

UNINVITED ANIMALS¹

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The domestication of Marty

In the spring of 2012, on concluding their research into the cockroach as simultaneously a biological organism and as a non-human technological subject, the members of the Canadian Critical Media Lab offered their experimental subjects up for adoption. Among the arguments in favour of the domestication of the cockroach found on the laboratory's website, the following were given for consideration:

- Roaches are tremendously easy to care for. They will eat anything, from dog food to fresh fruit and vegetables. Roaches are easily housed in a small secure glass or plastic terrarium
- Roaches are very clean insects
- Roaches are very interesting creatures to watch²

This is followed by a description - accompanied by close-up photographs - of eight cockroaches of both sexes, offered for adoption. Each cockroach has its own name and individual story. The first in the list is Marty:

Marty is truly the king of his castle. He is tenacious, precocious, and curious. He's always the first of the den, and the first to test out new treats. For the record, Marty loves strawberries, but isn't so fond of cucumbers! Before coming to [the laboratory], Marty was tasked with the job of ensuring that his lab mates were safe and secure, making tough decisions for the greater good of his kin group. He's a nice boy, but has a tendency to act aggressively to roaches of smaller sizes, especially when he's provoked. For this reason, we would recommend that he find a forever home where he is the only roach.

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² www.theroachlab.com (date accessed: 13.03.2014).

Next comes the profile of Bernard, who was attacked by another cockroach during transportation, causing him to lose one of his antennae and one of his back legs (the description is preceded by a notice: sadly, Bernard has passed away. His injuries were too much for him to overcome). Michel, who has also lost several extremities during shipment, is described as a stunner, caring, an attention-lover full of enthusiasm for life. George, on the other hand, is shy; he keeps away from others, and prefers peace and quiet. Isabelle is lively, full of energy, and loves carrots and adventures. Wolfie is clever and cannot stand being on his own; he needs to be constantly in the company of other cockroaches and people. Jacques, who has also lost an antenna, is a tall, dark and intelligent American cockroach. Donna is fun-loving, always the centre of attention, caring and kind. They all have one thing in common - these animals possess strong individuality and they need a home.

This is certainly not the first case of the domestication of cockroaches in particular or insects in general, or of other animals often regarded as parasites. But there is something deeply paradoxical in this phenomenon. What does domestication actually mean in this instance? We can provide a home for a homeless kitten or puppy, but on some fundamental level the idea of 'giving a home to a homeless cockroach' sounds absurd. This is not about any kind of cultural superiority or omnipresent anthropocentrism, in which the objects of domestication become more like ourselves, anthropomorphic animals, supposedly standing higher in the hierarchy of species than flies and cockroaches - beings no less evolved or complex, but enjoying a bad reputation and undeserved contempt (it is exactly this kind of anthropocentrism that the participants in the project are trying to combat, subjecting centuries-old prejudices to impartial criticism and insisting on the radical equality of all living things). For all my infinite respect for cockroaches, something else strikes me about this project, apart from the recognition of these insects as equal and worthy contenders to share with us our food and shelter. Cockroaches, mice, rats, ticks, ants, flies, silverfish and so on are not traditionally categorised with those animals that are brought into the home, but among those which are simply found there. They turn up in our dwellings of their own accord. They come without invitation.

Can they really be homeless as such? In a sense, they are always at home in somebody else's home. Efforts are made to get rid of them, but more often to exterminate them rather than merely drive them out - special services and products exist for this (such as insecticides - a means of committing genocide against insects and so-called 'house parasites'). More humane products have also appeared on the market for those not wishing to suffer from feelings of guilt connected with the murder of these little creatures, substances with a repellent

effect, keeping them from creeping out from their cracks and nests and crossing the visible frontiers of the home, preventing them from showing themselves in its open areas and from reminding the official, lawful inhabitants of their existence. An obvious analogue for such substances is the power of the odour of cats, which we bring into the home, to deter mice, which bring themselves in. Undesirable animals are driven away, and they leave, run off, clambering along cracks and piping, creeping through wall cavities, migrating to other flats, other homes. In a certain sense, they never leave the generalised space of the home (or that of objects lying adjacent, such as refuse chutes, courtyards and dustbin areas).

But is it possible in this case to call them domestic? Though they live in houses, they obviously do not accept house rules. Families are the usual occupants of houses, and pets, which are brought in, are afforded the rights of family members, while these other animals continue to live in their swarms, nests and colonies, just as in the wild. Marty and his comrades are an exception to the rule. The operation carried out on them - domestication - demands first of all their individualisation, when one subject is isolated, picked out from the herd, the swarm, the flock. This separation from their animal multiplicity is the first step on the road to human society, the human condition. In the same brochure we read that each cockroach is to be handed over to its new owner complete with its own little home or 'habitat' along with the necessary accessories. He or she has a name, a character, and an individual story. Should he or she crawl out of his or her habitat and get lost in the house, then it is likely that they would not be able to find their way back to their own group but, in encountering another, foreign, group, the situation would end in their death. His or her fellows multiply freely in the various dark nooks and crannies they so love, feeding on objects and substances that have not been provided for their benefit. For this, they are labelled parasites, although, from a biological point of view, few of them can really be defined in this way. Not all of these creatures present any danger to humans, being unable to cause them physical harm or transmit diseases: the feeling of fear, horror, and revulsion linked with them is often of another nature.

Unheimlich

Animals that turn up in the home by themselves are neither fully domestic nor fully homeless, nor fully wild. Insects, worms, rats and so on, have an uncanny reputation. The use of the word 'uncanny' here is not a simple aesthetic characteristic. Their sinister creepy-crawly nature explicitly characterises their position in the home. This is all the clearer if we turn to the German word *unheimlich*. 'Indeed, we get an impression that many languages are without a word for this particular shade of what is frightening,' writes Freud in his work of the same

name (Freud 1919). Freud devotes a long and detailed passage to the etymologies of the words *heimlich* and *unheimlich* (deriving, clearly, from *das Heim* - the home, the domestic hearth), underlining the ambivalence of *Heimlich* - the homely, from whose very comfort the uncanny grows:

...on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. 'Unheimlich' is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of '*heimlich*' and not of the second. [...] On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the *Unheimlich*, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. [...] Thus heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*.

Freud 1919: 217-56

Freud refers to several dictionary sources, including an entry from Daniel Sanders' *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (1860). For the word *heimlich* (belonging to the house, family, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, domesticated, homely, kindred) Sanders also, incidentally, mentions the definition 'domesticated animal' - in opposition to the wild - as one of its obsolete meanings. If this archaic sense is taken into account, then this same ambivalence will spread to the animals that turn up in the home - their domesticity crossing over not into its obvious opposite, wildness, but into the uncanny, remaining thereby within the bounds of 'the homely'. They live in the home, but as a kind of uncanny ghost; they disrupt the intimacy of domestic comfort, emerging from their dens to bring into the home something of a strange, otherly significance.

There is nothing random in the use of the word 'ghost' here: a haunted house figures as the most obvious - although it is more complex and loaded with additional meanings - literary example of the uncanny discussed towards the end of the cited essay, where Freud articulates the idea that the feeling of uncanny-ness - this special kind of fear - is 'something repressed which recurs' and that it is 'nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (Freud 1919). In Freud's thought, fear is an echo of some affect experienced in the past. The uncanny does not absolutely have to have been such initially. At

first it might have been familiar, kindred, beloved or comfortable to whatever degree. However, the functioning of the human psychological apparatus is dependent upon the processes of repression and the return of the repressed: in returning, something takes on uncanny traits. The classic example is so Freudian that it would be remarkable if it had not been included in this text:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is homesickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before,' we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix 'un' ['un-'] is the token of repression.

Freud 1919: 217-56

It is quite symptomatic that insects should appear in this context in Andrei Platonov's short story *The River Potudan*. Platonov's character, Nikita, falls ill, developing a fever, and, on the sight of some intrusive flies on the ceiling he at once turns to the memory of his dead mother. Or rather, the sight of the flies summons up the ghost of his mother from nothingness, she pays a visit to the house, leaving material traces of her presence in the very bed where the sick young man lies:

Towards evening he lost consciousness. At first all he saw was the ceiling, and on it two belated half-dead flies, sheltering there for warmth to prolong their lives; and then these same objects began to fill him with melancholy and disgust – the ceiling and the flies seemed to have got inside his brain, and he was unable to drive them out of it or stop thinking about them, with thoughts which grew and grew and were already eating away the bones of his head. Nikita shut his eyes, but the flies seethed in his brain; he jumped up from the bed to chase the flies off the ceiling, and fell back against the pillow; the pillow seemed to smell of his mother's breath – she had slept here beside his father; Nikita remembered her, and forgot himself in unconsciousness.

Platonov 1999

The uncanny insects found their way from the ceiling straight into his brain. In that moment, the room underwent a transformation, a dislocation, as though opening up the ceiling-brain, through which the ghost of the mother penetrates the home imperceptibly. The flies in this house are the intermediaries for the return of the forgotten; they connect the character with his origins.

In Roger Caillois' surrealist work *The Praying Mantis*, describing the impact of that insect upon the imagination of people and the various folkloric episodes and traditions connected with it, he mentions the superstition of a certain African tribe which worships the praying mantis as an incarnation of a divine forefather, whereby, if one of them gets into the house, this means that one of these gods has come to visit his descendants (Caillois 2003). Incidentally, according to the classification scheme brought forward in this essay, the mantis belongs to the family of the so-called 'ghost-insects', or *phasmatodea* (from Greek φάσμα *phasma*, meaning an apparition or phantom); and so its appearance in the home as a ghost - the shade of the ancestors - is a common instance of a somehow universal tendency, inscribed, according to Caillois, both in the language of myth and the language of science (which, in its fascination with this enigmatic insect, can reach quite lyrical tones). 'This is as good a definition of the uncanny as one will find: the experience of encountering one's own origins' - writes Joan Copjec in her book *Imagine There's No Woman* (Copjec 2004: 103). Perhaps this definition is no better either (the word 'origins' perplexes me, I am closer to Schelling's romantic definition, to which Freud himself was inclined: that which ought to remain secret, but which has come to light. Schelling, indeed, connects the *unheimlich* with the sublime but it is, without doubt, of pertinence here. Likewise germane are Copjec's following comments:

Freud was careful to explain that the uncanny is not the opposite of the canny, the inverse of the familiar or homely. That is, the uncanny or unhomely negates the homely not from outside, but by returning from anelsewhere, but limits the homely from within. It leeches familiarity from the familiar. The uncanny ghosts or undead of history are not refugees from another place but are homeless in a more profound sense. Not simply displaced from their real homes, which exist or once existed elsewhere, they give body rather to a certain displacement or out-of- jointedness in the homely place where they appear.

Copjec 2004: 103

It is exactly such ghosts and those returned from the dead that, according to Copjec, make history by means of the breaks and dislocations which they produce in time, – as if without

their disquieting presence history would die, having returned to the domestic hearth. The inertia of the present is eaten up by uninvited guests – the ghost of Hamlet’s father, the statue of the Commandant killed by Don Juan, the spectre of communism, a mother’s ghosts, the monuments to soldiers and partisans brought to life... Copjec uses the word *leech* as her verb here, a homonym of the noun for the blood-sucking invertebrate and, in this way, replaces the recurrence of ghosts of the repressed, of a forgotten past so constitutive for history, with the motif of parasitism. Jean Claude Milner, from whom Copjec borrows this motif, brought it quite unexpectedly into his musings on the scientific nature of psychoanalysis, having taken as his departure some comments on certain advantages of the German language (bringing us back to Freud’s etymologies):

The prefix un- is not always as flatly negative as the Latin prefix in-; it is not always confined to delimiting the complement of the domain signified by the positive. Thus, Unmensch is not a nonhuman but an undone man, a monster; Unkraut is not an herb (kraut), but a weed, a parasite; the unheimlich is not the inverse of the familiar, but the familiar parasitized by an anxiety that disperses it. [...] The negative prefix is nothing more than the seal of this parasitism.

Milner 2000: 57

The connection between parasitism and the return of the repressed is described in detail by Michel Serres in his book *The Parasite*. Here, parasitism serves as a universal model for economic relations. Exchange is deceit. Following this, in instances where exchange is observed – of living bodies for things, of work for money, of money for words and songs, – a unidirectional parasitic chain is hidden. The parasites live at the expense of another, referred to as the host. The parasite fastens onto the body of its host or penetrates inside it, feeding off it. Man, in Serres’s estimation, is a universal parasite on the body of nature, not only nourishing himself on its animals and plants, but literally living inside them:

We adore eating veal, lamb, beef, antelope, pheasant, or grouse, but we don’t throw away their ‘leftovers.’ We dress in leather and adorn ourselves with feathers. Like the Chinese, we devour duck without wasting a bit; we eat the whole pig, from head to tail; but we get under these animals’ skins as well, in their plumage or in their hide. Men in clothing live within the animals they devoured. And the same thing for plants. We eat rice, wheat, apples, the divine eggplant, the tender dandelion; but we also weave silk, linen, cotton; we live within the flora as much as we live within the fauna. We are parasites; thus we

clothe ourselves. Thus we live within tents of skins like the gods within their tabernacles. Look at him well-dressed and adorned, magnificent; he shows-he showed-the clean carcass of his host. Of the soft parasite you can see only the clean-shaven face and the hands, sometimes without their kid gloves.

Serres 2007: 10

A parasite needs a home and a hospitable host. Each host in his own turn, however, parasites upon another – these home-bodies might be imagined arranged one inside the other, like a set of Russian *Matryoshka* dolls. Larger, stronger parasites are thereby constantly trying to rid themselves of other smaller ones. Man, according to Serres, sets himself up as a host who offers a home to those animals, which permit him to parasitise on the body of nature i.e. to those upon which he himself can potentially feed or utilise in some other fashion:

In the end, there are two kinds of animals: those that are invited and those that are hunted. Guests and quarry. Tame and wild. The wolf and the dog whose neck is irritated by the collar. [...] There are animals whom we parasite and those who might supplant us and whom we chase away, hunt, and eventually eliminate.

Serres 2007: 77-8

This is exactly how Serres envisions repression - as the persecution and chasing away of some parasites by others. Serres uses the word repression in its widest sense: 'This repression is also religious excommunication, political imprisonment, the isolation of the sick, garbage collection, public health, the pasteurization of milk, and so forth, as much as it is repression in the psychoanalytical sense' (Serres 2007: 68).

Repression is as universally prevalent as parasitism - for every small parasite, there can be found a larger one, trying to get rid of it: 'Our forefathers were excluded from paradise. I left too; we were all chased out' (Serres 2007: 89). Paradise, like nature, is a universal home with a luxuriantly blossoming garden, whose master may suddenly refuse to share the fruits of its trees. Serres unravels a complex dialectic of parasitism, into which every living thing is drawn, one way or another. All living creatures are drawn into the game of repression and the return of the repressed. The repressed, he emphasises, is eternally returning. It returns in the form of that in which we see the parasite.

If we recall Schelling's definition in this regard - that which ought to have remained secret but

has come to light - then the motif of the uncanny resounds with yet greater insistence. A ghost - the repressed - returns to the house in the body of a parasite, casting off its clothes. It is not a human, but an un-human - an *Unmensch*, and not an animal, but an un-animal - an *Untier*. The prefix 'un' is not simply the seal of parasitism, but a sign of the secret that has come to light. The naked parasite comes again and again, crawls towards the clothed ones, either with the hope of rehabilitation, or with the demand for redemption, or with a silent reproach. The truth, which it drags behind itself from out of dark corners, frightens us.

The un-domestication of Gregor

According to Vladimir Nabokov Kafka himself was extremely critical of Freudian ideas. He considered psychoanalysis 'a helpless error' (Nabokov 1980). On this basis, Nabokov decisively brushes aside the psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka's work then known to him, in which the literary subjects were explained chiefly as facts from the biography of the writer (particularly his relationship with his father). It is hard not to agree with this - the weakness of the interpretations to which Nabokov refers, consists in their attempts to make Kafka their patient, when the body of his writing clearly cannot fit the analyst's couch.

And yet there is a definite link between Kafka and Freud. This connection is of another nature than that between patient and analyst. The unconscious speaks with the analyst in the language of symptoms, a medium by which the eternally returning repressed makes itself known. Kafka's writing is not so much a collection of symptoms demanding diagnosis, as the direct speech of the repressed. In the world of Kafka, the unconscious is conscious and speaks in an exact, sparing and articulate language. The internal monologue of Kafka's characters is the conscious speech of the unconscious, from which the perceived real world loses consciousness. Only this speech is sane, but in the world, submerged into the absurd, it is neither heard nor understood. If the psychoanalyst finds his way to the subject of the unconscious by a roundabout path, then, in Kafka, the subject himself opens the door to his room. This is exactly what happens in *Metamorphosis* - the naked parasite, into which, suddenly, Gregor Samsa is transformed after a troubled sleep, opens the door to his room and appears in front of the clothed ones. Lacking hands or even teeth, he opens the door with his lips and mouth:

Slowly Gregor pushed the chair towards the door, then let go of it, caught hold of the door for support - the soles at the end of his little legs were somewhat sticky - and rested against it for a moment after his efforts. Then he set himself to turning the key in

the lock with his mouth. It seemed, unhappily, that he hadn't really any teeth - what could he grip the key with? - but on the other hand his jaws were certainly very strong; with their help he did manage to set the key in motion, heedless of the fact that he was undoubtedly damaging them somewhere, since a brown fluid issued from his mouth, flowed over the key and dripped on the floor. [...] As the turning of the key progressed he circled around the lock, holding now only with his mouth, pushing on the key, as required, or pulling it down again with all the weight of his body.

Kafka 1976: 99-100

Having placed his head on the door handle, Gregor opens the door. The chief clerk, who had come to investigate his absence from work (Gregor should have set out on a business trip but had not turned up for the morning train), with a loud 'Oh!' slowly backs off; Gregor's mother faints; the father at first clenches his fist, and then begins to weep. Instead of Gregor, they see a gigantic insect. Nabokov, a professional entomologist, gives us a fully realistic description of this entity:

Now what exactly is the 'vermin' into which poor Gregor, the seedy commercial traveller, is so suddenly transformed? It obviously belongs to the branch of 'jointed leggers' (Arthropoda), to which insects, and spiders, and centipedes, and crustaceans belong. If the 'numerous little legs' mentioned in the beginning mean more than six legs, then Gregor would not be an insect from a zoological point of view. But I suggest that a man awakening on his back and finding he has as many as six legs vibrating in the air might feel that six was sufficient to be called numerous. We shall therefore assume that Gregor has six legs, that he is an insect.

Next question: what insect? Commentators say cockroach, which of course does not make sense. A cockroach is an insect that is flat in shape with large legs, and Gregor is anything but flat: he is convex on both sides, belly and back, and his legs are small. He approaches a cockroach in only one respect: his coloration is brown. That is all. Apart from this he has a tremendous convex belly divided into segments and a hard rounded back suggestive of wing cases. In beetles these cases conceal flimsy little wings that can be expanded and then may carry the beetle for miles and miles in a blundering flight. Curiously enough, Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back. (This is a very nice observation on my part to be treasured all your lives. [...]) Further, he has strong mandibles. He uses these organs to turn the key in a

lock while standing erect on his hind legs, on his third pair of legs (a strong little pair), and this gives us the length of his body, which is about three feet long. In the course of the story he gets gradually accustomed to using his new appendages – his feet, his feelers. This brown, convex, dog-sized beetle is very broad.

Nabokov 1980

The presence of wings, which Gregor never discovered, is not the only keen observation made by Nabokov. In fact, the entirety of his commentary on *Metamorphosis* is a series of keen naturalistic and anatomical observations. It is precisely the details that are key – from the arrangement of Gregor’s body to the internal arrangement of the Samsas’ flat, in which he appears. We too will concentrate on the details.

At the very beginning, the hero wakes up, recognises his room, but does not recognise himself in it. Attempting to fall back to sleep, in order to ‘forget all this nonsense,’ he closes his eyes. In Nabokov’s own copy of Kafka’s text, there is a note: ‘A regular beetle has no eyelids and cannot close its eyes – a beetle with human eyes’ (Nabokov 1980). Human eyes - a familiar element in this alien unfamiliar body. The human glance brings him into kinship with the aforementioned praying mantis, the ghost-bug, which, as Caillois notes, has far more in common with the human being than simply its general form - they are among the very few insects able to turn their head independently to follow anything in their surroundings that has caught their attention. Caillois suggests that this has been enough to earn them their notoriety as bearers of the ‘evil eye,’ as a creature which, in a highly uncanny way, is unusually capable of watching rather than simply seeing (Caillois 2003).

Gregor, too, does not cease to watch – with his eyes he follows the inhabitants of the house from his hidey-hole (from his room, from under the couch where he has concealed himself from their eyes), sometimes even trying to catch their eye, as well as looking out of the window at any opportunity. The latter is no simple feat for him: he needs first to put effort into pushing the armchair to the window, so that then, pushing against the armchair, he can reach the sill. All this movement and activity, excessive in the case of an insect, is connected by Kafka with ‘some recollection of the sense of freedom that looking out of a window always used to give him’ (Kafka 1976: 112). But here we have another keen observation from Nabokov: Gregor’s crouching on the windowsill is not so much a reminiscence of human feelings as the display of a new, insectoid attraction. Due to his becoming a beetle, Gregor is going blind and he, bug that he is, is simply drawn to the light:

Gregor, or Kafka, seems to think that Gregor's urge to approach the window was a recollection of human experience. Actually, it is a typical insect reaction to light: one finds all sorts of dusty bugs near windowpanes, a moth on its back, a lame daddy longlegs, poor insects cobwebbed in a corner, a buzzing fly still trying to conquer the glass pane. Gregor's human sight is growing dimmer so that he cannot see clearly even across the street. The human detail is dominated by the insect general idea.

Nabokov 1980

Kafka himself writes that Gregor is losing his sight:

For in reality day by day things that were even a little way off were growing dimmer to his sight; the hospital across the street, which he used to execrate for being all too often before his eyes, was not quite beyond his range of vision, and if he had not known that he lived in Charlotte Street, a quiet street but still a city street, he might have believed that his window gave on a desert waste where gray sky and gray blended undistinguishably into each other.

Kafka 1976: 112-13

The wasteland, the indistinguishable merging of the grey sky and greyeath – this, by all appearances, is perceived by the insect Gregor as the space beyond his room and several visible details of the flat, to which his living world has now been condensed (he can only make out the closest objects). This empty expanse beyond the window fascinates him.

A fascination for space, or temptation by space (Caillois 1984: 28), according to Caillois, is something that unites the insect and the psychasthenic in their perception of the world around them³. The experience of the psychasthenic is connected with de-personalisation, loss of personality, and is accompanied with the subject's experience of being swallowed up by external space. 'He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar' writes Caillois in *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia* (1984: 30). The author, however, is more concerned with insects that allow the fascinating space around them to swallow them up so much that

³Jussi Parikka, in particular, turns to Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, in the context of Caillois' *Mimétisme et la psychasthénie légendaire*, see: Parikka J. (2010). *Insect Media*. 110-11. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; also Kwinter, S. (2001). *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

they become externally indistinguishable from its defining elements, rather than with schizophrenics. Caillois suggests that a protective function is wrongly assigned to the mimicry of insects. On the contrary, in their case, ‘we are thus dealing with a luxury and even a dangerous luxury, for there are cases in which mimicry causes the creature to go from bad to worse: geometer-moth caterpillars simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears. The case of the Phyllia is even sadder: they browse among themselves, taking each other for real leaves’ (Caillois 1984: 25).

That which, among humans, is classified as psychasthenia, is practised by insects as mimicry. This is their peculiar form of madness. Insects are psychasthenics in action, psychotics, but also magicians and sorcerers: they do not simply pretend, they actually transform. Gregor Samsa is, without doubt ill, but his psychasthenia takes on a magical twist - he does not imitate an insect, but actually transforms into one, his mimicry taking place not on the level of mental illness, but on that of bodily transformation.

Caillois draws attention to the unidirectional aspect of mimicry: ‘the animal mimics the plant, leaf, flower, or thorn, and disassembles or ceases to perform its function in relation to others. *Life takes a step backwards*’ (Caillois 1984: 30). The living retreats, it aims for the inorganic. In this aim, both physical entropy and the psychological principle of nirvana, described by Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, are united. In the lure that open space holds for the insect, the universal desire for merger and dissolution is displayed, for the neutralisation of activity. Man transforms into an insect, and the insect mimics further, until it finally fuses with non-living material.

Not only does Gregor look out of the window, he also gradually merges into rubbish and waste. All began with his loss of the human ability to stand upright – from the time when, once having collapsed onto his little insect legs, he immediately felt at ease. His limbs are tipped with an adhesive substance; thanks to this, Gregor is able to stick to the surfaces he climbs. Subsequently, when the degree of entropy has markedly increased and less care is taken with cleaning up his room, chance objects begin to become stuck to him: “...owing to the amount of dust that lay thick in his room and rose into the air at the slightest movement, he too was covered with dust; fluff and hair and remnants of food trailed with him, caught in his back and along his sides” (Kafka 1976: 130). The hairs and threads that Gregor picks up are elements of the surrounding space, from which he gradually becomes indistinguishable. This role is played at first by the bedsheets, which he pulls from the bed onto the couch and under which

he hides so as not to traumatise his sister with his appearance when she brings him food. On the one hand, this is a human gesture, but on the other, an animal instinct for mimicry – for hiding and wrapping oneself up in neighbouring objects.

Caillois draws attention to this peculiarity of mimicry: “The larvae of mayflies fashion a sheath for themselves with twigs and gravel, those of Chrysomelidae with their excrements. Oxyrrhyncha or spider crabs haphazardly gather and collect on their shells the seaweed and polyps of the milieu in which they live” (Caillois 1984: 28). These same crabs wrap themselves up in paper, changing their colour. All these actions are of an automatic character. Moreover, as Caillois remarks, insects commonly imitate not simply lifeless matter, but corrupt, rotting matter, a half-eaten leaf, detritus, excrement. In this, he believes, there is nothing rational – it is purely aesthetic. Gregor is a crazed insect-aesthete who has lost the boundaries of his ‘ego’, and the rubbish strewn world sticks to his body until such point that it merges completely with the objects around; the housemaid realises that Gregor is dead on trying to tickle him with the broom. By that point, his body had become ‘completely dried up and flat.’

Initially – we must not forget – the beetle was rounded in form. What distinguishes Gregor from other insects is his size - roughly equivalent to that of a dog. If Gregor had transformed at once into an ordinary, small beetle, then the Samsas would likely not have even noticed him - it would have been as if he had simply disappeared. But he transformed into something intermediary in size between a man and a beetle. He is still in the process of metamorphosis, halfway along the path to becoming a true insect. The dog is a domestic animal, and this is exactly how Gregor is received at first - as something unattractive, but still one of their own, a *Haustier*, a member of the family. As before, he is called by his name, efforts are made to tidy his room, they feel sorry for him, and his sister brings him food.

Gregor’s room is his own *habitat*, a home within a home like those portable terrariums offered to potential owners to receive Marty and the other seven cockroaches in. Due to it being inhabited by an insect, the room is kept locked, but its inhabitant is given basic care up until a certain point. The turning point is reached after the sister suggests that all the furniture be taken out of the room, so that Gregor might more freely crawl around the floor, up the walls and on the ceiling. His mother opposes this idea: ‘doesn’t it look as if we were showing him, by taking away his furniture, that we have given up hope of his ever getting better and are just leaving him coldly to himself?’ – she asks (Kafka 1976: 116). Hearing her words, Gregor also begins internally to oppose his sister’s decision: ‘Did he really want his warm room, so

comfortably fitted with old family furniture, to be turned into a naked den [German *Höhle* - a cave, bear's den, lair, burrow - *O.T.*], in which he would certainly be able to crawl unhampered in all directions but at the price of shedding simultaneously all recollections of his human background?' (Kafka 1976: 116). The sister insists, the furniture is removed, and Gregor, in desperation, rushes to save 'the picture on the wall – which was already denuded of everything else that had been on it – of the lady dressed in copious fur,' covering it with his body. He is noticed once more, his mother faints again, and his sister angrily shakes her fist at him.

This is the second of three episodes in which Gregor reveals himself openly to people: the first had been the time when he had opened his door with his mouth, and the last was when he crept out on hearing his sister play the violin for the three beetle-like boarders to whom the Samsas had let one of the rooms to earn money to live on. It is a moment of the uncanny: that which should have remained concealed has emerged onto the surface. The remaining time had seen Gregor hide himself out of sight - crawling under the couch or covering himself in bedsheets.

We note how, in the first episode, Gregor is seen by the chief clerk, and in the third - by the lodgers. In both cases, the witnesses back off towards the staircase: the Samsa family tries to hush up their house secret. In the scene with the furniture there are no witnesses. The Samsas are face to face with the frightening repressed, onto which they direct their aggression. Coming home from work, the father throws apples at Gregor, one of which remains stuck forever in his back (where his winglets are). From that moment on, the un-domestication of Gregor becomes rapid and irreversible. From a pet, he turns decisively into an unwelcome parasite, which must be got rid of. After the last uncanny episode (with the boarders), his sister announces:

I won't utter my brother's name in the presence of this creature (Untier), and so all I say is: we must try to get rid of it. We've tried to look after it and to put up with it as far as is humanly possible, I don't think anyone could reproach us in the slightest. [...] But how can it be Gregor? If this were Gregor, he would have realised long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away in his own accord. Then we wouldn't have any brother, but we'd be able to go on living and keep his memory in honor. As it is, this creature persecutes us, drives away our lodgers, obviously wants the whole apartment to himself, and would have us all sleep in the gutter.

Kafka 1976: 133-34

Nobody notices any longer what Gregor is buzzing about - his speech now is understood only by Kafka and his readers. The world in which he had lived with his family is now lost to his senses, has become deaf, absurd and cruel. In the process of his de-domestication, Gregor loses his name, and his room, once warm, cozy, 'normal' and 'human' ('*ein richtiges, nur etwas zu kleines Menschenzimmer*'), transforms into a cave, a *Höhle*: dirty marks now stretch along its walls and heaps of dust and rubbish are everywhere. All manner of refuse is now dumped in the room, with the receptacle for ashes and the rubbish bin being moved there from the kitchen. It becomes an uncanny dark place in the home, and simultaneously a kind of rubbish tip, for everything that should be put out of sight. But the uncanny presence of Gregor in the house gives away his family's secret: 'Gregor's family are his parasites, exploiting him, eating him out from the inside' (Nabokov 1980).

It is noteworthy that we are only acquainted with Gregor in this insect body, as there is no backstory in the novella, in which Gregor would have been seen as a 'normal' member of a human family. We only know him as a beetle, and the novella has only one reality - the reality of awakening. As Mladen Dolar comments, this is exactly the special kind of reality that several of Kafka's characters inhabit - including Gregor, Josef K. in *The Trial* and the badger in *The Burrow*:

Awakening is the riskiest moment, says Kafka, and if one lets one's vigilance slip even stranger things can happen, like one can wake up as an insect. Gregor Samsa, in *Metamorphosis*, missed for a moment the quickness of wit to catch everything in the same place, he didn't find his own body, he mislaid it for a moment. Awakening is metamorphosis, there is a *Verwandlung* lurking in every awakening.

Dolar 2012: 218

According to Dolar, this reality is possessed of "the escaping familiarity that one cannot take hold of, the 'it was no dream', and the curious word *Menschenzimmer*, 'the human room', *ein richtiges*, the 'regular', the true, the proper human abode is made inhuman on the stroke of the awakening, at the hour of the riskiest moment" (Ibid.) Instead of reality, the hero awakens in the real – in the special temporal modality, which immediately precedes awakening.

Gregor wakes up untimely - a moment before time, following the timelessness of sleep, regains its bearings and sets out its way markers. Commercial-traveller-Gregor should have

woken up on time, in time, at the sound of his alarm clock, in order to hurry to the station to catch the morning train. Ahead of time, something else awakens in him.

The subject of the unconscious

Man is a domesticated animal. Not only has he tamed other beasts, going as far as cockroaches, but has also first of all tamed himself. We cannot creep up the walls, leaving dirty tracks, nor can we be tempted by space, turning ourselves into rubbish. We have to stand on two legs, eat at a table, and sleep in a bed. ‘...I am now here, seating by the fire, wearing a winter dressing gown...’ - writes Descartes, as if trying to reassure himself (Descartes 2013: 25). The appearance of the subject *cogito* is connected with a series of procedures of separation, beginning, as is known, with fundamental doubt, applied to the entirety of the world around us. The thinking subject, or mental substance (*res cogitans*) is born in a process of separation from corporeal substance (*res extensa*) - something opposed to the insect’s fascination for space and fusion with it. The subject first separates itself from the world in order to re-appropriate it, to make it its comfortable home. The subject of *cogito* sets itself in opposition to madness and animality, and struggles with them for the purity of its *habitat*. Fundamental doubt is yet another, intellectual, method for ridding oneself of disagreeable parasites. It is no coincidence, as Michel Foucault notes in his *History of Madness*, the insane at that time - along with beggars and tramps - were subjected to exclusion and sent away to special institutions, segregated from society (Foucault 2006).

At the same time, Jacques Derrida proposes, in his celebrated polemic with Foucault on madness in Descartes, that ‘philosophy is perhaps the reassurance given against the anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness’ (Derrida 2001: 72). I shall quote a notable clarification of Derrida’s position from Žižek:

Through a detailed analysis, he [Derrida – *O.T.*] tries to demonstrate that Descartes does not EXCLUDE madness, but brings it to EXTREME: the universal doubt, where I suspect that the entire world is an illusion, is the strongest madness imaginable. Out of this universal doubt, *Cogito* emerges: even if everything is an illusion, I can still be sure that I think. Madness is thus not excluded by *Cogito*: it is not that the *Cogito* is not mad, but *Cogito* is true even if I am totally mad. The extreme doubt, the hypothesis of universal madness, is not external to philosophy, but strictly internal to it. It is the hyperbolic moment, the moment of madness, which GROUNDS philosophy. Of course, Descartes later ‘domesticates’ this radical excess: he presents the image of man as thinking

substance, dominated by reason; he constructs a philosophy which is clearly historically conditioned. [...] Of course, every philosophy tries to control this excess, to repress it - but in repressing it, it represses its own innermost foundation.

Žižek 2007

Žižek clearly is following not so much Derrida himself as Lacan, who in some way has rehabilitated Descartes via Freud. In Freud, as Lacan asserts, the subject and consciousness are not one and the same thing; ego does not coincide with the *cogito*. 'I is an other (*Je est un autre*), repeats Lacan after Rimbaud' (Lacan, 1988). There is a thought (and, with Lacan, speech) prior to any reasoned thinking and knowledge: 'Descartes did not know, <...> but we know, thanks to Freud, that the subject of the unconscious manifests itself; that it thinks before it attains certainty' (Lacan 1988: 37). Before any 'I' appears, it thinks and it speaks.

It should be remembered at this point that repression, according to Freud, concerns first and foremost the animal that is man. In particular, it refers to that initial, organic repression, the repression of properly animal instinct, as a result of which the unconscious is also formed. A culture as a whole, according to Freud, develops in the same way, as does each separate individual, in proportion to the ever-increasing distance it puts itself from animal immediacy while growing into an adult. Of course, this assertion is not so well-defined, and many authors, fully supportive of and continuing the teachings of Freud, would not agree with it (Lacan included) – dissatisfied in particular with the substantialisation of the unconscious as a kind of reservoir for the repressed, for an archive of the forgotten past, as well as its animalisation.

My own thesis in this regard is very simple, however: with certain limitations, it can be stated that the subject of the unconscious (specifically the subject, and not the substance) is the animal. And this animal thinks and speaks (though, it is true, only Kafka has been able to successfully understand and convey this speech). Animals that have not been invited, which frighten us, those with which it is hardest of all for us to identify with, return the repressed. The animal as subject of the unconscious is the core of madness not from without, but from within the human subject, in whose comfortable home it unfailingly produces an uncanny displacement. It never leaves its home, but was, in the process of man's self-domestication, driven into that dark corner from where it now gazes upon us absently, like a ghost.

Lacan's animals do not, of course, think and speak (to which Derrida retorts: do we ourselves even think or speak?) (Derrida 2008). Besides, Lacan's animals do not think and speak exactly

because they do not have an unconscious, as the unconscious (and not, for example, consciousness or reason) is that which conditions thought and speech. Some domestic animals do, it is true, nevertheless display some semblance, according to Lacan, of an unconscious, in so far as we draw them into communication (and habituate them, properly speaking, to human norms and rules). It is as if they were just about to speak, but their speech still comes out in a woof: the speaking and thinking human subject as a positive unit is born from repression and a gap, or splitting.

Lacan often uses the word 'gap'. What kind of gap is being referred to here? First of all, in the structuralist understanding, this is not a gap or rupture between something and something else, but rather the differentiation as such, which precedes the appearance of something and something else. This differentiation as such (pure negativity) may be thought of as a gap between the subject and being, between nothing and being, the human and the animal, nature and culture, the individual and the genus, and so on. In all cases, in the beginning there is a gap, an indifferent difference, and not some primordial harmonic unity between this and that. Indeed, this, in my opinion, is one of the most striking and definitive divergences between Lacan and Deleuze - two French intellectuals of roughly the same generation, but who explained the world in totally different ways. Deleuze interprets the unconscious straightforwardly as a positive animal multiplicity, which shows itself in intensity of affects. He believes in wild beasts, living in packs, is fascinated by insects, and laughs at those uninteresting domesticated animals who are, to his mind, the only fit subjects of such a repressive practice as psychoanalysis. Deleuze's unconscious is the terrain of savage beasts and swarming insects, knowing neither negativity nor the subject.

If indeed we concern ourselves with the subject, as understood by Lacan, and moreover, with the subject of the unconscious, then, sooner or later, this subject will lead us to nothing, to the pure negativity of difference, in which it dwells. In such a case, repression will not so much be the obscuring of our animal tracks or an unpersuasive attempt to eliminate nature, as the permanentation of this differentiation, which acquires a positive sense and in which 'the repressed and repression are the same thing' (Lacan 1991: 191). It is not something that is repressed, but rather nothing, from which everything originates in the course of this repression (including the repressed itself, which returns in the form of something). The human being drives away the unwelcome animal, from which he desires to distinguish himself, but the animal returns, and not because it was here before the human. The processes of domestication, self-domestication (as I term repression) and un-domestication

are simultaneous, and there is a deep kinship between Marty, which has taken on a name, a family and an individuality, and Gregor, who loses everything and melts away into space. The human and the animal, the host and the parasite, appeared at the same time, one gave birth to the other from indifferent difference. The repressed is the empty subject of the unconscious, coming to us in the form of a ghost or an animal, with which we are forced to share the uncanny comfort of our dwellings. Not only Kafka's insect stares into the emptiness of space, but this emptiness itself watches us from dark corners of the unconscious with the eyes of an unseeing insect. Its subject is the most radical atheist on earth, hiding from us in all its metamorphoses the almost unbearable truth that we have never had, and will never have, a proper home.

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