirmation of complex differences, which firmly rests on the embodied existence of the daughter as a being embedded into relations to multiple others. In this respect, this ethics correlates with the nomadic theory proposed by Braidotti, which is based on affinity:

Being able to have positive encounters with another entity. They express one’s potential and increase one’s capacity to enter into further relations and grow. [...] by expressing and increasing its positive passions, the subject-in-becoming empowers itself to endure, to continue through and in time.²¹

These positive encounters become visible in the end of the story: whereas real wolves were often hunted and killed for their furs, the caring encounter between mother and daughter allows the hybrid daughter to give her fur to her mother without any harm, enriching the relationship. The idea of a “subject-in-becoming” negates the idea of an “essence” of a subject, and instead recast subjectivity as a process defined by physical or, as Braidotti would call it, “embodied” encounters with multiple others. These encounters with others as well as the specific environment in which a subject finds itself make for its embeddedness into connections (to others, to its environment) and

²⁰ Cf. Braidotti: *Transpositions*, p. 111.

²¹ Rosi Braidotti: “Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others”. In: *PMLA* 124.2 (2009), pp. 526-532, here p. 531.

shape a subject continuously, allowing for new identity threads and connections to emerge. This is an ethical encounter from which all parties benefit. The villagers' narrow perspective on the Other confines them in a state of fear, in which they cannot benefit from such an encounter.

In a posthuman view of the world, "mixity and intercontaminations [are] the norm and they go against the grain of the European master-narrative of rational progress"²². Hutmachr's hybrid characters can be read as embodying this rule of "mixity and intercontaminations". The vignette "Wolf" subverts the master-narrative of rational progress by ascribing to the collective an irrationality, which arises not simply from their preconceived notions about Otherness – describing the animal aspects as if their existence is enough reason for fear –, but also from a confusion of causality: repeated references to rising ground water recur in the text, and the villagers seem to believe in a connection between the existence of the animal child and this situation:

Sie sehn mir prüfend ins Gesicht; sie sagen: In unserm Kellern steigt das Grundwasser. Sie sind sicher, ich werd mich jetzt vor dir fürchten. Ich fürcht mich aber nicht vor dir, mein Wolf. (*T*, p. 28)

The reference of rising water and the fear it brings evokes the Biblical Deluge and thus the end of humankind. Yet there is no apparent link between the existence of the wolf child and the rising water; instead the text show her as suffering from the rising water: "Narben hast du an deinen Füßen, Töchterchen. Die schmerzen, wenn das Grundwasser steigt" (*T*, p. 28). The villagers blame the child because of her Otherness, a typical scapegoating mechanism that evokes many historical and contemporary moments in which this happens to ethnic groups, with devastating consequences – not least the scapegoating of the Jews during the Third Reich.

The power of the collective discourse is so strong that the daughter starts to believe herself that some kind of threat might be emanating from her and asks her mother whether she is afraid of her too (*T*, p. 29). The question suggests that she is beginning to fear her own difference and thus rejecting her animality and attempting to conform to human expectations. This endeavor is explored in "Glücklich", the vignette immediately following "Wolf". Afraid of the villagers, the daughter initially gives in to their wishes:

Du bist wie wir, sagen sie zu ihr, als sie sie fangen. Also muss sie gehen wie sie; also muss sie sich kleiden wie sie und sprechen wie sie. Sie kleiden meine Tochter, sie sieht jetzt aus wie sie. [...] Sie geht aufrecht wie sie, obwohl ihr Rücken davon schmerzt. (*T*, p. 31)

Hutmacher homogenizes all villagers in the collective pronoun "they", which represents the discourse that defines *bios* both as unified and one-dimensional; "Their" response to Otherness and difference is an attempt to enforce their own conformity²³ or, if that attempt fails, expel the scapegoat. The statement of the villagers that she is "like them" shows that the reasons for discriminating against her are perceived, not real: if she is like them, they are like her, and the villagers thus share in the potential for animality and morphing (or becoming) that are part of *zoē*, which is perhaps why they reject the child so forcefully. The child becomes the canvas for refusing the potential for animality, hybridity, and *zoē* in themselves.

²² Braidotti: *Transpositions*, p. 99.

²³ Lorenz: "The Motif of the Wild Woman" p. 172.

Their attempt to tame the wild child shows a disregard for the actual needs of the daughter: her body, apparently unsuited for bipedalism, is forced to comply with a way of walking that causes her pain. Her treatment betrays that she is, in fact, not really “like them”, since the villagers capture and tame her like an animal. Though it is with great effort, the daughter’s ability to adapt to the way of walking, dressing, and speaking of the majority emphasizes her mutability, which exposes yet again the constructedness of a dialectical scheme of difference. In fact, it becomes apparent that the collective that forms *bios* is applying the same mechanisms of exclusion and rejection constantly to themselves, in order to deny that they are also part of *zoē*:

Bist du glücklich, fragen sie meine Tochter. Mein Rücken tut weh, sagt meine Tochter. Das muß so sein, sagen sie. Seid ihr denn glücklich, fragt meine Tochter. Sie sagen: Frag doch nicht immer dasselbe. Gewiß sind wir glücklich. (*T*, p. 31-32)

The fact that pain is considered a part of existence (“das muß so sein”) calls the livability of *bios* in question. The idea that pain is necessary to attain happiness (“Glück”) appears like a fairy tale goal (as, for instance in *The Little Mermaid*, in which painful bipedalism is the path to a human existence and marrying a prince is her “happily ever after”²⁴) that also underpins female standards of beauty (“Wer schön sein will, muss leiden.”) Being part of *bios* comes at the cost of denying physical needs to the point of pain. Happiness, in the value system and universal ethics of the collective, is therefore an empty term, since it is based on willful unhappiness. The collective response that “they” are doubtlessly happy, even though there is suffering in their midst, points to a conception of life in terms of *bios*, which only allows for certain bodies and certain behaviors, and therefore excludes the embodied pleasures of *zoē*.

During all this, the mother worries about her daughter. She expresses her concern in “Haut I”:

Was wünsch ich ihr [...] Ach, ich wünsch ihr was es nicht gibt: eine beständige Haut, eine feste Haut: müßt sie sich nicht mehr fürchten. Wär sie beständig, wär sie fest, wenn sie lachen, wenn sie kommen [...] Es ist das Wolfkind, es ist meine Tochter [...] Was wünsch ich ihr: eine Haut, die wächst ihr über Augen und Ohren, so muss sie euch nicht mehr hörn. So fürchtet sie sich auch nicht mehr. (*T*, p. 25)

The mother describes the early stages of discrimination and prejudice, such as social exclusion and ridicule. She wishes for a thick skin for her daughter, which would protect her against taunts and stares. The mother wants to protect her from the expected peer pressure and scapegoating with a resistant, solid skin that seems to be more than a metaphor. In the context of hybrid bodies, a resistant skin would make her impenetrable, and cut her off visually as well as acoustically from the world by growing over her eyes and ears. This seems to be the only defense against the pressures of the collective that the mother can, at this point, imagine: once her daughter hears, once she sees, she will inevitably be vulnerable to the discursive violence of the majority. In the mother’s concerns, historical significance of Otherness comes through: as an author of Jewish descent, Hutmacher is well aware of the dangers of being identified by a marker of Otherness. The “author’s particular sensibility to power abuse and exploitation is linked to the Jewish post-Shoah experience”²⁵, and it is echoed in the closing wish of the mother:

²⁴ In one of the vignettes, Hutmacher even gives the wolf child a fish tail (*T*, p. 20).

²⁵ Lorenz: *Keepers of the Motherland*, p. 190.

Wünsch ich mir meine Tochter mit offenen Augen: fürchte dich. Mit offenen Augen, mit einer Wolfshaut: hab Angst. Fürchte dich, wenn sie kommen und lachen; schlaf keine Nacht mehr in deinem Bett: nur so bleibst du am Leben. (T, p. 25)

Since those words are the final wishes of the vignette, they show the mother's awareness that neither denial of discrimination nor attempts to fit in can ultimately protect the daughter. Rather, she needs to adopt the opposite attitude and face her discrimination open-eyed and alert in order to survive. The text demonstrates Hutmacher's great sensitivity for the prevalence of xenophobia in Europe in the 1970s and 80s, which found explicit expression, for instance, in the "Bitburg Controversy" over Ronald Reagan's visit to a Wehrmacht and SS cemetery in West Germany in 1985, as well as in the election campaign of Kurt Waldheim, a former Nazi who successfully ran for the office of president in Austria in 1986.²⁶ In Switzerland, there has been a lively discourse of "Überfremdung", foreign infiltration, especially since the 1960s²⁷. Hutmacher's collections bear witness to the persistence of xenophobia and discrimination in the twentieth century. By speaking from the position of the Other, at times, or from the position of the concerned mother, at others, "Hutmacher assumes the voice of those who cannot speak out: oppressed human beings, animals, plants, and, by analogy, Jews in Nazi Germany."²⁸

Embracing Zoë: Non-Knowing

For the villagers, which, in Hutmacher's texts, stand for the collective of bios, there seems to be a clear distinction (at least legally) between the norm-giving group that represents bios and the Others who are identified via animal characteristics and fall into the realm of zoë. However, the vignettes show time and again that this distinction does not hold up and that Otherness not only lives within the bounds of the village, but seems to be potentially existing within each of the villagers. By bringing these two spheres into such proximity, Hutmacher participates, to speak with Braidotti, in a "politics of location [...] a cartography of embedded and embodied positions on the map of bios/zoë power"²⁹. Hutmacher portrays Otherness not as a foreign phenomenon, but as something that can be discovered and embraced in anyone, thus reminding us that we all have the potential for zoë, while critiquing bios for its arbitrary nonsensical rules and regulations. The discourse Hutmacher presents breaks with the binary thinking that separates life into the political bios and the creaturely zoë and suggests strategies of what Lorenz calls "unlearning"³⁰. Her vignettes work on a mechanism of un-thinking or un-knowing Otherness as well as traditional conceptions of life which separate bios from zoë and treat those realms as mutually exclusive. While life, especially in Western culture, is valued and appreciated primarily in the form of bios (which is reserved for humans only and is phallogocentric), texts like Hutmacher's can show that acknowledging the neglected realm of zoë (traditionally linked to animals) can

26 See *ibid.*, p. 195.

27 Damir Skenderovic: "Fremdenfeindlichkeit". In: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*. URL: <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D16529.php> [last accessed on 3. August 2017].

28 Lorenz: *Keepers of the Motherland*, p. 191.

29 Braidotti: *Transpositions*, p. 100.

30 Lorenz: *Keepers of the Motherland*, p. 191.

lead to new, enriching modes of encountering Others. “‘Life’, far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalterable right of one species – the human – over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given, however, it is posited as process, interactive and open-ended.”³¹ Hutmacher’s texts foreground the animal-like bodies of the protagonists in order to demonstrate this inclusive and positive conception of life and its interactive nature with its environment. Defining the oscillating metamorphoses of these characters as open-ended, she uses their animality (often associated with traditionally dangerous creatures) to start the process of un-knowing in encounters that dismantles all previous assumptions about the Other. The process on un-knowing and un-thinking has two steps: first, the realization that one does not actually know anything, let alone enough about the Other (except for superficial assumptions based on their body), and second, the long road to embrace this state of un-knowing in order to foreground the Other’s and one’s own ability to live in an open-ended world where encounters with one another shape the participants. Hutmacher describes this process in one-on-one encounters between protagonists.

One vignette that deals centrally with the notion of false assumptions based on physical presence and the exposure of a lack of knowledge is “Berghund”. The mountain dog is an animal figure – not a hybrid – who is living at the outskirts of society. The distinction between the village and the mountain where the dog resides separates the two realms of *bios* and *zoē* physically. Being removed from the collective allows for one-on-one encounters that re-frame Otherness. The vignette opens with a description of the protagonist’s appearance, which is devoid of any gender identifications, but highlights the connections between animality and social exclusion.

Die Unterseite meiner Pfoten ist schwarz; mein Gesicht ist schwarz. Meine Ohren sind schwarz wie der Berg in dem ich wohne; sie hören die unsicheren Schritte dieses Mannes von weither, er mag noch so leise gehen. Ich sehe die Veränderungen in seinem Gesicht, als er mich erblickt, er mag es noch so sehr beherrschen; das Zucken seiner Augenlieder, seine sich weitenden Pupillen und die nachlassende Festigkeit seiner Mundwinkel, das alles sagt mir deutlicher als jedes Wort, dass er Angst hat vor mir. (W, p. 71)

The description reveals only animal fragments such as paws; in addition, the fact that the animal is “black” is emphasized. The black color is unusual in regard to the species description offered in the title: commonly, mountain dogs (as in Great Pyrenees) are white; the color reversal fits the character of the mountain dog who defies norms and turns them into their opposite, thus subverting breed standards and thereby rejecting the manipulation of bodies in biopolitical terms. The appearance of the mountain dog unsettles the villagers: in his presence, their steps become uncertain, and their facial features betray fear, which demonstrates how little control anyone has over their physical appearance. The mountain dog unsettles certainties the human villagers seem to take for granted, which challenges their power, particularly when a dependency on this animal Other is revealed: “Er braucht mich, das ist es; er kann es sich nicht leisten, mich mit seiner Furcht zu erzürnen” (W, p. 71). The idea that a display of fear would anger the mountain dog only makes sense in the context of the previous vignettes, in which the danger the villagers associated with animal Others was never justified; thus, the mountain dog would get angry if the villagers showed such preconceived notions.

31 Braidotti: *Transpositions*, p. 99.

The fact that the villagers “need” the dog suggests that there is a place in society that can only be filled by an Other. In the story, the “Berghund” offers refuge to women who have been disappointed by their respective human, male partners:

Frauen, die nicht mehr bei ihren Männern leben wollen, nicht mehr bei ihren Geliebten und Verlobten [...] Sie kommen zu mir, sie erzählen mir; die meisten gehen zurück nach einiger Zeit. (W, p. 72)

Similar to the wolf daughter who cannot find happiness in the world of the villagers, the women who come to live with the mountain dog also seem to lack fulfilment or happiness. Their decision to join the mountain dog strengthens the link between femininity and animality and also points to “radical antipatriarchal and anti-authoritarian tenets; every practice of Western Man is questioned by the norm-setting voices of outsiders, women and witches”³². The fearful male suitor approaches, in this story, not with the collective, but alone and enters a space in which the patriarchal and human-animal power structures are reversed. The mountain dog is “needed” at this juncture as a gate-keeper who protects the women’s sanctuary, but he also acts as a guide who helps the village women gain a different view on life not only as *bios*, but as unique and grounded in a specific embodied subjectivity (i.e. not using generic terms to identify a person, but acknowledging that all individuals are specific in their embodied existence). The text ties this specificity of an individual to the reason why the women left their partners in the first place, which comes out when the mountain dog interrogates the man who has come to bring home “his” woman:

Sie ist bei dir, ich weiß es, sagt er und sagt: Weshalb ist sie weggegangen von mir. Ich lasse ihn beschreiben, wie sie aussieht. Seine Schilderung ist armselig; wie wenig er sie angesehen hat, als sie noch bei ihm war. Ich frage ihn, weshalb er sie zurückwill. Er beteuert mir seine Liebe, aber ich kann ihm seine Liebe nicht glauben, wenn er nicht sagen kann, wie sie geht, seine Frau, was sie neugierig macht und weswegen sie aufschreit, nachts. (W, p. 71)

The mountain dog’s questions suggest that attention to detail and looking beyond appearances are constitutive for a mode of encountering Others that considers individuality. The appreciation of an Other, in the eyes of the mountain dog, takes into account both the physical specificity of the loved one’s body and her wishes, fears, and general being-in-the-world. It does not accept labels such as love if there is no sign of true consideration the specific, embodied mode of the other individual. At the same time, there are also traces of a “post-individualistic notion of the subject, which is marked by a monistic, relational structure”³³ in the mountain dog’s interrogation of the man: the dog asks not only about the woman’s specific embodiment (“the way she walks”), but also about her relationship to things and her environment (“what arouses her curiosity”). The man’s inability to answer any of these questions to the mountain dog’s satisfaction exposes not knowing as an issue: if the man knew more about the woman, he could perhaps reclaim her, like a lost dog from a shelter who matches the right description.

The man’s description is too “poor” in detail to be a sign of “love”, reinforcing that every Other needs to be perceived as an individual whose subtleties of being require attention. “Love” turns out to be a concept as difficult as “happiness” was in the wolf child’s account:

³² Lorenz: *Keepers of the Motherland*, p. 191.

³³ Braidotti: *The Posthuman*, p. 87.

Liebt sie dich, sage ich. Natürlich liebt sie mich, sagt er. Nein, sage ich, dann kenne ich sie nicht. Dann kann sie nicht bei mir wohnen, sage ich und gehe in den Berg zurück zu den Frauen [...] nein, sagen sie zu mir, Liebe ist das nicht. (*W*, p. 71/72)

Since the male partner lacks knowledge about the details of his beloved and is sure of her love, the mountain dog cheekily tells him that she cannot be in the sanctuary: women who love their partners do not come there. The women's confirmation that "love it is not" raises the question whether love, in the context of the collective, is not just another term like happiness that is used to change someone's behavior or claim ownership, rather than a caring attitude towards the whole being of the partner. In this context, the choice of a dog – rather than a wolf – confirms this idea, since dog owners typically declare love for their pet; yet at the end of the day, it is not an equal relationship, since the pet remains (legally, at the very least) the property of its owner. Moreover, the fact that the woman cries out at night (similar to the wolf child) suggests trauma or suffering that she may have endured during her time in the village, which invokes the notions of violence against women and animals.³⁴

A stay with the mountain dog offers women an opportunity for un-thinking and encountering their environment anew: The mountain dog "zeig[t] [...] ihnen die Adern in den Steinen und die fein gewobenen Flechten; ich lehre sie hören: das Wasser spricht im Berg" (*W*, p. 72). The mountain dog teaches the women a different way of relating to their environment and being consciously embedded in and connected to one's world – one that is based on a belief in co-dependence and an emphasis on perceiving the individuality of others as embedded, embodied, complex beings. None of the teachings are aimed at a specific skill that could be used in a utilitarian framework; rather, the mountain dog teaches general attentiveness in order to re-establish a connection with nature. The attention to one's environment fosters a notion of perceiving oneself as embedded and can lead to a sustainable ethics that does not only account for human life as *bios*, but also encompasses animal life as well as the natural world, bringing the individual closer to *zoē*. Being taught by an animal Other about the environment fosters posthuman relations. Reading these teachings through the lens of Braidotti's theory, they can foster an awareness "to see the inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each. It is a transformative and symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the 'nature' of each one and foregrounds the middle ground of their interaction."³⁵ The embedded modes of knowing taught by the mountain dog erode the stability and universality of knowledge: the water speaks in the mountain, yet there is no universal message, no content one could take away from it. The process of un-learning draws attention to the limitations of knowledge: the examples of the water, the lichens, or the veins in the stone show that there is no fixity in knowledge, since every encountered other will take on individual meaning. The appreciation of their existence is enough. This mode of attentive looking and listening promoted here suggests an approach to the world that is based on, in Braidotti's words, an embodied subjectivity that is embedded in a specific environment and transverse, i.e. shaped by and through the encounters one has (with others, one's environment). Attentive interactions – with one another, with one's environment – rather than differentiating labels, such as species designations, become the force that shapes

34 Braidotti: *Transpositions*, p. 104.

35 Braidotti: *The Posthuman*, p. 79.

relationships as well as subjectivities. The women's unlearning, with the mountain dog as a teacher, re-shapes their understanding of life not as the binary of *bios/zoē*, but as a shared, "generative power that flows across all species"³⁶.

All of the women eventually return to the village, which is not a sign of failure, but rather a reminder that the distinction between the realms of *bios* and *zoē* needs to be broken down, and that knowledge and attentiveness have to be brought back into the realm of the dominant culture. It also is a reminder that subjectivity is not static and is constantly in the mode of becoming, shaped by the interactions one has with one's environment. The vignette does not try to keep the two spheres of village life and outside world, *bios* and *zoē*, distinct, since this would be a notion of *bios*. Rather, even the Berghund hopes "auf die eine, die kommen muss eines Tages, die in mir nicht nur den Lehrer sieht [...] nicht nur den Berghund mit den schwarzen Pfoten, mit dem schwarzen Gesicht" (*W*, p. 72). Since posthuman nomadic subjectivity is not possible in isolation, but rather in the interaction and symbiotic relationship with Others, the mountain dog's hope for a partner is a reminder that instead of separating *zoē* from collective life and *bios*, the lives of the ones in the collective need to be transformed and transform themselves in open encounters with Others that allow for an acknowledgement of embedded and embodied existence.

The process of un-learning draws attention to the limitations of knowledge, a topic also in the vignette "Ungeheuer", in which a young woman is to be sacrificed to a "monster". There is little knowledge about this Other, but it is once again associated with an unspecified threat that the sacrifice of yet another woman is to stop:

Ich weiß nicht, wie er aussehen wird. Ein Drache, sagten die Frauen, ein wildes Tier. [...] Wie ist er, was wird er mit mir machen, fragte ich. Wir wissen es nicht, sagten die Alten. [...] Wie sieht er aus, fragte ich. Wir wissen es nicht, sagten die Alten. Schrecklich, sagten die Frauen. (*W*, p. 36)

The Other is identified as a wild animal or even a mythical dragon – both figures that elude the control and knowledge of the villagers but pose a threat. Questions about specifics about the Other are answered with a repeated "I don't know", so that the only place the Other holds on the map of knowledge is that of danger and dreadfulness. Yet the Other approaches in the same environment as all figures in the text: "Daß ich hier sitze im hohen Holz, daß ich ihn erwarte [...] Das Holz bewegt sich, es ist mir vertraut" (*W*, p. 36). This familiarity is a sign that the Other shares the same environment as the villagers. *Bios* and *zoē* are not as isolated as the fearful villagers made it seem: the villagers had located the Other in a completely different realm, such as a mythical place of fairy-tales, which would make it seem as if the Other had no connection to the world of *bios* at all. Even though the environment in which the young woman is waiting is not the village, but seems to be in a forest, she nonetheless knows it well, which means that villagers (to whom she belongs) must have visited this location often in the past, thus demonstrating that the Other cannot be far removed from the living environment of the villagers. She thus begins to doubt all of the knowledge the villagers passed on to her about this creature and wonders whether the Other can indeed be as dreadful as described, since they are apparently embedded in the same environment: "Aber ich kenne dieses Holz doch, jeden Tag bin ich hier. Hier ist kein Drache, und die Tiere, die hier leben, kenne ich; die tun mir nichts" (*W*, p. 37). The statement "here is

36 Braidotti: "Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others", p. 529.

no dragon” is ambiguous: if one emphasizes the dragon in this sentence, it denies the existence of dragons, calling them mythical creatures. If one emphasizes “here”, it still allows for the existence of these magical creatures, but banishes them into a completely different realm that is not compatible with this familiar and trusted environment. No matter the emphasis, the young woman trusts in the familiarity of the environment and the creatures that inhabit it, mythical or not. Her reaction exemplifies an ethics of relatability that is based on open-mindedness and an acknowledgment of her shared embeddedness. This mindset leads the young woman to approach the Other. When she hears steps, she gets up to meet him: “Ich höre jetzt Schritte. Da kommt er. Ich stehe auf, ich gehe ihm entgegen. Du bist das also, sage ich zu ihm” (*W*, p. 37). Her calmness stems from the familiarity of the place, and it allows her to perceive him without the lens of fear of the villagers. The statement “so it’s you” concludes the vignette and reveals that the young woman seems to be familiar with the Other, apparently recognizing him, which the “also” (so) signals. It also means the Other cannot be a dangerous creature, a “wild beast” or a “dragon”, since the young woman, in that case, could not already be familiar with him (or her) – which suggests that the figure is around the villagers frequently enough to have become a familiar face to the young woman. Her familiarity shows that the threat the villagers perceived and tried to avert by sacrificing a girl is based on assumptions and bias, but not actual knowledge. Her voluntary approach depicts could be understood as a nomadic view of the subject, which does not judge, but rather thrives in affirmative relatability. The calm character of these final sentences underscores the possibility of peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion

The villagers in Hutmacher’s vignettes stand in for a human collective that embodies the discriminatory aspect of *bios*, whose norms and behavioral standards are tied to bodies, revealing the biopolitical tenets inherent in this conception of life. Difference, perceived in animal and gendered terms and thus tied to a negative connotation of *zoē* as bare, bodily, non-rational life, is forced to conform, or excised. Exclusion from *bios* is not based on real knowledge about an Other, but rather relies on prejudices and assumptions. Hutmacher’s texts demonstrate the ways in which bias and assumptions distort the image of the Other and fuel fear, which in turn feeds discriminatory acts and violence toward non-normative bodies. This has repercussions beyond the animal figures in Hutmacher’s texts, since these principles apply to any body that does not meet the standards arbitrarily put forth by a majority, whether due to animal characteristics, gender, ethnicity, race, or disability. Upon closer inspection, Hutmacher’s stories reveal a deep entanglement of *bios* and *zoē*: the fear that drives the collective seems as much a fear of the Other as a denial of the *zoē* they carry in themselves. Thus, the processes of exclusion, which are based on biopolitical principles, are a kind of scapegoating, expelling the Other from their midst in the form of a sacrifice that might restore order in the community. In an alternative to this behavior, Hutmacher’s vignettes propose a mode of un-knowing, recognizing that there is no universal knowledge, thus un-thinking the assumptions which delineate membership in *bios*. When universal models lose their validity, affirmative encounters that seek co-existence become increasingly important. In order to have such encounters, one

has to look beyond superficial differences and recognize one's embeddedness in the same environment as everyone else. These modes of un-knowing cannot be achieved within the sphere of *bios*, but require a one-on-one encounter with an Other, and an open mind. The metamorphic aspect of the Others, refusing to be limited to only one interpretation of embodiment, and "the motif of transformation points to their shared experience as living organisms"³⁷: each living organism, by virtue of having a body (and thus *zoē*) and being embedded in a common environment, shares experiences with others. The mode of living that Hutmacher's vignettes put forward is an embrace of the Other and a refusal of fixed, universal, anthropocentric categories of knowledge and power. The animal or hybrid characters are central for a reconceptualization of life as *zoē* that connects the human embodied experience to the vitalist, animal aspect that it shares with all creatures.

³⁷ Lorenz: *Keepers of the Motherland*, p. 190.