

Dominic Pettman

When Lulu met the Centaur: Photographic traces of creaturely love

2015

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15176>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Pettman, Dominic: When Lulu met the Centaur: Photographic traces of creaturely love. In: *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, Jg. 4 (2015), Nr. 1, S. 127–144. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15176>.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://doi.org/10.5117/NECSUS2015.1.PETT>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0 Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0 License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

When Lulu met the Centaur: Photographic traces of creaturely love

Dominic Pettman

NECSUS 4 (1): 127–144
DOI: 10.5117/NECSUS2015.1.PETT

Abstract

The brief triangular love between Nietzsche, Salomé, and Réé – as crystallised in the famous photograph of kitsch (literal) horse-play, where the woman is depicted as treating the two men as beasts of burden – allows us to consider the role of ‘creaturely love’ in our more general understanding of the lover’s discourse. That is to say, through such images we can explore the role and figure of the animal within ‘the anthropological machine’, itself designed to produce a sense of the human from the inhuman (especially through mediated forms of intimacy). Further, in the different intermedial relationships between photography, poetry, and philosophy, the Centaur – in the letters and texts circulated by this group (later including Rilke) – provides a charged specific totem for a libidinal ecology of souls, striving to understand themselves as simultaneously creaturely and spiritual. Such a figure allowed both a recognition and a disavowal of the nonhuman basis (and telos) of human affections.

Keywords: animals, anthropological machine, Centaur, creaturely, love, metaphysics, Nietzsche, photography, poetry, Réé, Rilke, Salomé, totem

1 Horsing around¹

Nietzsche ... arranged a photograph of the three of us, in spite of strong objections on the part of Paul Réé, who suffered throughout his life from a pathological aversion to the reproduction of his features. Nietzsche, who was in a playful mood, not only insisted on the photo, but took a personal hand in the details – for example the little (far too little!) cart, and even the

touch of kitsch with the sprig of lilacs on the whip, etc. – Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Looking Back*

So recalls the original Lulu – Lou Andreas-Salomé – concerning one of the most surreal and intriguing images we have of the infamously imposing and brooding philosopher. Here Nietzsche is ‘horsing about’ with Lou herself and the reluctant, heart-sick poet Rée. In that golden summer of 1882 this self-described ‘trinity’ were living together in the mountains near Lucerne, where the photo was taken. They were in the midst of a *marriage blanc*, held temporarily together with the formidable and fragile bonds of intellectual Eros. Lou hoped their love triangle would yield unprecedented spiritual and mental fruit, which is why she insisted on sexual abstinence, which she believed would help avoid complications which distract from lucidity of mind. No wonder Nietzsche felt somewhat frisky and wished to sublimate his desires into an allegorical assemblage of Hegelian fetish-play!

As one translator and commentator notes of the photographic oddity:

[t]he backdrop is composed of a scene with a Rée, a bush, and the Jungfrau mountain. The expression on Nietzsche’s face could be read as visionary; Lou and Rée scarcely betray amusement. The whole picture, with the artificiality of the studio, the coexistence of indifference (Rée), stiltedness (Lou), and posed devotion to an inner image (Nietzsche), seems more grotesque and uncanny than it does amusing.²

The image is all the more remarkable when we consider the famous fable of Nietzsche’s own insanity and the event which was said to trigger it: witnessing the cruel beating of a horse in a Turin square, prompting a fit of sympathy that effectively broke the great man’s brain (albeit one already softened by syphilis). Looking at this bizarre visual echo of Nietzsche’s virtually unknown ‘playful’ side – seven years before the breakdown – it is difficult not to see a proleptic affinity between himself and an abused beast of burden, no matter how kitsch Lou’s whip appears in the picture. There is an irony infused in the image, bridging the two moments somewhere between the poetic, cosmic, and biographic.

While the debate continues concerning the degree to which this famously tragic moment is apocryphal or not, the story has become a primal scene for Western philosophy (most recently, for instance, it provides the structuring absence of Bela Tarr’s remarkable film *The Turin Horse* [2011]). The power of the scene rests on a further fatal irony: Nietzsche, the great Zarathustrian warrior of the right and mighty, is undone by a tsunami of pity inspired by a single beast (had not the same man, in a book called



Genealogy of Morals, warned against such tender sympathies as a Trojan Horse, bearing yet more moralistic slaves into the city?). How to read this anomalous moment of empathy and compassion in the light of his un-Samaritan perspective on ethics?

Did he empathise with the horse, seeing its will-to-power bridled and injured so? Did he see the creature as a proxy for his own imminent fallen and harassed state? Was there pure projection, or some kind of mutual communication? Was there a telescoping of his vivid past onto the agoraphobic present, linking the mounted cavalry with his own pagan Calvary? Such questions haunt the margins of this photograph.

2 Totemism and the creaturely³

Nietzsche's work has a strong totemic aspect to it, enlisting figural and symbolic animals for his counter-moral system – eagles, lions, asses, and so on. Interestingly, given the ostensible source of his meltdown, horses did not feature, even though they seem readymade to serve as avatars of nobility and transcendence, leaping over old resentments and kicking slave-mentality in the teeth. However, there are a few cameos when horses appear in his life and writing. In 1867, for instance, Nietzsche signed up for one year of voluntary service with the Prussian artillery division in Naumburg. He woke up at 5.30 every morning to muck out the manure in the stables and groom his own steed. In a letter to a friend penned at this time, Nietzsche writes:

I like the riding lessons best. I have a very good-looking horse, and people say I have a talent for riding. When I whirl around the exercise area on my Balduin, I am very satisfied with my lot.⁴

However, in March of the following year, the young man had a riding accident, leaving him exhausted and unable to walk for months; he subsequently returned to the library chair rather than the saddle. Later, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche would write:

[a] good posture on a horse robs your opponent of his courage and your audience of their hearts – why do you need to attack? Sit like one who has conquered!⁵

In the same text Nietzsche represented the historical will, inspired by 'the light of genius', as a horse ready to 'break out and leap over into another domain'.⁶

Of course, that other giant of Germanic letters, Freud, also viewed the horse as a totemic creature,⁷ which often featured in neurotic or psychotic narratives revolving around what he called 'anxiety-animals'. In the famous case of Little Hans, who was five-years old, the paralysing fear of horses stemmed – or so Freud insisted – from displaced ambivalence concerning the father and his intimidating 'widdle'. The father-horse chimera is at once magnificent, dreadful, enviable, and fascinating. Indeed, this case prompted Freud to look at children's self-representation in an entirely new light, via modern day totemism, inflected through the Oedipus Complex. Ultimately, Freud would use the horse as his own symbol for the id

itself: a powerful yet unruly animal, requiring the ever-straining harness of the superego to function with disciplined direction.⁸ For Freud then, *all* humans are in some sense centaurs. Thus there is something inherently erotic or libidinal about actual horses, given that the animalistic ‘lower’ half is powered by the id. This is why they are one of the primary totems for libidinal economics in general.⁹

If animals are good to think with, as Claude Lévi-Strauss famously maintains, then *mythical* creatures help us to challenge the more common lines of such thinking. The centaur has a privileged figural and symbolic power in the popular imaginary, its hybrid form embodying the Janus-aspect of phenomena. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche writes:

[i]f anyone wanted to imagine a genius of culture, what would the latter be like? He would manipulate falsehood, force, the most ruthless self-interest as his instruments so skillfully he could only be called an evil, demonic being; but his objectives, which here and there shine through, would be great and good. He would be a centaur, half beast, half man, and with angel’s wings attached to his head in addition.¹⁰

In her book on Nietzsche’s ‘animal philosophy’, Vanessa Lemm essentially identifies this centaur as a meta-hybrid: a centaur with wings, and thus divided three ways by animal, human, and angel (we will return to the angel when Rilke enters the frame, excluded as he was by the lens and the trinity at this point in time). For Lemm,

[w]hat distinguishes the virtue of the Centaur (Chiron) is his tactile sensibility. His hands (*chira*) master the art of grasping the occasion (*kairos*), the instant when animality comes forward through this encounter. The tactile sensibility of the genius of culture is reflected in the terms Nietzsche uses to describe his skills: he uses ‘tools’ (*Werkzeuge*) and ‘manipulates’ (*handhabt*) his virtues.¹¹

Chiron, the most celebrated of centaurs, is thus a creaturely technician; he is skilled in the arts of medicine as well as music, hunting, and astrological projections.¹² The centaur is thus a figure which helps us explore the sly existence, dormant power, and erotic *techne* of what I would like to call ‘creaturely love’ – that is, the nonhuman, ahuman, more-or-less than human passion or affect that attracts us to the other in a register beyond or outside the conventional discourse of soul-mates.

Suppose, for instance, we felt blasphemous enough to consider the love of Antony and Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet, or Swann and Odette from the

perspective of the popular media-friendly genre ‘animals in love’. Here the lovers are not ‘people’ per se, but merely two creatures enamored with each other, like the two otters holding hands while floating in the water in the famous viral video found on YouTube. We might then treat a forbidden love between the Capulets and the Montagues like one of those novelty news stories where an elephant is inseparable from a dog, or a pig from a hedgehog. While this comparison may appear willfully perverse or facetious, denigrating humanity’s most cherished state to something bestial, it has the benefit of jolting us out of certain lazy, even dangerous, habits of mind (specifically, those assumptions concerning ourselves and the exceptionalism of our capacity for affection and being affected). As humans, we like to think that we love the other for their unique *human-ness*, whether we find this incarnate in a smile, a silhouette, or a spirit. The beloved is always encountered *in media res*, embedded in a cultural context, from the clothes they wear, to the comportment of their body, to the words they are speaking, if only through their eyes. Animals enjoy none or very little of this. But the concept of ‘creaturely love’ – at least in my own definition – works diagonally against this grain, acknowledging its truth, as far as it goes, but also arguing that what we love in the beloved precedes and exceeds that abstract element we call the human. Whether it is the texture of the beloved’s skin or hair, their singular scent, the way they drool in their sleep, the way they eat with their mouth open, their pensive moods, or the way they are trapped within their own *umwelt* of semiotic disinhibitors; we love the creaturely in the other as much as their humanity. In fact, we could go so far as to insist that love is not a human phenomenon at all but an attempt to make the other admit, under a type of passionate interrogation, that they are *not* human, never were human, trying to fool us with their distracting, sophisticated ways. Love would thus be the litmus test which we all fail – and in doing so, ironically succeed. For we all suspect, at various levels of consciousness, that we are not really human. Or not only human. And it is that twilight between love and lust known as desire that we unmask the pretension of species-being (as Nietzsche knew so well).¹³

Hence the fascination afforded by the photograph of Nietzsche and Rée, literally harnessed to Salomé and her utopian vision of a sexually-charged, but physically innocent, *ménage-à-trois*. This awkward image makes explicit the creatureliness which informs *all* our loves, and the various bestiaries which give them metaphoric wings (and not only metaphoric). For instance, soon after the studio photo, on the 2nd of July, Nietzsche wrote to Salomé:

I wanted to live alone – But the dear bird Lou crossed my path and I believed it was an eagle. And now I wanted the eagle to stay close to me.¹⁴

This, not long after writing to her:

I want to be lonely no longer, but to learn again to be a human being. Ah, here I have practically everything to learn!¹⁵

Like the centaur, Nietzsche considers himself caught between natures – the human and the animal – neither fully one nor the other, but pulled in both directions (as if they are mutually exclusive).

For her part, Nietzsche's infamously possessive and manipulative sister painted the seductive Russian woman in creaturely terms. In a letter to her friend Carla, also in the same year as the photograph, she writes: 'how can one call honest that girl who threw herself on Fritz like a wild beast, shredding his good reputation?' And then in her personal diary: '[Salomé has] the character of a cat – a beast of prey that pretends to be a pet ... a cruelly closed sensuality [and] ... crude in questions of honor.' Two years later, after his sister encouraged a breach with the other two members of the fleeting love triangle, Nietzsche would express regret at having listened to her slanderous taxonomy of his friends, describing her in turn as 'a vengeful anti-Semitic goose'¹⁶ in a letter to an acquaintance.

Such totemic descriptions serve to do more than create poetic or malicious analogies – they acknowledge the creaturely continuum we inhabit on a very material and actual register with other life-forms.¹⁷ And while the cultural codings we bestow on, and burden animals with, may not conform to some actually existing nature or set of values, they *do* help to democratise the human exceptionalism of the Great Chain of Being (which somehow stubbornly survives the trauma of Darwinian understanding).

3 The dark horse

Rée was the dark horse in all this: the melancholic poet who would never leave the house without a vial of poison in his waist-jacket pocket, just in case the world cornered him in an intolerable fashion. He loved Salomé with a semi-requited passion, miserably willing to be the third wheel, at least at the beginning, rather than be exiled from her captivating company. She certainly loved Rée enough to make his intimate presence a condition of marrying her husband, Friedrich Carl Andreas (but not enough to satisfy

or prioritise him, as she would for another poet, Rilke, later in life). In a letter to Rée, Salomé wrote:

[i]t's strange, but our conversations have led us automatically toward those chasms, those dizzying places, where one once climbed alone to gaze into the abyss. We've constantly chosen to be mountain goats, and if anyone had heard us, he would have thought two devils were conversing.¹⁸

Finally, after the jealousy which was his daily oxygen became too much, he fled Salomé's orbit, leaving behind a letter pleading with her not to come looking for him. Like a wrong-footed mountain goat, Rée died several years later, falling off a cliff while hiking.

Salomé, who appears fatalistic and pragmatic in her memoirs, turns her attentions to her husband, now released from the burden of having to share his free-spirited partner with another man. One of their first discovered affinities is an appreciation of animality. '[T]here was one area in which we were quickly in agreement,' she writes in hindsight,

which opened the same doors to both of us: the *world of animals*. This world of the not-yet-human, which so profoundly reminds us of what lies beneath our own humanity, of a simpler and less complicated life no longer in our reach. Our attitude toward individual *animals* was as similar as our attitude toward individual *people* was usually different.¹⁹

She goes on to note:

[a] small episode from the early years of our marriage [which] seemed to me characteristic: we had purchased a huge Newfoundland as a watchdog, and one summer night my husband slipped through the garden into the hall to see whether the dog would sense it was his master or think he was a burglar, since he was naked, an unfamiliar state as far as the dog was concerned. Andreas, however, moving with stealth and care, his face a study in concentration, so resembled a stalking predator that – it's hard to put it into words – they were as alike as two mysteries. He became so wrapped up in the inner drama of the animal, in the question of 'for' or 'against,' that he apparently wasn't playing anymore, but seemed to have surrendered to his own twofold wish: for indeed he always wanted new companions to both love and protect him. The dog, in a state of extreme tension, came out of the whole affair with flying colors by reacting to both needs: he *growled* threateningly, but *backed up*. My husband,

pleased as could be, laughed aloud, whereupon the dog leaped up to his shoulders and received a joyful hug.²⁰

'It is revealing, however,' she concludes a few pages on, 'that these imprecise comparisons are instinctively drawn from the realm of creatures. One realizes the limited nature of all human measure.'²¹

But consistent with her profound hunger for access to Being in its most heightened, sensitive, self-conscious, and articulate state, Salomé would court other less domesticated creatures, including one of the foremost poets of creaturely life, Rainer Maria Rilke. Reflecting on the passions as she sees them, Salomé wrote,

[t]he perfect gift of an eroticism without inner contradictions is granted only to the animals. In place of the human tension between loving and not loving, they alone know that inner regularity which expresses itself in heat and freedom in a purely natural manner. We alone can be unfaithful.²²

This theme of human alienation is consistent with a woman married more to psychoanalysis than her own husband, and a Western tradition of considering animals as 'water in water', or poor-in-world (and thus rich in immediate experience).

Despite all her romances with men, Rilke was Salomé's first lover, even as he was significantly younger than her when they consummated matters in 1887. Given their mutual search for meaning in the midst of *fin-de-siècle* disorientation, this relationship ran up and down the scale both linking and separating the animal, human, and angel; as well as along the keyboard where the physical and metaphysical touch without blending. Together they made a spiritual pilgrimage to her homeland of Russia, where they paid their respects to Tolstoy and seemed to find a connection to the organic continuum of history that had eluded them in the more modern Western countries of Europe. This rather utopian journey found its emblem in yet another horse, this one just liberated from its cart, returning joyfully to its nightly herd (an image Rilke would later link to Orpheus in Sonnet XX). This jointly 'witnessed myth'²³ of their unofficial honeymoon would return to him in an altered form much later, at the side of one Katharina Kippenberg, who also spied a white horse running through a meadow from a train window. Of this moment she wrote:

Rilke and I were both engrossed in contemplation of this horse. 'Now he's going to leap up and gallop off!' I shouted. To my astonishment, I saw the blood rush to Rilke's face. It was flushed so darkly it seemed it would never fade. As though deeply moved, he sat there silently, looking downward, and gave no reply.²⁴

For Rilke, this horse seemed to represent a passion that ended when Lou wished to banish him from her life at the dawn of the new century ('[t]o make Rainer go away, *go completely away*, I would be capable of brutality. [*He must go!*']).²⁵ Nevertheless, they rekindled their correspondence. In 1922, more than two decades after their initial affair, Rilke summoned the original equine ghost in a letter to Salomé, soon after completing the tenth and last Duino elegy:

I wrote, created the horse. You know, the free happy gray horse with the wooden peg in his foot that once toward evening came upon us in a gallop on the Volga meadow – What is time? When is the present? He leapt over so many years into the wide open spaces of feeling. ... I went out and stroked little Muzot [the castle where he had been living and writing] that has protected me and ultimately preserved me for so long, as if it were a great old animal.²⁶

4 Groping for an opening

Rilke's poetry was part of a sustained attempt by the author to understand what he called The Open – the free, actual, immediate, immanent, stream of Being unhindered and unfiltered by human self-consciousness. Rilke's Open occurs outside the walls of the prison-house of language – outside the 'interpreted world' – and represents a type of unimaginable freedom of access and action, unshackled by second-guessing, interpretation, anticipation, desires, and other human burdens:²⁷

With all its eyes the natural world looks out into the Open. Only *our* eyes are turned backward, and surround plant, animal, child like traps, as they emerge into their freedom. We know what is really out there only from the animal's gaze; for we take the very young child and force it around, so that it sees objects – not the Open, which is so deep in animals' faces.²⁸

There is, however, one event or exception which can help our fallen selves glimpse the Open, if not move gracefully through it: the epiphanic shock of

love. The only problem is that the beloved is *blocking the view*. The emotional and intellectual state of exception that love denotes threatens an ontological shift whereby the cultural blinkers threaten to fall away. The human erotic apparatus, however – and its attendant projections – sabotage the possibility of existential liberty. With the lover's face acting as screen (yes, 'in both senses', as media scholars like to say), we dwell together in Plato's cave, ignorant of the exit.

As if by some mistake, it opens for them behind each other ... But neither can move past the other, and it changes back to World.²⁹

Given Rilke's yearning for this creaturely experience of continuity, nestled in the womb of everything – the Open, balanced by his skepticism concerning the possibility of access to such a harmonious state of atemporal bliss for our own species – one wonders why he considers his great passion with Salomé to link him to the human ('why then still insist on being human', he himself asks in the Ninth Elegy). Does not such an intersubjective connection merely take the lover further away from the pure unthinking ecstasy of the lark and the tiger, the gnat and the bat? According to Salomé herself, '[t]he poet is engaged in a life-and-death struggle to overcome "the body's abuse of the soul" and to realize the "peace of the animals and the safety of the angels."³⁰ This is consistent with the dominant gnostic-Romantic interpretation of humanity as liminal and exceptional: neither terrestrial nor ethereal, but a confused and messy hybrid of both.

Like Nietzsche before him, Rilke saw in 'his' Lulu a portal to his own species-being. An instance of this piece of 'cruel optimism'³¹ is inscribed in a letter dated 6 January 1913, where the poet confesses that it was through Salomé that he felt 'linked to the human'.³² What was it about this woman – and this period in intellectual history – that had such giants of the inkpot fretting about their status as human beings, and desperately clinging to her as the medium to achieve it? Just as Nietzsche wanted to be a flogged horse in her company, with the camera lens to capture his 'visionary' *jouissance* and abjection, Rilke emphasised his own animality, his own creaturely love, for Salomé. 'So now your old mole has once again burrowed a trench for you and cast dark soil right across a perfectly good road.'³³ When viewed from the perspective of modern animal totems or zoopoetics, Rilke's angels seem more and more like a disavowal of his own – and indeed all humanity's – creaturely loves. Terrible and terrifying as they are, the agonising proximity and enigmatic intelligence of the angels provide a transcendent security zone from the materialist Darwinian legacy of our fleshly fates and desires. Their very existence, even if only inside

the pen and on the page, bears witness to a more-than-creaturely fate. At least that is what Rilke both hoped and felt.

Back on Earth the centaur makes a suitably fleeting appearance; not explicitly trapped in the stanzas of the *Duino* poems, but roaming freely in the margins of the Second Elegy in particular. Here, the narrator asserts,

If only we too could discover a pure, contained, human place, our own strip of fruit-bearing soil between river and rock.³⁴

At least one critic has explicitly tied not only this desire, but also this topography ('between river and rock') to the figure of the centaur, since between compositions Rilke was busily engaged in translating a poem by Maurice de Guérin simply called 'Le Centaur'.³⁵ In this short work the eponymous creature spies a human walking through a valley usually unsullied by this particular species. The sight of the human shocks and saddens the centaur, since:

[h]e was the first [man] my eyes had chanced upon; I despised him. 'There at most,' said I, 'is but the half of me! How short his steps are, and how uneasy his gait! His eyes seem to measure space with sadness. Doubtless it is some centaur, degraded by the gods, one whom they have reduced to dragging himself along like that.'³⁶

Similar to Nietzsche's vision of the human as an insane, melancholy, *embarrassing* animal, Rilke looks obliquely to the centaur as a more-than-human figure to better outline our mortal failings and foreclosures. And yet, this once-proud narrator has made the fall into old age, and the gloom the passing of time can bring in its wake. Centaurs, after all, are not angels. They do not enjoy eternal life. Where once this particular fellow galloped through the fields, at one with the elements, he now suffers the same regrets and entropic emotions as we humans are apt to do (at least that is what Guérin's poem suggests). A creaturely kinship is revealed after all, through the winding down of vitality, physicality, and the bone-deep understanding of finitude.

Lulu was clearly attracted to centaurs, since both Nietzsche and Rilke identified with this figure, at least for a time. We can speculate they did so, because the centaur is an ideal – albeit paradoxical – figure, representing humanity living in harmony with its animal side. But such reconciliation comes at a cost, as all forms of self-consciousness ultimately seem to do: the cost of nostalgia, of witnessing one's own letting-go of the world. Per-

haps this is why Rilke, in a letter to Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe (dated 16 May 1911), went so far as to express an only slightly ironic fear of walking in the woods around his present home, lest he encounter 'a dried up little centaur' in his path; an experience, no doubt, which would have unpleasantly reminded Rilke of his own attacks of mourning and melancholia.³⁷ Better to have one's path crossed by a simple beast, like the unassuming horse or cow; both creatures which would not presume, like the centaur, to speak back in one's own language, thereby disturbing the reassuring (but in fact elaborately constructed) ontological moat between animal and human.

5 A lost photograph

Many summers after the rather grotesque novelty photograph was taken of the odd trio in Lucerne, the older and wiser Salomé decamped yet again to the Alps with her new young lover:

Rilke ... and I began to look for a place in the nearby mountains. Having moved out to Wolfratshausen, we changed our little house again. ... for our second place we were given the rooms over a cowshed at a farmstead built against the side of a hill. The cow was supposed to appear in the photo we took later – she didn't look out the window of the shed.³⁸

This camera-shy cow who declined to be photographed would, we can safely say, be of no interest to most cultural historians, biographers, and literary critics. And yet the consistent and sometimes obsessive ways in which this bohemian group of intellectuals and artists viewed themselves through the prism of the animal eye – as much as via the camera eye – suggests that such an absence or refusal on behalf of the cow is significant; at least for media theorists (after all, Salomé thought the animal's perhaps willful absence notable enough to mention in her memoirs).

Between the playful photograph explored at the beginning of this piece and the one mentioned above we encounter – or are confronted with – the *absence* of the animal: an animal which nevertheless contributed to the structure and force of the image in question (in the first instance explicitly, in the second implicitly). Photography is often considered the ultimate medium for capturing (or failing to capture) the hauntological relationship between presence and absence. Indeed, to a thinker such as Roland Barthes – and his famous notion of the *punctum* – photography is an

intrinsically melancholic technology, unique in its ability to render the viewer acutely aware of the temporal dialectic between being/no-longer. Being itself is, through the lens, revealed as an ongoing *fort/da* game, which the indexical aspirations of photography can seemingly freeze and examine. Moreover, this visual technology can both give the illusion of human control over the finitude embedded in the passing of time while simultaneously – and rather cruelly – mocking such hubris.

However, the trace of a photographed animal has a different kind of mediated freight than one which leaves the creature outside the frame. Photography is thus a privileged technical element in what Giorgio Agamben has called ‘the anthropological machine’: the (primarily visual) apparatus used by humans to convince themselves of their exceptional existential status. In leaving the horse and the cow outside the range of the lens, these deeply reflective ethnographers of the soul seem to simultaneously acknowledge and disavow the creaturely fate or fortune of being human. They recognise a kinship with the animal, while registering a resistance to a collapse of categories (in the first example, through parody, in the second, through the ‘radical passivity’ of the animal itself).

Despite the relentless emphasis on the human element in matters of the heart, there was in this group, and this time, a partially conscious appreciation of – and ambivalence toward – the creaturely source of such intense and disorienting passions: that not only do animals herald and witness human affections, but these same affects between people are always already (and utterly) *a love between animals*. Rilke’s concern for the soul, trapped and abused by the body, may not have been so tortured if he had only followed his creaturely instincts all the way back to the immanence of the Open. Rather than focus on the assumed metaphysical surplus of the linguistic animal, he may have found the freedom he was so desperately looking for in everything from the graceful leap of the gazelle to the indifferent apathy of the cow in his quarters.

That is what fate means: to be opposite,

to be opposite and nothing else, forever.³⁹

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The open: Man and animal*, translated by Kevin Attell. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Andreas-Salomé, Lou. *Looking back: Memoirs*, translated by Breon Mitchell. New York: Paragon House, 1990.
- _____. *You alone are real to me: Remembering Rainer Maria Rilke*, translated with an introduction and afterword by Angela von der Lippe. Rochester: BOA Editions, 2003.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The beast and the sovereign: Volume 1*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Dufourmantelle, Anne. *Blind date: Sex and philosophy*, translated by Catherine Porter. Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Freud, Sigmund. 'The Dissection of the Psychical Personality' in *New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*, edited by James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965.
- Greene, Jane Bannard (ed.). *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1910-1926*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969.
- Guérin, Maurice de. *The centaur & the bacchante*, translated by T. Sturge Moore. London: Hacon & Ricketts, 1899.
- Lemm, Vanessa. *Nietzsche's animal philosophy: Culture, politics, and the animality of the human being*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2009.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *War and peace in the global village*. San Francisco: Hardwired, 1997.
- Morris, Desmond. *Horse watching*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1989.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Selected letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Christopher Middleton. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996a.
- _____. *Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996b.
- Pettman, Dominic. *Human error: Species-being and media machines*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- _____. *Look at the bunny: Totem, taboo, technology*. UK: Zero Books, 2013.
- Pick, Anat. *Animality and vulnerability in literature and film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *The Duino elegies & sonnets to Orpheus*, translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage, 2009.
- Ryan, Judith. *Rilke, modernism and poetic tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Santner, Eric L. *On creaturely life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Silverman, Kaja. *Flesh of My flesh*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2009.

About the author

Dominic Pettman is Professor of Culture and Media, Lang College, and Chair of the Liberal Studies program, New School for Social Research in New York City.

Notes

1. The seeds of this article were first planted in a presentation titled 'A Horse is Being Beaten: On Nietzsche's "Equinimity"' at the Tunnels, Tighotropes, Mesh & Networks symposium hosted by Theory Center at Western, visiting the New School (13 April 2013). The proceedings are forthcoming from Punctum Press in a volume titled *Digital Dionysus: Nietzsche and the Network-centric Condition*, edited by Dan Mellamphy and Nandita Biswas Mellamphy.
2. Mitchell in Salomé 1990, p. 153. Personally, I read Nietzsche's expression as closer to sardonic mischief.
3. The key critical reference here is Santner 2006, which discusses Rilke in biopolitical terms, along with Kafka and Sebald. This compelling book tracks specific vectors of power, exposure, *jouissance*, and infra-humanity in literature and modern(ist) life, informing my work in many respects, but also highlighting places where we diverge on the exceptionalism or location of the category. Indeed, in order to stretch or translate Santner's concept from the region of 'life' to that of 'love', it is necessary to fully define both this notoriously slippery term, as well as the 'creaturely'. This is the ongoing project to which the current article gestures and my next book will be dedicated.
4. Nietzsche 1996a, p. 32.
5. Nietzsche 1996b, p. 292.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
7. For a more detailed discussion of the ways in which totemic thinking and symbolism continues to inform the 21st century mediascape, see my recent book, *Look at the Bunny: Totem, Taboo, Technology*.
8. Freud writes, '[t]he ego's relation to the id might be compared with that of a rider to his horse. The horse supplies the locomotive energy, while the rider has the privilege of deciding on the goal and of guiding the powerful animal's movement. But only too often there arises between the ego and the id the not precisely ideal situation of the rider being obliged to guide the horse along the path by which it itself wants to go.' (Freud 1965, pp. 68-69)
9. In 14th-century Europe a horse was the equivalent of a sports car – only much more so, since if a young peasant could secure one (by, say, ambushing a knight in the woods) then he was granted access into a world of prestige, privilege, and relative power. Ownership of such an animal, no matter how obtained, allowed instant upward mobility, at least for a time. The great invention which enabled the rise of this new class of socio-economic centaurs was the stirrup. Both McLuhan and Deleuze had much to say about this new technology, which created an unprecedented inter-species war machine. The horse-human-armor-lance assemblage became one lethal galloping event. 'Few inventions have been so simple as the stirrup, but few have had so catalytic an influence on history', writes McLuhan. 'Antiquity imagined the Centaur; the early Middle Ages made him the master of Europe' (McLuhan 1997, p. 33). Moreover, it is arguable that the horse is the second cyborg, after humans, given that we find evidence of equine armor over 4,000 years ago in Persia. Medieval horses lugged as much metal as their riders did during battle. Of course, the horseshoe allowed horses to haul their loads far longer than previously possible, enhancing the animal for trade and industry. As Desmond Morris noted, perhaps courting controversy, '[i]f a dog is man's best friend, the horse has been man's best slave' (Morris 1989, p. 1). Indeed, whenever we 'harness' the power of Nature we unconsciously figure the forces of *phusis* as equine in character.

10. Nietzsche 1996b, p. 115.
11. Lemm 2009, p. 27.
12. For Jacques Derrida, centaurs as a mythic class 'represent the most asocial savagery ... in particular because of their unbridled sexuality, which makes them attack women and wine' (Derrida 2009, pp. 85-86). And yet, consistent with their chimerical composition, they can also be held up as a 'model of ethics' (as Homer does of Chiron, once again, 'the most just among the centaurs' (Ibid.) and an excellent teacher besides).
13. Elsewhere I have argued that species-being is all-too often a form of 'specious-being', as (self-identified) humans, in particular, repeatedly make the quintessential 'human error' of considering themselves *as* human (i.e., as something transcending the animal). My recent book, *Human Error*, is a sustained exploration of the ways in which Agamben's anthropological machine is distributed and made manifest in modern media, to the extent where it constitutes a distorted mirror for our own narcissistic fables and fantasies. 'Creaturally love' is thus a concept which seeks to extend this argument even further beyond the latent or meta-humanism in Agamben's philosophy, toward a more properly inclusive 'zoological machine' in which different elements or constituencies are attracted to each other beyond or despite species-designations. In other words, it seeks to blend animal studies, posthuman philosophy, and affect theory in order to expose the 'bestiality' within our own romantic narratives. That is to say, two humans making love are (always already) animals engaged in sexual intercourse, whether they are literally between the sheets or not.
14. Nietzsche in Dufourmantelle 2007, p. 92
15. As Zarathustra would say to his animal entourage, a year or two after horsing around with Salome: '[y]ou are my proper animals. I love you. But I still lack the proper human beings!' (in Silverman 2009, p. 58).
16. Nietzsche in Dufourmantelle 2007, p. 95
17. Anat Pick's seductive notion of 'creaturally poetics' in fact abolishes any distinction between language and materiality, preferring instead to argue that the two are entangled in profound and inherent ways. She writes that the creature within creaturally poetics is not merely figural but 'first and foremost a living body – material, temporal, and vulnerable' (Pick 2011, p. 5); and that the blurring of boundaries between the human and the animal occurs in on the register of 'intersomaticity' (Ibid., p. 15). While I have great sympathy for Pick's extension or adaption of Santner's motif – which seeks to emphasise exposure and obligation, rather than protection and rights, of the nonhuman (whether located in the other or the self) – my own version of the creaturally follows a different path than hers. Pick's creature is the protagonist of a possible "rehabilitation" of religious discourse' and ancillary notions of framing (bare) life as post-secular or even saintly; this arrives thanks to her interest in the ethico-religious project of Simone Weil, in particular. My understanding of the creature owes more to genealogies and trajectories of immanence, as far as (in)humanly possible from the whiff of the thurible (no matter how sensitive to appropriating and distorting gestures of the Church these approaches may be). But the potential pitfalls of promoting anti-anthropocentrism via mystical forms lie beyond this present essay.
18. Andreas-Salomé 1990, p. 50.
19. Ibid., p. 128.
20. Ibid., p. 121.
21. Ibid., p. 125.
22. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
23. Ibid., pp. 202-203.

24. Rilke's sensitivity at times went beyond the animal kingdom to embrace plants, as in this remarkable moment of intense vegetal empathy, which appears in a 1914 letter to Salome: 'I am like a little anemone that I once saw in my garden in Rome. It had opened up so wide during the day that it could not close during the night! It was terrible to see it in the dark meadow, wide open, still inhaling everything through its wide-open throat – with the much too imposing night above that would not be consumed. And nearby, the clever sisters, each closed up around its small body. I too am incurably exposed and vulnerable. For this reason I am totally distractable; I decline nothing. My senses respond to the least disturbance without asking my permission.' (Andreas-Salomé 2003, p. 80).
25. Rilke in Silverman 2009, p. 88.
26. Rilke in Andreas-Salomé 2003, p. 105. In her memoir of their relationship, Salome notes that in 1920, Rilke's Swiss friends 'gave him a fortuitous gift; they provided him with a castle, Schloss Bergam Irchel, in the canton of Zurich. [He wrote]: "This little old castle Berg – mine, for me quite alone, like the wintry solitude. Berg, far from any access by train, is difficult to reach, more so because of the quarantine imposed on account of lockjaw and hoof-and-mouth disease, it is even more remote. Consequently, I have not been able to leave the boundaries of the park for weeks – but each limitation of this kind only reinforces my protection and safety.'" (Ibid., p. 101) This little historical wrinkle is as revealing as it is trivial: a localised bovine virus functions serendipitously as a Muse for one of the most celebrated poetic sequences of the 20th century. After all, they say a writer thrives on restrictions; and this particular writer – wrestling with angels on the ramparts of friends' castles for the soul trapped within finitude – thrived on creaturely-inspired travel restrictions. No matter how angelic the flights of language take him, the Poet can still be infected!
27. Giorgio Agamben's book on *The Open* discusses the polarised readings of the Open by Rilke and Heidegger. The latter, with his emphasis on the exceptional potential of human Dasein, believed animals to be essentially trapped or captivated by this ontological case of anti-agoraphobia; whereas 'Man' at least has the prospect of using language and other forms of techne to fully accede to Being (beyond physiological imperatives and/or psychological foreclosures).
28. Rilke 2009, p. 49.
29. Ibid.
30. Andreas-Salomé 2003, p. 20. Salomé reinforces the point, image, and language in her reminiscences: '[i]t is the body that does not allow itself to be part of the desired unity, resists it and is hedged between the animal and the angel ([Rilke's letter dating] Paris, 26 June 1914): "My body has become like a trap.'" (Ibid., p. 94).
31. Lauren Berlant's recent book of this title so convincingly argues the prevalence and historical mutation of this inherent aspect of 'love' that any discussion of affective experience and self-narration is limited without recourse to the seductive self-limitations of 'cruel optimism'.
32. Rilke in Silverman 2009, p. 26.
33. Andreas-Salomé 2003, p. 84.
34. Rilke 2009, p. 15.
35. Ryan 1999, pp. 119-120.
36. Guérin 1899, p. 9.
37. Rilke in Greene 1969, pp. 26-27.
38. Andreas-Salomé 1990, p. 68.
39. Rilke 2009, p. 51.