During our e-mail conversation a few years ago, Paul di Filippo seduced me into reading his sexually explicit SF novel *A Mouthful of Tongues: Her Totipotent Tropicanalia* (*AMoT*) by describing it as “the most ‘transgressive’ and posthumanist and gender-conscious” text he has written so far. Indeed, published in 2002 and classified in reviews as “erotica”, even “pornography”, *AMoT* imagines a possible world where ‘monstrous’ mutations and Escherian transformations of all sorts are the order of the day: mainly through orgiastic intercourse with other human or non-human creatures, men change into women, women into men, human beings into animal-human hybrids and finally, at the end of the book, into jaguars, flocks of birds and swarms of butterflies. In the light of psychologist Susan Oyama’s developmental systems theory and similar biological as well as philosophical theories of evolution and change that inform my textual analysis, these metamorphic processes can be seen as invitations to the reader and critic to conceptualise (post)human identity as neither predicated upon the constituting logic of man/woman nor sustained by the human/animal abyss. As a radical alternative to the dominant cultural imaginary concerning cross-species sociality in 21st-century naturecultures, *AMoT* offers more politically promising representations of the multiplicities and complex assemblages ‘we’ are (becoming).

The novel thus lends itself perfectly as material to further explore the construction, deconstruction as well as reconstruction of species boundaries in contemporary literary, philosophical and scientific writings. Moreover, the essay reflects my larger endeavour to intervene in two domains of cultural theory and practice by taking animal encounters seriously: one is the field of posthumanism, the other the field of feminism.¹

¹ Some passages of this essay have appeared in slightly mutated form in my online publication of 2006 and have also been elaborated into a longer German text, forthcoming in *Gender Goes Life*, edited by Marie-Luise Angerer and Christiane König (2008).
While both fields are heterogeneous and pursue different questions and agendas, they share the goal of thinking beyond binary oppositions such as human-machine, human-animal, nature-culture, man-woman, heterosexual-homosexual, etc. Yet, while the former—especially so-called “cybernetic” or “popular” posthumanism—has often been “all too humanist”, reinforcing old hierarchies in the guise of the “new” or “post” (Rossini 2005), the latter has also not been able so far to forge analytical tools to do away with the body-mind dualism proven to be so harmful to women and all of Man’s Others. What might help feminists (and any scholar committed to justice and social change) to theorise difference outside oppressive and hierarchical dualistic frameworks, as Donna Haraway suggests in her latest book, is “to come face-to-face with animals” (2008, p. 72). As a consequence of meeting and falling in love with Cayenne (an individual of the Australian Shepherd breed), Haraway herself looks specifically at dogs and dog-human relations in order to learn “an ethics and politics committed to the flourishing of significant otherness” (2003, p. 3). Cyborgs, she adds, are no longer good trainers in this respect:

I appropriated cyborgs to do feminist work in Reagan’s Star Wars times of the mid-1980s. By the end of the millennium, cyborgs could no longer do the work of a proper herding dog to gather up the threads needed for critical inquiry. (p. 4)

Many of Haraway’s books and talks include personal stories of intimate encounters as a starting-point for theorising. In the piece of “dog writing”, the Companion Species Manifesto I quoted from above, it is tongue-kissing between a human and a canine bitch (a term of honour for Haraway) that seems to have triggered off her critical reflections and implicit recoding of “love” and “sexuality” beyond heterosexual and speciesist grand narratives:

Ms Cayenne Pepper continues to colonize all my cells—a sure case of what the biologist Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis. I bet if you checked our DNA, you’d find some potent transfections between us. Surely, her darter-tongue kisses have been irresistible…. Her… quick and lithe tongue has swabbed the tissues of my tonsils, with all their eager immune system

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2 Kate Hayles has used the term “cybernetic posthuman” in her standard work on posthumanism as a technical-cultural phenomenon (1999, p. 4). The label “popular posthumanism” figures prominently in Cultural Critique 53 (Winter 2003), dedicated to posthumanist culture and theory.