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›Anwält‹, Intellektuelle, Schriftsteller: J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* zwischen Engagement und Autonomie (Abstract)

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The article focuses on J.M. Coetzee's much debated text *The Lives of Animals* and highlights its tension between aesthetic autonomy and ethical-political commitment. Coetzee is known for declining outright personal commentary on political topics such as the state of post-apartheid in South Africa. He refuses to have his texts used for heteronomous purposes through an aesthetic of ambiguity, which is characterized by narrative vacancies, plurality and openness of meaning. Critics have often denounced this attitude, arguing that it prevents a practical commitment to change. Coetzee's animal texts also deal with the problem of ethical-political commitment: in this case particularly for the non-human other. On the basis of the concept of ›advocacy‹ the article discusses how *The Lives of Animals* problematizes the act of speaking *for* animals. For this purpose, the article first introduces three theoretical stances regarding advocacy from prominent representatives of the field of *Animal Studies*. Steven Best, a proponent of *Critical Animal Studies*, invokes the critical theory of the Frankfurt School by demanding the return of the public intellectual, who uses a transparent and normative language to instigate a social transformation that can also affect change in the arena of animal-human relations. Cary Wolfe, on the other hand, makes use of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory to emphasize that there is no right or wrong discourse when it comes to advocating for animals. The language of the advocate, he argues, needs in fact to be tailored to the specific social system in question to ensure the biggest possible effect. Finally, Donna Haraway's deconstructivist approach points out fundamental problems of advocacy. Advocacy, she argues, does not only signify having a supporter or protector; rather, it also always presupposes a power hierarchy in which the other is forced into a form of representation that shows itself as deficient and dependent.

Haraway's approach appears particularly suited for the analysis of Coetzee's text, as the vindication of, and advocacy for, animals in *The Lives of Animals* is discussed and problematized by means of the fictional protagonist Elizabeth Costello, an Australian author who has been invited to speak at Appleton College in the United States. Haraway's deconstructive reading of advocacy, which aims to refrain from reducing the animal counterpart to a degraded victim and instead respect it as a partner with equal rights, agency and an independent perspective, features significant parallels to Coetzee's text, which constitutes an examination of the complex question of adequate advocacy for animals. Costello, for instance, is characterized as an intellectual who fights for the rights of animals. By transcending the boundaries of her respective field, the study of literature, and intervening in the public-political discourse, she demonstrates a typical characteristic of the public intellectual as described by Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey in her study *Eingreifendes Denken*, which is based on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. However, the text also uses the figure of Costello to challenge and question these typical characteristics of the intellectual. Her rhetoric style, which her son John criticizes repeatedly, stands in stark contrast to the transparent and normative language espoused by Steven Best as a prerequisite for the effective fight against the oppression and exploitation of animals. Costello herself repeatedly undermines the authority which she assumes as a speaker: on the one hand, with the explicit vulnerability of her body – Costello compares herself to Kafka's ape Rotpeter and his wound – and her psyche; on the other, with her resistance to be

pinned down to an unambiguous position. Instead of a (paternalistic) speaking *for* animals, *The Lives of Animals* seeks to explore the prospect of a speaking *of* animals through the perspective of its protagonist. In this way, animals are not reduced to deficient victims but become independent actors in their own right.

With reference to the relation between political-ethical commitment and aesthetic autonomy the article aims to illustrate that *The Lives of Animals* is about challenging and pushing the boundaries between the systems of arts and politics, and by doing so, between the spheres of autonomy and commitment, or the public and the private. The poetics of ambiguity often ascribed to Coetzee presents itself as an essential doubling in *The Lives of Animals*, which is emphasized through multiple acts of transgression on both a thematic and an aesthetic textual level: in respect to genre and *decorum*, to the area of expertise, or the ›classic‹, demarcated body. Intervention, as shown by the analysis of *The Lives of Animals*, arises from the constant transgression of boundaries and is exemplified in the role of the intellectual as a provocateur, who violates established rules, norms and taboos. Even though fiction cannot close slaughterhouses, it has the power to provoke unrest – »I just don't want to sit silent« (Coetzee 2004, 104) – and thus create a dynamic that upsets the established relationship between human and animal, thereby enabling the conception of a new relationship between the species.

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