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Experimental Practices of Life Narratives: A Review of *Narrating Life – Experiments with Human and Animal Bodies in Literature, Science and Art*, Stefan Herbrechter and Elisabeth Friis, Eds, Leiden and Boston: Brill and Rodopi, 2016, 335 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-30259-4

Arleen Ionescu

Universitatea Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești, Romania
Email: anionescu@upg-ploiesti.ro

In 2014 *Word and Text* hosted an issue on experimental fiction. On that occasion the editor, Laurent Milesi, was welcoming the experimental with all its 'connotations of risk, excitement, innovation, and aesthetic progressiveness' as well as 'the knowledge of its own possible failure'.[1] Entitled '"Keep It New": Recent Trends in Experimental Fiction in English', the issue explored different projections into our literary future in an impending age of 'post-criticism' and revisited, in Ivan Callus's words, 'a practised discourse even while otherwise commendably bringing the question of experimentation and the new back on literary criticism's agenda.'[2]

A fascinating compendium gathering mainly contributions from the SLSAeu (Life, in Theory) Convention in Turin (3–6 June 2014), Stefan Herbrechter and Elisabeth Friss's edited collection *Narrating Life – Experiments with Human and Animal Bodies in Literature, Science and Art* looks at experiments in and with literature, art and science in ways that dramatically extend the remit of the previously mentioned volume. As the first volume in the new 'Experimental Practices' series, *Narrating Life* not only experiments with 'literature' as we thought we knew it in relevant departments, but its seventeen contributions also draw at times futuristic bridges across story-telling and life experience that stretch our expectations of what constitutes 'life' and its narratives in literary as well as scientific discourse.

In his wide-ranging 'Narrating(−)Life – In Lieu of an Introduction', Stefan Herbrechter formulates the guiding question for the lead volume in this pioneering series: what is the relationship between literature and life in the *double entendre* of the hyphenated phrase: is life itself the subject of its own narration, i.e. narrating itself, or some anthropomorphic writing agency (such as humans) narrating that object called 'life'? For Herbrechter, implicitly relying on the time-honoured dissociation of the first-

[1] Julia Jordan, Laurent Milesi, '"Keep It New": A (Re-)Introduction', *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4.1: '"Keep It New": Recent Trends in Experimental Fiction in English', ed. Laurent Milesi (June 2014): 5.

[2] Ivan Callus, 'Exhausted Replenishment: Experimental Fiction and the Decomposition of Literature', *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4.1: '"Keep It New": Recent Trends in Experimental Fiction in English', ed. Laurent Milesi (June 2014): 120. The term 'post-criticism', which will become relevant in my presentation of Jeff Wallace's essay, was used by Gregory Ulmer, as recalled by Mario Aquilina in his review of *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*' in the same issue (180).

person subject in the theory of enunciation, '[n]arrating and living, in fact, mutually exclude each other', since the 'I' who does the narrating is different from the 'I' that is narrated (2). Under such circumstances, the question becomes why life should necessarily happen in the form of a narrative:

> Literature – auto-bio-graphy, life writing – would not only be a substitute for life – a lesser (or, indeed, higher) form of life – it would positively exclude living 'as such', if living were to be understood as 'being at one with oneself', 'mere' being, even less than *Dasein* (being-there). (2)

Stefan Herbrechter's 'In Lieu of an Introduction' reviews the general panorama in posthumanist studies within which it is hoped that this series will offer a new angle on the self-questioning of anthropocentrism. The reader is thus made aware that a new critical idiom is required in order to appreciate experimental literature on life, an idea shared by other compendiums on experimental literature, such as *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. In his review of the latter for the '"Keep It New" issue previously mentioned, Mario Aquilina had remarked that somehow the reader often felt impelled to return to the past, which is also what the reader of *Narrating Life – Experiments with Human and Animal Bodies in Literature, Science and Art* feels: that the future of narrating life 'has always already been legitimized as the future to be envisaged by important predecessors'. Thus, Aquilina's view that, '[i]f experimental literature has a tense, it seems, it is the future anterior',[3] fully applies here as well.

The contributions in the first part, 'Narrating Life in Literature', deal with various ways in which literature thematises posthumanism: through the deconstructive tendencies of human subjectivity (Friis), species transmutations (Idema), science-fictional reimaginings (Ingwersen and Iuli), posthumanist concerns of nonhuman forms of writing (Rossini), human-media interfacing (Nusser), inhuman biopolitics (Shackelford), metaphysical mind-benders (Wallace), the other's 'form-of-life' (Zechner – Agamben's term; see below). In his 'In Lieu of an Introduction', Herbrechter had mentioned Agamben's revival of the ancient Greek distinction between *bios* and *zoē*. Aware that biopolitics should not contest merely the law and power structures, Agamben had asked in *Homo Sacer* whether 'bare life' could be mobilized by emancipatory movements. For Agamben, this 'new biopolitical body of humanity' had to be transformed into a *bios* that is only its own *zoē*: 'we give the name form-of-life to this being that is only its own bare existence and to this life that, being its own form, remains inseparable from it.'[4] In one way or another, all the contributions gathered in *Narrating Life* seem to work across life's divide between *bios* and *zoē*, hence Herbrechter's interrogation in his presentation: 'which of the two lives does the narrating – *bios* or *zoē*?' (2)

Elisabeth Friis's essay discusses the way in which Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector managed to both depersonalize and emphasize the '*personal* tone of voice' (33) in her autobiographical novel dealing with her sufferings after a fire in 1966. The fire was caused by a lit cigarette in her hand after she had taken sleeping pills, and the accident

[3] Mario Aquilina, 'A Case of Shifting Boundaries. A Review of *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. Eds. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale. New York: Routledge, 2012', *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4.1: '"Keep It New": Recent Trends in Experimental Fiction in English', ed. Laurent Milesi (June 2014): 180.

[4] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 188.

left her suffering from very severe burns that never totally healed. That's why she becomes 'a screaming object' (35), screaming 'with pain and anger because the pain was an insult' to her 'physical integrity'.[5] In order to narrate such painful details, the writer resorted to circumventing 'the temporality of the narrative text', destabilizing and recasting 'the poetical message's situation of enunciation' (36), or dissolving the 'I-category' (41), literary devices that turned the book into a life experiment. Avowedly taking her cue also from Cixous and Braidotti, Friis coins the new genre of *écriture zooïque*, concluding that the 'screaming object' becomes a body writing, hence 'some kind of posthumanist *life writing*' (53).

In 'Species Encounters: O. Butler Meets Haraway Meets Deleuze and Guattari', Tom Idema brings to us 'alien' encounters traced in Octavia Butler's 2007 *Lilith's Brood*, a novel that 'recounts the evolving relations between humans, Oankali and their offspring, relations characterized by a tension between physical and emotional dependency and divergent philosophies of life' (57). The essay makes three main points: (1) the 'evolutionary ordeals' encompassed by Butler's collection of science fiction can be related to Deleuze and Guattari's treatment of literature as 'experiment' in *A Thousand Plateaus*, thus of literature as 'life'; (2) a reading of Donna Haraway's theory on species transmutation in *When Species Meet* is productive in the analysis of Butler's experiment; and (3) *Lilith's Brood* can be seen to stage 'a confrontation between Haraway's idea of worlding and Deleuze and Guattari's conception of 'becoming-world', thus underscoring a number of conceptual connections between these thinkers that culminate in what may be called an onto-epistemology of the encounter' (57). From these perspectives, Butler's trilogy can be taken not only as 'a literary experiment in which characters construct and dwell in ecological contact zones that are both stimulating and uncomfortable', but as a way of testing the 'ground for rethinking the place of humanity on this planet' (69).

In his 'Solid-State Fiction: J. G. Ballard and the Crystallization of Life', Moritz Ingwersen states that while life 'expresses itself as a perpetual resistance to stasis', because it moves and flows, death is always connected to 'the arrest of flow – rigor mortis' (73). Ballard's fourth novel, *The Crystal World*, deals with an environmental apocalypse. Ingwersen offers a survey of von Laue's and Bragg's theories of inanimate molecular crystal worlds with the help of X-ray spectroscopy in physics and of Ernst Haeckel's influential study on the structural principles of crystals in the elaborate drawings of radiolarians.[6] He also looks into Donna Haraway's Ph.D. dissertation *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields* (1976), whose conclusion was that 'the crystal metaphor was seminal in shaping the twentieth century paradigm shift from an atomistic (or mechanistic) to an organicist understanding of embryogenesis' (78), and into Erwin Schrödinger's 'influential insertion of the solid into the origins of the animate' (80). Ingwersen investigates Ballard's novel as 'mutation and growth' (known as morphogenesis) and as stasis, 'the annulment of movement', which means 'petrification and death' (82). For Ingwersen, the more blurred the boundary between the organic and the inorganic becomes, the more it is related to the ambiguity between mental and environmental, and ultimately between living and non-living (82). Thus, the 'individuation, or morphogenesis' of Ballard's apocalypse novels does not elevate the human figure but rather the nonhuman, a 'hybrid liminal state', whereby 'the human form

[5] Clarice Lispector, *Discovering the World*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 53.
[6] Radiolarians are protozoa belonging to the class Polycystinea, found in the upper layers of all oceans, and radiolarian art designates art forms from the ocean resembling these.

at the same time dissolves and asserts itself as a function of a pre-individual material environment' (88).

Cristina Iuli's 'Dissonance, Data, and DNA: Aesthetics, Biopolitics and Transgenic Music in Richard Powers' *Orfeo*' investigates a novel, published in 2014, dealing with the relation between aesthetics and life, whose protagonist is a seventy-year-old composer named Peter Els. Els's life as an Orpheus who experiences hell is quite different from that of the eponymous title of Powers's novel. Els's biggest desire is to remain in the history of avant-garde music as the first ever to be able to break a bio-informatic organism (*Serratia marcescens*) by means of a musical code. Pursuing such a borderline experiment of transgenic art, he ends up being considered a bioterrorist by American Security agents and even gets the nickname of 'the biohacker Bach'.[7] Iuli's hypothesis that '[l]ife is art is life' (108) is carefully tuned to the different 'scales and thresholds of significance, between life as bios, as the living, life as a medium for meaning in art, and the work of art as a *form*.' (108). Iuli sees Els's composition as an original work of art which is yet different 'from life degree zero' (108) and his 'fantasy of access to an undetermined outside' as both 'already encoded through a highly specific set of distinctions that underscore musical semantics – songs, music, rondo' and something that 'depends on a genetic, evolutionary framing of that "torrent" of life that is fundamentally foreign to the materiality of "life itself"' (109). Els's failure shows that there is no communication and unity between the self-referentiality of the artwork (its own elements such as 'sound, noise, notes, silence, arrangements') and its external referentiality ('the observation of observations, by listeners and other meaning constituted systems, such as other compositions)' (110). One can attempt to write genetic code from music code, yet the result will be only a simple 'analogy' and the proof that mutations are possible (see 111). For Iuli, Powers's *Orfeo* is 'an ambitious effort to conjure up the ghost of 'realism' as Western literature's most *grandiose* conceptual *dispositif* for the investigation of the unresting, interminable, never-to-be-resolved tension between observation and representation that binds all relations between knowing systems and their environments, whether digital or analog' (112).

Tanja Nusser's '"Chromosomal Cuties", "Fembots", "Chatty Cyber Trio" or "Cantankerous Clones"? Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Teknolust*' picks up where Cristina Iuli left off, since here the use of metaphors in gene discourse is explored in relation to writing, reading as well as authorship. Nusser proposes a short history of information 'conceptualized as an exact, quantitative measure of the complexity of linear codes' (115). The interest in information as code started as early as the late 1940's; it then developed in the fifties through Norbert Wiener's cybernetics and later via François Jacob's argument in *The Logic of Life: A History of Heredity* that 'biological heredity can be described with the concepts of information, message and code' (116). The concept of information was coined by Wiener and Shannon and had a big impact on biology because of the structure of DNA as a linear code (115). However, since the late 1990s, this model has been questioned because of a series of elements that were not previously taken into account: 'the interaction with the environment, network structures', as well as what Lemke called 'dynamic unity' and 'decentralized forms of the organism's self-control'[8] (116). Tanja Nusser relates Norbert Bolz's work on gene discourse and his conclusion

[7] Richard Powers, *Orfeo* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014), 265.

[8] Thomas Lemke, 'Mutationen des Gendiskurses: der genetische Determinismus nach dem Humangenomprojekt', in *Put on Your Blue Genes: BioTech-Kunst und die Verheißungen der Biotechnologie*, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst ed. (Berlin: KGBK, 2005), 88.

that the chromosome could ostensibly be understood 'as a legal code, […] which itself has executive power'[9] to Heidegger's idea that biochemistry 'discovered the scheme of life in the genes of the gamete' (117). Lynn Hershman Leeson's 2002 film *Teknolust*, which deals with the encounter of two DNA strands, is seen by Nusser as puzzling the audience to the point that viewers become unable to distinguish whether evolution or life forms (be they humans or SRAs [Self-Replicating Automata]) will win the final race (see 131). The protagonist of the film, Rosetta Stone,[10] a bio-geneticist, creates her own replica by feeding the computer her DNA, thus generating a SRA which is half human and half software (see 121). The name of the protagonist is linked to 'the concept of the genome as a translatable code which can be deciphered' (119). As Nusser reveals, Nobel prize winner and biologist George Beadle, together with his wife Muriel, used the concept of the Rosetta Stone in 1966 as 'a metaphor for the development of genetics and the potential decoding of genes' (119), since science became the means by which a few messages written in DNAese could be translated 'into the chemical language of blood and bone and nerves and muscle'.[11] Since Ruby is fed constantly with images of femininity (through 'motivational tapes/DVDs of classic Hollywood films, which are supposed to embed specific images of heterosexual femininity, emotionality, and relationships in her subconscious'), Nusser considers that the film builds 'biological and social gender as cultural and biological techniques of reproduction, which, among other things qua attempted imitation, is geared towards establishing femininity.' (123) Moreover, once Ruby has become impregnated by the printer and copier Sandy, the film advances 'the idea of biological/sexual reproduction, which the mother/sister Rosetta Stone had earlier replaced with the merger of the cybernetic and biotechnology (not linked to sexuality)' (125), thus 'beg[ging] the question of how the category of humanity itself can be situated within these perhaps very different models of evolution.' (125). Nusser relates Ruby's pregnancy to the AL research 'concerned with systems which exhibit a behaviour that is characteristic of biological systems' (121), since its 'considerations assume that the evolution of artificial life forms requires a physical situatedness, which must account for not only a formal development (which is determined by genetic algorithms), but also for a psychosocial level' (126):

> In figuring pregnancy/motherhood as the absolute stereotype of femininity, the pregnancy of the cybernetic Ruby can also be read in the direction of Alison Adam's criticism of the male-dominated AL research, which seemingly misses the need to care for the cybernetic body/organism. Adam characterizes this caretaking as a feminine issue, a role that Rosetta Stone as the programmer of the three SRAs appears to assume perfectly: she is/assumes the mother/sister role, and Ruby's pregnancy, as such, becomes the bodily incorporated experience. (126)

The fact that the copier and printer Sandy, and the cybernetic/genetic copy Ruby become aware of their 'desire for each other' and become a happy couple who eventually have a child points to the reestablishment of 'the models of the nuclear family and the familial

[9] Norbert Bolz, 'Der geklonte Mensch – der letzte Mensch', in *Der codierte Leib: Zur Zukunft der genetischen Vergangenheit*, Alexander Schuller and Nikolaus Heim eds. (Zürich: Artemis, 1989), 277.
[10] Apart from being known nowadays as the brand of a famous language learning software, this is of course also the name of the rock stele from which the French orientalist Jean-François Champollion cracked another 'code', that of the Egyptian hieroglyphs.
[11] George Beadle and Muriel Beadle, *The Language of Life: An Introduction to the Science of Genetics* (London: Gollancz, 1966), 207.

genealogy', whereby 'biological, social, and genetic parenthood are still united in one mother and one father' (129).

In her 'Submarine Experiments with Human Lives by Christoph Ransmayr – A Waterman Narrates', Manuela Rossini writes that 'the beginning and end of humankind lies at the bottom of the sea where the human form is only one among many possible forms in the game of biological evolution, brought forth by hydrogen and symbiosis.' (137) The article is a thought-provoking analysis of the Austrian writer Christoph Ransmayr's *Ladies & Gentlemen under Water*, a novel inspired by Manfred Wakolbinger's amazing underwater photography. *Ladies & Gentlemen under Water* proposes the metamorphosis of the first-person narrator and of six human characters into sea creatures: Mr Blueher, the narrator, who used to be a museum attendant, narrates as a reef squid; Mr Reddish, a former vendor of waterbeds, has become an imperial shrimp; Ms Horange, once a swimming instructor, has turned into a helmet jellyfish; Mr Blackthorn, who was a plumber in his life on the ground, has morphed into a ghost pipefish. Ms Whitey, an ex-minister of education, is now an amphipod; while Miss Purpleheart, a former beauty queen, is a batfish, and Mr Greenfinch, who used to build dams, now crawls on the bottom of the sea as a sea slug. These creatures live in the water to which Ransmayr's text is 'a *homage*'. Rossini believes that in this posthumanist adventure without technology,[12] the human and masculine principle are relegated to the background (141), leaving space for water that has turned into the medium of the character's '*ex*-istence, the *sine qua non* element of osmosis between human and animal that literally makes the boundary between the two species a fluid one. and foregrounds instead the liquid element's indispensable role in the (re)creation of the world.' (142) Rossini returns to the beginning of the posthumanist creation myth as water in the view of microbiologist Lynn Margulis, who from the seventies until recently was against 'the neo-Darwinian militaristic and capitalistic rhetoric of "survival of the fittest"' and who was 'in favour of the hypothesis that the eukaryotic cells of plants and (non)human animals owe their existence to prokaryotic (nucleus-free) bacteria which 'devoured' each other 3 billions of years ago: new types of cells and organs, and ultimately new species, evolved, first, through the mutually parasitic co-habitation of bacterial cells and, later, through the exchange of genetic material between different living entities.' (142-3). Rossini makes the inventory of the critical-posthumanist visions of the future that 'reconfigure the human as embedded in a more material and worldly context' (143). Such reconfigurations may ascertain the survival of humanity and establish a barrier against its destructive tendencies. By slowing down, evolution can continue even though this may be regarded as 'a devolution from a humanist-anthropocentric perspective, with "Man" as the crown of creation degenerating into a more "primitive" corporeal form' (143).

Laura Shackelford's 'In Toxicating Languages of Bioinformatic Circulation: Poetics and Other "Smallwork" in *The Flame Alphabet*' starts from the Foucauldian notion of biopower, defining it as acting directly on bodies, its capacity to 'sidestep language-based, symbolic meaning and its representational and metaphorical levels altogether' (147), the combination of biological and digital coding that seems to 'replace or supersede natural language and its metaphorics of meaning altogether' (147). Shackelford sees the computationally heightened capacities of language as performative

[12] For a description of 'posthumanism without technology', see Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, 'Critical Posthumanism, or, The Invention of a Posthumanism without Technology', *Subject Matters* 3.2 (2007): 15–29, which offers a concise illustration of the overall outlook of their *Critical Posthumanisms* series at Rodopi.

from both a material and symbolic point of view and 'as a particular kind of *interface*' between the informatic and the biological (148). An experiment with language's 'bioinformatic turns', Ben Marcus's *The Flame Alphabet* (2012) is the best example to illustrate Shackelford's point: language becomes truly and literally poisonous in Marcus's novel, where the narrator's family and the Jewish community from Rochester, New York become lethally sickened by the physically toxic speech of their children. Marcus's work is a 'literally toxic traffic between biological and linguistic, between bodily life and languages accomplished' by means of 'biochemical, linguistic, sociotechnological, and economic relays' (152). Shackelford interprets the novel as a poetic anatomization of an 'emergent, global circulatory system and its predominant modes of transmission and exchange – linguistic, biological, familial, ethnic, religious, and national' (160).

It is no surprise that Kafka, whose Gregor Samsa metamorphosed into the verminous insect that haunted his parents and sister, is present in this collection of essays concerned with experimental posthumanism: in Jeff Wallace's 'Life beyond "Critique": Murakami after Latour' (one of the two protagonists of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* is one Kafka Tamura, a 15-year-old runaway) and in Dominik Zechner's 'Aporias of Survival: Kafka's Alien Incursion', where Kafka's 'The Cares of a Family Man' is explored as a configuration of 'the experimental disposition of narrated life' (191).

Wallace compares Murakami's fiction with John Berger's artistic vitalism and Bruno Latour's imperative to move beyond critique through an effort to 'translate life' 'into a responsibility for reconfiguring literature as an "aid to living"' (178).[13] *Kafka on the Shore* focuses on two characters: Kafka Tamura in the odd-numbered chapters, and Nakata in the even-numbered chapters. Young Kafka Tamura becomes a literary critic whose favourite short story is Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony', whose central figure is the deadly apparatus writing 'its juridical sentence onto/into the body of the condemned' (178). The old man from the even-numbered chapters finds it difficult to communicate with human beings, but he easily converses with the stray cats that he finds. The two intersecting stories, with their protagonists and secondary characters, seem to be tied together by what Wallace calls, possibly after Heidegger, the 'post-critical pragmatics of care'. For Heidegger, the radical role of 'care' (*Sorge*) was to summon *Dasein* to turn away from its authentic being and to forget its anxiety by seeking security in the crowd.[14] More recently, Bernard Stiegler has voiced in his work the eminent threat to social and cultural development which prevents people, whose lives are more and more a calculated result of technical industry, from 'caring' and even from seeing (not to mention admiring or enjoying) the world around them.[15] The examples brought by Wallace from Murakami's fiction suggest that Murakami's treatment of 'enduring family ties, sexual fulfilment, or progressive politics, as well as critical and moral superiority' renews the concept of care (184). To support his arguments, Wallace points out the prevailing insistence on non-affect in Murakami's *The Norwegian Wood*, where love is reduced to

[13] The reference is to Bruno Latour's influential essay 'Why has Critique run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', Critical Inquiry 30 (Winter 2004): 225-48.

[14] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, new ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973) and *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 225-69.

[15] See especially Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). The notion of care was first adumbrated in *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison, Daniel Ross, and Patrick Crogan (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

food. The novel ends on the mesmerizing scene in which the two heroes, Midori and Watanabe, finally declare their love in a department-store restaurant, where Midori, while ordering, puts an end to Watanabe's declaration of love, hence Midori's reply: "'Yeah, I know… Anyway, let's eat. That's all I can think about now" (Murakami quoted by Wallace, 185).

'Care' is also part of the title of Kafka's short story that Dominik Zechner's essay concentrates on: 'The Cares of a Family Man' ('Die Sorge des Hausvaters'), a strange title which Harold Bloom thought should have been changed to 'The Sorrows of a Paterfamilias'.[16] Here, the 'care' is that of a father who is afraid of dying while leaving to his children the burden named Odradek. Drawing on the question of the foreigner, the stranger and the problematics of hospitality as theorized by Kant, Benveniste and Derrida, Zechner attempts to ask whether Odradek 'is able to die' and regards Kafka's short story as a scene that questions the Heideggerian finitude of one's life's and thus 'encounter with alterity' (192). To Zechner, it seems that indeed, as Avital Ronell has also emphasized in her analysis of *Dasein*'s uncanny experience of 'anxiety, fascination, and guilt',[17] Odradek is not the thrown Being-toward death, but exactly what she called 'an anonymous Other' (192) that makes the narrating of the character's life infinite. The critical approach that Zechner proposes is based on the search for a name, because

> [h]aving a name, being able to account for oneself by means of a name, the questionable gesture, overdetermined yet so often inadequate, of identifying oneself by a name's virtue, is apodictically indicative of finitude's call, the limit of its last demand: the name-bearer will die while the name shall live. (195)

Zechner concludes that 'Odradek marks an unresolved complication within the registers of death's relation to the name' (195), relying on Werner Hamacher's meticulous analysis of all the components of the name 'Odradek', from which at least two colliding series of significations are derived: 1) an allusion to the Czech verbs meaning 'dissuading or deterring someone' (*odraditi*), as well as 'being degenerated, uprooted' (*odroditi*), while 2) words like *rod*, *rada*, *rádek*, *radix* suggest 'type' or 'kind' but also 'class' or 'rule'. Besides, the prefix *od-* in his name indicates 'the role of a *privativum*', since its meanings are 'off', 'away from', which Zechner categorizes as a pointer to 'a lack or deficiency' (197). Another outcome of Kafka's questioning of Odradek's capacity to die is in Zechner's view an appropriation of a 'lexicon of authenticity' which is 'urged by the Heideggerian defeat of alterity' (203). The essay also draws on one of Adorno's 1934 letters to Benjamin, in which he related the title of Kafka's story to Heideggerian *Sorge* (204), and considers that Odradek managed to outlast 'the household's politicoeconomic consistency, trumping the paternal instance which provides for the authoritative cohesion that binds this familial regime.' (204). Kafka's text positions itself toward mortality as 'pure transgression: *Odradek stands as the motive of removing the borders between and reconciling the organic with the inorganic, thus a motive of death's suspension. He "survives".*' (204-5). For Zechner, Odradek is the other's *form-of-life*, which via the Heideggerian *Being-in-the-world* (that is disclosed in the state of *Angst*) unfolds the reader's own *form-of-death* (see 206).

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[16] Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), 16.

[17] Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology – Schizophrenia – Electric Speech* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 57.

Stefan Herbrechter had asked whether, under the pressures of the 'emergent global environmental consciousness' and the 'ambient "species angst"', autobiography could still be related to the Anthropocene. Starting from Claire Colebrook, for whom history is a narrative that is no longer human, Herbrechter pointed out that in posthumanism we encounter the '"figural" disappearance of the human which 'is inscribed in the very desire of autobiographical autoaffection.' (12) From this, we are to infer that such a disappearance impacted on the so-called 'humanities' as well as on the social sciences, which have to reflect critically on the boundaries of their very own disciplinarity, thus being forced to move towards their (disciplinary) 'Other', i.e. the Sciences, hence the suggestion in the second part of the volume, 'Narrating Life in Science', that we should bring 'scientific' knowledge back into 'narrative' form in a way that challenges at once the established humanist and the scientific (naturalist or nonhumanist) accounts of life in order to offer a heterogeneous, yet captivating rewriting of life stories (or life's stories) through the lens of the 'new humanities' – or, rather, 'posthumanities'.

Amelie Björck's 'Linear Time and Revolutionary Time: Humans, Apes, and Temporality in Scientific and Literary Narratives' focuses on humans and other primates whose stories 'garner relevance not only by being accounts of human identity, but more specifically by being about man as a *creature of time*' (247). Björck's essay puts in parallel two literary texts about apes and humans separated by almost two millennia: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Edgar Allan Poe's detective story 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841), which bring 'two orangutans from very different times and contexts', one ape that is a 'regressive man, full of flaws' and one beast who murders one woman and her daughter in its 'resentment at having been interrupted in its transformation' to become a man. (251) Considering that *scala naturae* should not be regarded as a stationary system, Björck agrees with Elizabeth Grosz, who argued that Darwin's views on time from *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) carried 'the germ of a time revolution compared to the existing concept of the overarching, eternal timelessness of God's Creation' (253). Björck regards the growing body of post-Darwinian fiction on the theme of apes and humans as sharing the fear that degeneration become the major threat to Western men (254), a fear adumbrated in stories such as H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), Frank Challice Constable's *The Curse of Intellect* (1895), Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels's *Theozoology* (1905), August Strindberg's *Zones of the Spirit* (1907), Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948) and Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes* (1963). In her essay, Björck turns to Kristeva's notion of 'cyclical time' that the French feminist psychoanalyst projected 'as a future objective', even though 'the process to get there would prove just as limiting, linear and unidirectional as before' (257). The future can be unlocked by the 'remarkably tenacious presence of chrononormativity' (259) and a third temporality can be devised, the one imagined by Kristeva at the border between the semiotic and the symbolic, whereby the body can be permeated by time and vice versa (261). In this way, Björck speaks about a resistance of bodies to chrononormativity:

> they refuse to be streamlined for practical progress; they are skewed, or forget, or become ill, preoccupied by emotion, allied with the wrong partners, and failing to live up to the prospects they might even have internalised themselves. (261)

Angela Rawlings's 'Ecolinguistic Activism: How and Why to Rite' gives examples from Icelandic society in which biotic and abiotic entities (such as the Icelandic glaciers that the author visited between 2008 and 2014[18]) are given human names in humanity's attempt to 'colonize land with anthropomorphic attributes […] while also likening and linking human bodies to their surroundings' (268), which transforms the literary into an ecosystem. Thus, the premises for communication between humans, non-human entities and ecosystems are created via language and rites which stand for the communion of body with landscape. The rites that Rawlings refers to are connected to 'the narrative of a cancering body when medical intervention excises meat and revises the proliferation of fast-reproducing cells via chemotherapy' (301), which makes her close the essay with unanswerable questions for which we are uncertain that the future will offer a solution: 'Has the body, as a site of experimental medicine, become a text in process or a text undergoing revision? Who is the writer, what is the text, and who assumes any power to revise a course or flow of future history?' (301)

Dorion Sagan's 'Death Writing – Toward a Bestiary of the Biological Real' creates a 'little bestiary', a monster with seven reincarnations,[19] 'a perverse transpecies [*sic*] transvestite posing as philosophy manqué', arguing that 'nature has its way with us, uses us for sex, then murders us' (303). Sagan locates different occurrences of the monster's life in every chapter of his essay: first in 'the Ur-Plot of Life Writing and a Darwinian Death Drive', then in the plots of great works such as Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, all characterized by what Peter Brooks[20] named the 'Freudian masterplot' that brings about 'not only impending death, but the need to provide meaning on the way thereto' (309). According to Sagan, in its early life the monster also lived in the hydrogen sulfide from Earth's interior whose raw material can oxidize bacteria in darkness, in the 'symbiotic host for all animal cells' that was 'an oxygen-poisoned archean or archeobacterium' (309). Such a monster makes us perceive hell as far closer, 'beneath the ocean abyss', and replay 'aspects of the ancient cyclical biochemical hits by which matter came to life to this day, in the subtle cycles of our sulfide flashing cells.' (310) The subchapter 'The Enchanted Castle of Green Envy' refers to 'the corporate greed and the postmodern totalitarianism posing as democracy' (310), to those greedy businessmen whose concern for the environment lies only in raising unanswerable 'questions about claims of anthropogenic global warming or "climate change"' (311); the subchapter 'The Vortex' (where the vortex is 'the more-than-living beast that runs life on Earth', 312) makes us cross '[t]he simplest route between complex three-dimensional gradients of pressure, temperature, chemical concentration or electron potential', which Sagan perceives as 'a complex metastable system' (312). Finally, 'The Internal Combustion Engine' refers to the contraption built by the Swiss engineer François Isaac de Rivaz in the same place where Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* was conceived. Consequently, Sagan looks for the monster in the 'anti-Victorian Victorian' writer Samuel Butler, whose *Way of All Flesh* put forward an

[18] Photos taken throughout these journeys that testify to the cancer rites are inserted in Rawlings's essay as examples of the communication between humans and the ecosystem.

[19] '(1) The Sulfur Beast from the Deep, life's foul-smelling legacy of gas-producing agglutinative biofilms that spread using iron-sulfur chemistry during the Hadean and Archean Aeons 4.5-2.5 billion years ago; (2) The Enchanted Castle of Green Envy; (3) The Vortex, a thermodynamic maw; (4) The Internal Combustion Monster; (5) Butler's Eye; (6) The Black Queen; and (7) The Tenants' (306).

[20] See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), Chapter 4.

evolutionary theory that closely related early versions of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* to the long botanical poem *Zoonomia* (313). Further on, another subchapter is entitled 'The Black Queen', a term used in biology and which the author relates to Mitteldorf and Pepper's idea that 'aging, technically the increasing probability of death with time, is *not* due, as universally believed, to organisms falling into disrepair.' (315).[21] Roman Polanski's horror film *The Tenant*, with its eternal return and reincarnation, suggests to Sagan that '[o]ur bodies we now know also have lodgers, tenants' (317), thus vindicating Margulis, Asikainen, and Krumbein, the editors of the recent *Chimeras and Consciousness: Evolution of the Sensory Self*, for whom 'not just our bodies, but our mental capacities and awareness, are a kind of group consciousness, a synesthesia of multiple beings hallucinating they are one' (318).

In 'Experimenting with Bones', Marianne Sommer proposes three experiments: one in Science/Art, one in Science/Fiction, one in Science/Studies. The first experiment was performed by Henry Fairfield Osborn who, on his visits to the natural history museums of big European cities, discovered that new technologies for exhibiting fossil vertebrates are needed. For Osborn, 'evolution itself as an experiment that took place in diverse labs', hence his 'biogeographic scenario of evolution' that put forward 'centres of development and dispersal' (321). The second experiment takes place in the realm of science fiction, where the nature of a cultural being (or group) is extrapolated, such as William Burroughs's *Tarzan*, where he testifies to his knowledge of palaeontology that is an 'imitation of the scientific travelogue à la Osborn's explorers' which takes the reader to the realm of prehistoric science fiction, where the reader is treated 'with naturalist descriptions of the plants and beasts encountered on the journeys through the scenes remote in time.' (322) Eventually an experiment in Science/Studies concentrates mainly on *T. Rex*, a creature that 'can travel as far as into the realms of prehistoric science fiction' (323). In this third part, Sommer shows that in our times we seem to have 'magically' crossed a 'bridge of huge time spans' (323), which can show us how long extinct animals lived. This is the amazement that the sociologist of science Bruno Latour expressed in relation to the exhibition of fossils at the American Museum of Natural History. For Latour, experimenting with the bones of dinosaurs like T. Rex meant getting more experience, becoming more and more '"cognizant", "attuned" to the quality of the collective, coordinated, instituted knowledge' (323).

The collection's desire to highlight the 'bio-graphical' is reflected in the unusual presence of the 'Notes on Contributors' prominently at the front of the book rather than as a *de rigueur*, perfunctory appendix. Each main Part of the book is also prefaced with a personal, creative (rather than critical) piece. Whilst David Wagner's fragment from *Lives* opens *Narrating Life in Literature* with the story of an agonizing dying protagonist who is given a second chance in life at the very last minute, by being gifted with another person's liver, Steve Tomasula's *The Atlas of Man (If by Man We Also Mean Woman)* from 'Narrating Life in Science' presents a strange experiment, even though through the traditional narrative voice of an 'I as witness',[22] an experiment performed by Professor

[21] J. Mitteldorf and J. Pepper, 'Senescence as an Adaptation to Limit the Spread of Disease', *The Journal of Theoretical Biology* 260.2 (2009): 186–95.

[22] Let me add that the narrator's voice about the scientific experiment the characters are conducting and the characters around is far from being 'experimental', yet the format of the narrative is highly experimental in its totalizing scientific discourse, formulas, equations, diagrams, drawings and in its conclusion which is actually non-narrative but visual, a collection of photos that are part of the atlas they made.

Johnson, the narrator, and Miss Smith, whose maps, figures, tables, graphics and drawings the reader has to follow to the end when he/she is left possibly to decipher (in the sense of recognizing in the photos at least some of the subjects who were being photographed previously) the photos taken during the experiment (235-41). The volume ends on another short creative cameo, a *Coda*, 'The Sponge Diver or Bodies on the Seabed', written by Amalie Smith, on how the standard diving dress was introduced in 1865 once industrial sponge diving started in Greece and developed afterwards into digital 3D technologies. These creative pieces challenge the reader to the point of making him/ her circle back to the legitimate question that Herbrechter asked in the beginning: is the writer writing his life story or is life itself writing 'him'?

The strength of the volume lies in its broad, inventive scope, which will be enormously rewarding to anyone interested in the shift from the classical autobiography to postanthropocentric forms of life writing, and its enquiry into a wide range of posthumanist lived experiences, whether as *bio*s and or as *zoē*, with the 'infinity of questions' that 'the posthumanisation of life writing raises' (4). Dealing with relationships between humans and others, be they animals, monsters, genetic codes, cyborgs or artificial intelligence devices, it offers a refreshingly innovative, versatile take on posthumanist explorations of 'life narrating'.

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