

A Suite of Creatures*

Meera Atkinson

**As part of my role as a Writer in Residence at the AASG conference, Life in the Anthropocene, I sat in on conference papers and generated creative responses.*

The following is a selection of those pieces. I would like to thank the presenters both for inspiring these and for their cooperation with their publication.



If I Speak You

Inspired by Christine Townend's paper: 'Where is the poetry supporting animals rights?'

If I speak you
how to speak you
not just of you
or speak at you
or around you
what we found you
or surround you
or defend you
not pretend you
or explain you
how to speak you
your unique you
smelling through you
see as you do
hear what you hear
fear what you fear
rear as you rear
give as you give
live as you live
cry as you cry
die as you die
if I speak you
speak your story
of your glory
through our sameness
and our difference
our resistance
if I speak I speak through me
you me you me you me you me
then I speak
with
 the air
 of shared breath

The Cats That Therefore They Are

Inspired by Dr Paul Alberts-Dezeeuw's paper:

'Human Temporality, responsibility and nonhuman life',

and starring his Burmese cat, Boo Boo.

A daydream: philosophy comes for the geological anthropocene to shake it down with thought; Dr Alberts-Dezeeuw's Burmese cat discusses the nexus of the anthropocene and the patriarchy regularly with Derrida's cat (now very old, but still sharp) on Skype, Derrida's cat having been adopted by Cixous after his death.

The cats get along famously (they're best friends), and, encouraged by Cixous, Dr Alberts-Dezeeuw's Burmese cat is writing an *écriture féminine* novel on the matter. Meanwhile, mentored by Dr Alberts-Dezeeuw, the cats are working on a paper about the human habit of anthropomorphising non-human animals as a symptom of the tragedy of the industrialised, corporatised, neoliberal human condition, which they plan to present at the next animal-human studies conference.

Sometimes, when Dr Alberts-Dezeeuw is thinking and taking notes in his armchair of an evening, he and his Burmese cat – who has not been able to stretch to veganism, but who has, at least, vowed off 'recreational' hunting – consider time and ontology across the species. Though these conversations can last rather a long time Dr Alberts-Dezeeuw's Burmese cat always has the last word, concluding with a sigh and a philosophical flick of the tail: 'I think the Buddhists are right.'

Concrete Jungle

Inspired by Dr Sandra Burr's paper: 'City beasts: imagining animals in the anthropocene'

On footpaths their paws, their slither green gone
our urban their habitat lost. As you and I sit doing business
at a cafe, they fall under wheels of cars, jump through
windows into our homes, fly over our heads and disappear,
returning as installations; sheep of chains (what a metaphor),
crow canopy, whales on walls and in air,
elephant

topiary

lane.

And there, above the store, flight over rooftops
of swooping loss, swooping loss, and elsewhere
the sculptured head of a war horse stands as monument
to the endless suck
into our madness
into our doom
into our wound.

Seventeen

Inspired by Dr Nicholas Malone's paper 'The status and significance of silvery gibbons: an endangered ape in (and on) the verge', this fictocritical vignette embodies the gibbon by way of Dr Malone's words and poetic license

We are the silvery gibbons of the Sancang forest and there are 17 of us left we are your history
 humans as disturbers we are within you it's a constructed process we are the human
 animal boundary gibbon the neglected ape not the great ape we are their
 history we are within them the marginalisation of us we are
 primatology's shifting gaze less than 10% original
 forest remains on Java and there are 17 of us left
 and do you know what that means us silvery
 human encroachment they take for trade
 and into their homes and reserves then
 came a tiger a supernatural being
 the forest has been dramatically
 altered by logging and we,
 taken as pets, need
 ethnographical methods
 and it was scary (the forest)
 not because of the ghosts
 or the devil but because
 of the animals (the absence of them)
 take our word this place is haunted
 spine chilling that's why it's important
 between forest and animals only
 17 of us anywhere a place must
 have inhabitants an expert
 says the study of
 nature is powerful, and
 power is cultural but
 listen there are only
 17 of us we can
 count you know
 17 yes
 17