

## 8-Jonathan Franzen: His Bird Solution

écrit par Béatrice Pire

**Abstract:** This article examines Jonathan Franzen's different writings on birds inspired by his intense birding around the world in the past twenty years. The autobiographical approach, close to Derrida's redefinition of man as a suffering animal and exposition of animal plight, has gradually given way to the ethical fashion of the Great American Novel *Freedom* (2010) on endangered species and a number of ornithological essays contradicting the Audubon Society's position on climate change.

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### I. English, American, Postmodern Birds

Before discussing Jonathan Franzen's avian aesthetics and originality within the literary representation of birds in the United States in the past twenty years, two decades that were marked by the rise of eco-criticism and an increased attention paid to nature and endangered species<sup>1</sup>, an account of the place that birds have previously occupied in English and American literature needs to be given, through a few examples drawn from a long tradition. The most comprehensive work on the subject is Leonard Lutwack's *Birds in Literature* which divides the subject into different categories<sup>2</sup>. The bird is first envisioned as an allegory, as in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*, or as a symbol and metaphor, as in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" or Shelley's "To a skylark"<sup>3</sup>. In these cases, the bird, through the beauty of its plumage, its sense of direction, and its songs, aligns itself with the poet and becomes its muse. Like the poet, it has the ability to fly above the human world on "the viewless wings of poesy", as Keats writes in "Ode to a Nightingale" (line 33). The symbolism of the bird is not however limited to poetry, which is usually closer to music than fiction, as some American novels equally play with the symbolism of birds, the innocence of the dove for example, in *The Wings of the Dove* by Henry James or the vocal art of the lark in *The Song of the Lark* by Willa Cather<sup>4</sup>. Lutwack, in his work, distinguishes a second category of supernatural birds, which by their position between heaven and earth, either relate them to spirits or winged gods. The example of Poe's "The Raven" remains the most convincing one, but Lutwack also analyzes "*The Plumed Serpent*" by D.H. Lawrence and "The Crow" by Ted Hughes<sup>5</sup>. Then comes the figure of the hunted, trapped or killed bird which is closer to the vision that

Jonathan Franzen unfolds. In between the former and this last category comes, for instance, Coleridge's albatross, whose death brings about chaos in the human and cosmic world<sup>6</sup>. In the field of fiction, "The Painted Bird" by Jerzy Kosinsky also emblemizes human cruelty and the massacres perpetrated in Europe during World War II<sup>7</sup>. Conversely, Lutwack identifies an erotic dimension in the bird, such as one would find, for example, in La Fontaine's fable, "The Two Pigeons", and which runs through Shakespeare's drama, from the cuckoo of adultery in *Love's Labor's Lost* to the contrary swan of faithfulness in *As You Like It*. Without exhausting the subject, which has been extensively studied, it should be noted that 64 different species of birds are evoked in Shakespeare's works<sup>8</sup>. The last chapter of Lutwack's book opens a final field of investigation into the links between birds and literature challenged by a new reality that began to emerge when it was published in the mid-1990s, almost at the same time as Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*<sup>9</sup>—a time when the growing threat of species extinction was beginning to loom, while up until then only the dodo seemed to be concerned. To give just a few figures: 40% of bird species have disappeared over the past twenty years in Europe. According to *The Guardian*,

40% of all 10,000 or so bird species are in decline in the face of threats such as agricultural expansion, logging, invasive species and hunting. [...] The world's population of seabirds, a group that includes gulls, terns, albatrosses and others, has dropped by around 230m, a 70% slump, over the past 60 years due to slightly different group of maladies that also includes overfishing and plastic and oil pollution<sup>10</sup>.

As a consequence, writers of the new millennium cannot entirely treat the avian subject as former authors did, their representation being necessarily more elegiac and their relation also more ethical than the one of novelists and poets who lived in an environment that was still alive, if not less threatened. Following this perspective, critic Travis Mason, a specialist in "avian poetics" speaks more of representing a loss than a presence and deploying "an (avian) aesthetic of (avian) absence"<sup>11</sup>. In the past twenty years, a significant number of American novelists other than Franzen have called attention to this growing threat, going as far as comparing the ecological disaster to the other major

historical catastrophe at the beginning of the millennium. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, his novel published in 2005, Jonathan Safran Foer seems to suggest a visual equivalent between black birds fluttering on one of the three opening photographs of the book and human bodies falling from the towers on 9/11 in the closing pages. A little story told by the main protagonist of the novel, Oskar Schell, a nine-year-old boy whose father died in the attacks, not only explains the significance of the title but also invites to draw a further parallel between birds smashing into the towers' windows and the planes that were flown into the World Trade Center.

"During the spring and autumn bird-migration season, the lights that illuminate the tower are turned off on foggy nights so they won't confuse birds, causing them to fly into the building." I told her, "Then thousand birds die every year from smashing into windows," because I'd accidentally found that fact when I was doing some research about the windows in the Twin Towers. "That's a lot of birds," Mr. Black said. "And a lot of windows," Ruth said. "Yeah, so I invented a device that would detect when a bird is incredibly close to a building, and that would trigger an extremely loud birdcall from another skyscraper, and they'd be drawn to that. They'd bounce from one to another"<sup>12</sup>.

Yet, like the flip-book that closes the book in which bodies are rising up towards the sky instead of falling, the device here invented by the boy to save the birds, can be read both as a recognition of the catastrophe—the fall of human beings similar to the fall of birds from the sky, the fall of the towers and the collapse of history—as well as the denial of and an attempt to palliate it. Another significant publication on birds by Jonathan Safran Foer includes his book entitled *A Convergence of Birds*, in which many contemporary writers like Rick Moody, Joyce Carol Oates, Diane Williams, Paul West, Siri Hustvedt, Lydia Davis or Robert Coover wrote fictional texts and poems, not directly inspired by living birds, but by birds as they appear in American artist Joseph Cornell's bird boxes, birds that have already been represented, therefore birds of paper, dead birds and like Cornell's boxes, necessarily boxed in<sup>13</sup>. Published in 2001, this metafictional approach to birds already seemed to announce their fate and a future in which their representation could ultimately be reduced to only being the image of an image representing an absence.

## II. “The bird that therefore I am”

Among his peers, Jonathan Franzen is undoubtedly the writer most familiar with birds and their extinction in the real world over the last twenty years. This disappearance has necessarily induced an equal change in his approach to and in the writing of their existence.

While not an ornithologist per se, he is the writer who has certainly birded most or seen the greatest number of birds since his interest—if not his “compulsion”<sup>14</sup>—started some twenty years ago: several thousands and up to more than a thousand a year at times, as he explains in “The Essay in Dark Times”.

It happened that by going to Ghana I’d given myself a chance to break my previous year-list of 1,286 species. I was already over 800 for 2016, and I knew, from my online research, that trips similar to ours had produced nearly 500 species, only a handful of which are also common in America. If I could see 460 unique year species in Africa, and then use my seven-hour layover in London to pick up twenty easy European birds at a park near Heathrow, 2016 would be my best year ever (10).

He is also the writer who has written most extensively on the subject, although the writing form has changed over time, with the fate of birds following, in his view, that of the dying novel. In the 2018 article in the *Guardian*, mentioned above, “Birdwatching with Jonathan Franzen: ‘Climate change isn’t the only danger to birds’”, Franzen begins with this confessional statement: “The two things I love most are novels and birds, and they’re both in trouble, and I want to advocate for both of them”. The first text he published on the subject in *The New Yorker* in 2005 was entitled “My Bird Problem” in an odd reference, as he himself admits in an interview with *Birding* magazine, to Norman Podhoretz’s 1963 controversial essay “My Negro Problem-and Ours”, equating the plight of wild birds and the plight of human beings in a racist society<sup>15</sup>. The parallel appears again in a more recent lengthy article advertised on the cover of *National Geographic*, titled “Why Birds Matter”, which is also the name of a recent book by ornithologists, botanists, conservation biologists and environmental economists<sup>16</sup>. Without going into the details of the essay, it is worth noting, right from the title, the personal nature

of the approach underpinned by the possessive adjective “my” and the anthropomorphic and autobiographical dimension of birding or birdwatching. Indeed, the essay links this activity to Franzen’s family history and his Protestant upbringing, tracing the historical resonance that early environmental legislation may have had with his parents:

The breakthrough environmental legislation of that era, including the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and the Endangered Species Act, had attracted the support of President Nixon and both parties in Congress precisely because it made sense to old-fashioned Protestants, like my parents, who abhorred waste and made sacrifices for their kids’ future and respected God’s works and believed in taking responsibility for their messes<sup>17</sup>.

Franzen’s love for birds often resonates with his love life, as he notes in the *Birding* interview– “I fell in love with birds by way of a California woman I met in 1997” (18)–thus joining the long tradition of personification, previously noted by Lutwak, of birds as lovers. Franzen indeed admits that his favorite bird is the California Towhee not only because it is “the most beautiful bird in the world”, “the most beautiful in plumage” with a “voice unsurpassed” but also because “It’s one of the rare species that’s monogamous and mates for life. It sings duets” (*Birding*, 18). His relationship with birds is always described as an “affair” (“It was in California that the affair really took off”, “My Bird Problem”, 183), a passion (“birding isn’t just a passion” *Birding*, 20) and their discovery even compared to sex. In a recent segment on *CBS News*, while recalling his first experience of looking at a bird in a tree, Franzen said, “And the scales had fallen from my eyes. There was this other world .... It was like being introduced to sex”, a parallel whose metaphorical extensions can be found, for example, in the slang expression “giving the bird”<sup>18</sup>.

The discovery of the avian and animal world therefore leads Franzen to a form of ontological redefinition, where he seems to abolish the boundaries between human and animal, where the look at the other allows him to grasp his own animality, to grasp himself as a bird, leading as for Derrida, to the following self-portrait: “The [animal], the bird that therefore I am”<sup>19</sup>. The original experience of the new-found identity that

Derrida describes, feeling ashamed to be seen naked by a cat, “naked as a beast” (5), which makes him coin the term “animalséance” (4), resonates with the identical shame felt by Franzen, “feeling ashamed of being a birder” (*Birding*, 19) or being “[t]o [his] shame what people in the world of birding call a lister” (*The End of the End of the Earth*, 9). Like Derrida, Franzen also concludes that birds are not that different from humans:

[T]hey’re more similar to us than other mammals are. They build intricate homes and raise families in them. They take long winter vacations in warm places. Cockatoos are shrewd thinkers, solving puzzles that would challenge a chimpanzee, and crows like to play. [...] Chickadees have a complex language for communicating, not only to each other but to every bird in their neighborhood, how safe or unsafe they feel from predators. (“Why Birds Matter”, 36)

Elsewhere however, he recognizes their ultimate difference from humans: “The radical otherness of birds is integral to their beauty and their value. They are always among us but never of us” (“Why Birds Matter”, 40). This he sees in their ability to fly (“Birds also do the thing we all wish we could do but can’t except in dreams: they fly”, 37) as well as in their inability to “master their environment” (“one critical ability that human beings have and birds do not: mastery of their environment”, 37). But like Derrida again, who in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, answers Jeremy Bentham’s question (“Can [animals] suffer?”, 27) in the affirmative, Franzen sees suffering as the common characteristic of humans and animals and the capacity to feel compassion for a suffering animal as a condition for a truly humane humanity. “My Bird Problem” already acknowledged the suffering of birds, in which Franzen recognized his own:

They looked like a little band of misfits. Like a premonition of a future in which all birds will either collaborate with modernity or go off to die someplace quietly. What I felt for them went beyond love. I felt outright identification. [...] [T]he way they looked [...] my outcast friends, [...] was how I felt. I’d been told that it was bad to anthropomorphize [...]. It was, in any case, anthropomorphic only to see yourself in another species, not to see them in yourself. (189)



To describe their condition, Franzen even suggested the idea of “poverty”, the one that Heidegger used for the animal world, defined as “poor in world” (*weltarm*<sup>20</sup>). Franzen indeed argued that the “[t]he difficulty for birds is that they’re just profoundly poor” (187). In his anthropomorphizing of birds however, Franzen distances himself from another philosophical tradition, that of Gilles Deleuze, for instance, who “sought to think the animal in an absolutely nonanthropomorphic way”<sup>21</sup>, mostly exemplified in Deleuze’s comments on the tick<sup>22</sup>. Between a metaphysical and cartesian tradition that envisions man as different from animal, which Franzen recognizes both in “religious believers and secular humanists” (“we are *not* like other animals; because we have consciousness and free will, the capacity to remember our pasts and shape our futures”, “Why Birds Matter”, 39) and his closeness to Derrida’s belief that sensitivity rather than thinking defines man and that the animal world feels pain just like the human world, Franzen does not however clearly decide, finding both views “neither provably true nor provably false” (39).

### III. Birds and the Great American Novel

Having become “increasingly distressed about the plight of wild birds” that he first acknowledged in “My Bird Problem” (186) –a problem with birds which soon evolved into problems that birds now rather have with human beings as most are threatened with extinction–Franzen transcribed this avian suffering into the novel form of *Freedom*, published in 2010, on the cover of which is drawn the endangered bird in question, the cerulean warbler<sup>23</sup>. Without going into the details of the novel, it is worth noting here the generic evolution of avian representation from the autobiographical essay toward the fashion of the Great American Novel, a tradition in which Franzen writes, as it was immediately recognized on the cover of *Time* magazine when the book was released<sup>24</sup>. Perhaps can it even be assumed that it is the bird or the animal which inspired this novelistic form. Indeed, if we consider that the pioneer of eco-criticism is also the finest specialist of the GAN, Lawrence Buell, the author of the *Environmental Imagination* and *The Dream of the American Novel*, we may be led to think that there is a link between environmental imagination and the Great American Novel style of writing, the common point between the two possibly being the soul<sup>25</sup>.

Even if the definition has been complexified since the term was coined in 1868 by John William DeForest, the Great American Novel often remains up to this day the “painting” of “the American soul”<sup>26</sup>. Following Plato’s vision of the soul as winged, Franzen likewise argues, in “Why Birds Matter”, that birds “help our souls”, that their “populations [...] usefully indicate [...] the health of our *ethical* values” (38), and that if “we are more worthy than other animals”, “our ability to discern right from wrong [should] make us *more* susceptible to the claims of nature” (39-40). Franzen thus aligns himself with Derrida on his analysis of man’s “subjection of the animal” as the manifestation of his moral cruelty, as he describes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*:

However one interprets it, whatever practical, technical, scientific, juridical, ethical, or political consequence one draws from it, no one can today deny this event—that is, the *unprecedented* proportions of this subjection of the animal. Such a subjection [...] call be called violence in the most morally neutral sense of the term. (25)

Derrida even goes so far as to speak of “genocide”, in agreement with the thought of Adorno who formerly analyzed the holocaust as the consequence of a murderer’s mad gaze or distorted perception of other men as being ‘only animals’<sup>27</sup>. But Derrida takes a further step by calling attention to the violence now inflicted on animals and comparing today’s endangered species to the former assassination of people.

No one can deny seriously any more, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves; in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence, which some would compare to the worst cases of genocide (there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one’s breath away. (25-26)

Franzen shares this vision of man as a criminal subjecting the animal world, as it was first commanded in *Genesis*. That commandment was commented in detail by Derrida who relates the taming, domination, domestication or “*subject[ion of]* the fish of the sea [or] the flying



creatures of the heaven” to their calling and naming (15-18) and subsequently coins the term *animots* (47) to simultaneously suggest the ideas of evil (*maux*), word (*mots*) and animal (*animaux*). In the last decade, Franzen has consequently been proposing an ethical approach to the ecological question and the fate of birds, but one which has gradually moved away from a guilty and apocalyptic Puritanism – as mentioned earlier in “My Bird Problem” – and is increasingly inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi. This new influence has led him to launch a controversy with the Audubon Society and many climate activists, a position expressed in a series of essays no longer of merely autobiographical content but also “practical, technical, scientific, legal, or political”, as Derrida invites to evaluate the consequences of human cruelty on the animal world.

#### IV. The “Carbon Capture”

First published in *The New Yorker*, especially the controversial “Carbon Capture” article, or elsewhere, these texts have been collected in *The End of the End of the Earth*. Must be added to this book the 2019 *New Yorker* essay “What If We Stopped pretending?”, the subtitle of which is “The climate apocalypse is coming. To prepare for it, we need to admit that we can’t prevent it” <sup>28</sup>. Offering a seemingly “bird of ill omen” vision, the article starts with a quotation by Kafka “There is infinite hope, only not for us” but reverts it into “*There is no hope, except for us*”. Franzen’s “Franciscan” stance was already evident in a 2012 collection of essays *Farther Away*, particularly in the text entitled “The Ugly Mediterranean” where Franzen, after he had targeted the cat as the first killer of birds in *Freedom*, now denounced the hunters of Cyprus:

Every spring, some five billion birds come flooding up from Africa to breed in Eurasia, and every year as many as a billion are killed deliberately by humans, most notably on the migratory flyways of the Mediterranean. [...] While Europeans may think of themselves as models of environmental enlightenment—they certainly lecture the United States and China on carbon emissions as if they were —the populations of many resident and migratory birds in Europe have been collapsing alarmingly in the past ten years. [...] A world of birds already battered by habitat loss and intensive agriculture is being hastened toward extinction by hunters and trappers. Spring in the Old

Concluding his essay on the vegetarian figures of Ovid and Leonardo da Vinci, he invokes above all, as a possible saving model, that of Saint Francis who, according to the legend, spoke to the birds that listened to him. After visiting the site of “The Sermon to the Birds”, he puts forward the idea that only the gospel of this saint is capable of saving creation. This led him, as stated earlier, to contradict the Audubon Society’s belief that “climate change [is] the greatest threat to American birds” (*The End*, 43) and to contrast two traditions: the one “inspired by St. Francis of Assisi’s example of loving what’s concrete and vulnerable and right in front of us” (44) and the one of New England Puritanism, which he sees resurfacing in a certain type of environmentalism: for most climate-activists, he says, “to be human is to be guilty” (44) and “now climate change has given us an eschatology for reckoning with our guilt: coming soon [...] is Judgment Day” (44). The essay is a step-by-step deconstruction of the “dominance of climate change” as “the environmental issue of our time” (45). The arguments he makes are the following: “the modeling is fraught with uncertainties”; “some birds could tolerate a higher temperature” (46); “it’s a ready-made meme [that] is usefully imponderable” (47); while “three billion birds die from collisions and outdoor cats every year”, “no individual bird death can be definitely attributed to climate change” (47); “declaring climate change bad for birds is the opposite of controversial” (47); “climate change is everyone’s fault-in other words, no one’s” (48). And Franzen enlists other causes of destruction that he sees equally valuable : “the rising population”, “deforestation”, “intensive agriculture”, “pesticide and plastic pollution”, “the spread of invasive species” (48). “To prevent extinctions in the future, [he says] it’s not enough to curb our carbon emission” (48). Even more controversial, Franzen sees common attributes between “climate change” and the “economic system that’s accelerating it”: “it’s transnational, [...] disruptive, self-compounding, and inescapable. It defies individual resistance [...] and tends toward global monoculture – the extinction of difference at the species level, a monoculture of agenda at the institutional level. It also meshes nicely with the tech industry” (54), which Franzen abhors.

The interest of the essay first lies in the literary dimension it lends to the

“climate change narrative”. For him this narrative is “simple” and “the story can be told in fewer than a hundred and forty characters” (55), hence the difficulty to list all the arguments and summarize Franzen’s demonstration which is long, complex and subtle. Opposed to this simplistic story of “climate change” that erases all differences, Franzen favors what he calls “conservation”, a position that may resonate with his literary semi-conservative tendencies: “Conservation work, in contrast, is novelistic. No two places are alike, and no narrative is simple” (55). And he finishes the essay by giving one detailed example of the way Amazon Conservation Association helps a small indigenous community in Peru. The second interest of this essay, apart from articulating a discordant voice against the orthodoxy, unanimity and anonymity of the report on climate change, is also to have grasped its ideological character. But, as during the Oprah affair twenty years earlier and Franzen’s politically incorrect stance, the essay was attacked and Franzen called “birdbrain” and “climate-change denier” (“The Essay”, 19), which led him, once again, to repent for his crime and write a public confession in the New England Puritan manner that he resists, “The Essay in Dark Times” which opens *The End of the End of the Earth*, even if it was written after the “Carbon Capture” piece. This essay is a new kind of revision, correction and punishment that Franzen has once again inflicted on himself. But it is also a perfect example of the essay form, altogether “practical, technical, scientific, legal, ethical or political” where Franzen’s *I* gradually vanishes to open up to birds that he tries to envision in “an absolutely nonanthropomorphic manner”, like Gilles Deleuze in yesteryears. There Franzen defines the essayist he tries to be, “as a firefighter, whose job, while everyone else is fleeing the flames of shame, is to run straight into them” (18); and – as Henry Finder, his editor at *The New Yorker* once called him, as a new kind of “climate changer” who merely uses the tools of his writings and controversial texts. “With public opinion”, he said, “there’s weather, and then there’s climate. You’re trying to change the climate, and that takes time” (21).

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[1](#) Eco-criticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [...] eco-criticism takes an earth centered approach to literary studies” (Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, xviii). Although there are prior interventions on the subject in the earlier decades, the investigation in the relations between the human world and the natural world in literature really took off with Lawrence Buell’s study on Thoreau *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) which was published almost at the same time as *The Ecocriticism Reader*. The rise of eco-criticism coincided with the global environmental crisis at the turn of the century with new threats of environmental destruction, depletion of natural resources, population explosion, pollution and the extinction of species.

[2](#) Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994.

[3](#) Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, London, Langley Press, 2016.

John Keats, *The Major Works*, Oxford, Oxford's World Classics, 2008

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[7](#) Jerzy Kosinski, *The Painted Bird*, New York, Grove Press, 1976 [1966].

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[9](#) Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination : Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996.

[10](#) "Birdwatching with Jonathan Franzen : 'climate change isn't the only danger to birds'". *The Guardian*, 14 November 2018.

[11](#) « Toward an (Avian) Aesthetic of (Avian) absence". *Alternation*, 16.2, 2009, p. 152-179. By the same author, *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay*, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013.

[12](#) Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 2005, p. 250.

[13](#) *A Convergence of Birds : Original Fiction and Poetry Inspired by the Works of Joseph*



Cornell, ed. Jonathan Safran Foer, London, Penguin, 2001.

[14](#) Franzen uses the word in “The Essay in Dark Times”. He confesses to be a “lister” in the world of birding and to have “a compulsive counting” : “I really am compulsive”, he admits. *The End of the End of the Earth*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018, p. 9.

[15](#) “My Bird Problem”, *New Yorker*, August 8, 2005, p. 52-60.

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[17](#) “My Bird Problem” in *The Discomfort Zone*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, p. 172.

[18](#) *CBS This morning Saturday*, Mar 17, 2018.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/why-author-jonathan-franzen-fell-in-love-with-birds-and-protecting-them/>

[19](#) “Since so long ago, can we say that the animal has been looking at us? What animal? The other. I often ask myself just to see *who I am* [...]. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (trans. David Wills), New York, Fordham University Press, 2008 [2006], p. 3.

[20](#) On the notion of “poverty in world”, see Giorgio Agamben : “The guiding thread of Heidegger’s exposition is constituted by the triple thesis: ‘the stone is worldless [weltlos]; the animal is poor in world [weltarm]; man is world-forming [weltbildend]”, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004 [2002], p. 51.

[21](#) Agamben, *The Open*, p. 39-40.

[22](#) Inspired by J. von Uexküll's study of the tick, Gilles Deleuze made reference to the insect in many of his books and used it to forge the concept of "becoming-animal". See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza. Philosophie pratique*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1981 [1970], 167-8. 3. See also the following quote: « A distant successor of Spinoza would say: look at the tick, admire that creature; it is defined by three affects, which are all it is capable of as a result of the relationships of which it is composed, nothing but a tri-polar world! Light affects it and it climbs on to the end of branch. The smell of a mammal affects it and it drops down on to it. The hair gets in its way and it looks for a hairless place to burrow the skin and drink the warm blood. Blind and deaf, the tick has only three affects in the vast forest, and for the rest of the time may sleep for years awaiting the encounter. What power, nevertheless! In *Dialogues*, transl. Tomlinson & Habberjam, New York, Columbia University, 1987, 60.

[23](#) *Freedom*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

[24](#) A portrait of Jonathan Franzen shows on the cover of Aug. 23, 2010 *Time* magazine alongside the words "Great American Novelist".

[25](#) *The Dream of the Great American Novel*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2014.

[26](#) "This task of painting the American soul within the framework of a novel". John William DeForest, *The Nation*, 9 January 1868.

[27](#) "The possibility of pogroms is decided in the moment when the gaze of a fatally-wounded animal falls on a human being. The defiance with which he repels this gaze-'after all, it's only an animal'-reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings, the perpetrators having again and again to reassure themselves that it is 'only an animal', because they could never fully believe this even of animals." Theodor Adorno, "People are looking at you", in *Minima Moralia, Reflections on a Damaged Life* (trans. E.F.N. Jephcott), New York, Verso, 2005 [1951], p. 105.

[28](#) "Carbon Capture", *The New Yorker* (April 6, 2015), reprinted as "Save What You love" in *The End of the End of the Earth*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

"What if we stopped pretending", *The New Yorker*, September 8, 2019.

[29](#) *Farther Away*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012, p. 86.