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KNOTTING THE HUMANIMAL ASSEMBLAGE. RACE; ANIMALS AND ART IN POSTSOCIALIST BELGRADE.

Introduction: Contexts, Theories, Concepts

Material-semiotic body-flows that participate in the formation of ontic differences through humanimal assemblage are of variable duration and form/content – humans, capital, state apparatus, nonhuman (non)living beings, artworks, etc. I will pay particular attention to the ways in which these body-flows coalesce and knot around, between, and within those human beings who are overcoded as non-white/Roma and white/ethnic Serbs. The concept of race is important here, as the difference between

Roma and Serbs is usually thought about in ethnic terms.¹ However, such a conceptualization erases important processes of racialization in the production of differences for the purpose of setting up repressive and exploitative socio-political hierarchies. It ignores the ways in which race plays a part in the production of differences between human and nonhuman animals. It also avoids the issue of violent dominance of whiteness that is intertwined with the (re)production of reproductive heterosexuality, which needs to be critically addressed.²

While it may seem surprising given the different historical and cultural context, I follow more recent work in Afropessimist thought in the approach to the phenomenon of race in South-East Europe and the Balkans. Namely, Serbia and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia never took part in slavery. To the contrary, socialist Yugoslavia participated in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War which actively fought against colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation. It is important to note that I am not setting up analogies between the historical and contemporary experiences of Black and Roma people. These racialized experiences are different. I am trying to think *alongside* the concepts developed within the Afropessimist thought. As explicated in more depth in the third section of this article, Jackson's

¹ There are rare exceptions; see Baker, Catherine (2018). *Race and the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-conflict, Postcolonial?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

² I recognize the importance of gender and sexuality for the (re)production of capitalism and white cis-heteronormative socius. Besides the differences between living and nonliving, human and animal, nonwhite and white humans, there are also sexual and gender differences at work in these formations. For an explicit analysis and critique of relations between cis-heteronormative gender regime and capitalism, as well as for other consequences of this particular sex/gender regime see Gleeson, Jules J.; O'Rourke, Elle (Eds.) (2021). *Transgender Marxism*. London: Pluto Press. For specifically Roma perspectives on these issues see Kóczé, Agéla; Zentai, Violetta; Jovanović, Jelena; Vincze, Eniko (Eds.) (2019). *The Romani Women's Movement: Struggles and Debates in Central and Eastern Europe*. London / New York: Routledge, and Corradi, Laura (2018). *Gypsy Feminism: Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism*. London / New York: Routledge.

concept of ontological plasticity³ cannot apply to racializing processes at work within/between/on Roma people. Roma people are produced as ontologically rigid. However, thinking alongside the Afropessimism enables novel insights about racializing processes at work elsewhere.⁴ Thus, I follow Alexander G. Weheliye who defines whiteness and white supremacy as

“a logic of social organization that produced regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized ‘human’ difference”, while blackness “designates a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot”.⁵

According to him, racializing assemblages “construe race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans”.⁶ Weheliye’s analysis of relations between blackness and whiteness is much more on the point for what I am interested in – ontic differences between human and nonhuman animals – than established discourse of ethnicity studies,⁷ as these presuppose that differences in ethnicity are always already between unmarked white human subjects and marked non-white subjects.

³ See Jackson, Zakiyyah I. (2020). *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*. New York: New York University Press, 3.

⁴ For arguments against analogies between Black and other nonwhite people see Wilderson III, Frank B. (2020). *Afropessimism*. New York: Liveright.

⁵ Weheliye, Alexander G. (2014). *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham / London: Duke University Press, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ Like those referenced in the footnote 2.

Those humans racialized as non-white are socially produced as spatio-temporally and ontically closer to animals across the whole spectrum of material-semiotic registers, so much so that one can rather speak of *humanimal assemblage* in which identity and differences are produced and maintained based on previously (over)coded and knotted material-semiotic body-flows. I follow Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their understanding of the concept of assemblage as consisting of vertical axis that includes becomings and horizontal axis consisting of bodies and their mixtures adding the flows of matter that are not organized as bodies to the horizontal axis. As they note, an assemblage “in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously”, and it contains all sorts of multiplicities such as “human, social, and technical machines, organized molar machines; molecular machines with their particles of becoming-inhuman”.⁸ It should also be noted that assemblages can be of varying scope and of varying duration, including smaller or larger units of space (neighbourhood, local, glocal, global, planetary) and shorter or longer units of time. Assemblages are multimaterial – include various materialities such as bodies, signs, affects, and pluritemporal – as various elements of the assemblage possess different temporalities given their different materiality.

Art plays an important role in this humanimal assemblage, knotting together institutions that surround it and enable its production with processes of racialization, animalization and humanization. Zoran Todorović's *Gypsies and Dogs* (2009), an artwork that will be in the focus of the first part of the paper, enters as a constitutive element into this

⁸ Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Félix (2005). *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 22-23, 36.

humanimal assemblage on the basis of previously produced differences between species and racial differences. While supposedly questioning the close relation of Roma people and dogs, this artwork shines a light on a network of various body-flows that actively participate in processes of racialization, animalization, and humanization.

Casting a more abstract look, one can critically analyze relations between various (over)coding processes that constitute this historically contingent humanimal assemblage. In that abstracted view, processes of overcoding and weaving/knotting body-flows enter into a relation of resonance and amplify each other in the urban ecology of Belgrade. Instead of having a vertical ontological and axiological axis that would serve as a basis for substantializing identities and then critiquing it, the transversal movement of multiplicity of body-flows that make various assemblages (including the humanimal one) de-essentializes all categories insisting on ontopolitics of horizontal becomings. As Guattari writes, transversality is a process that “strives to capture existence in the very act of its constitution, definition and deterritorialization”.⁹ It is from there that transversal ethico-aesthetic practices should begin with their critical micro-physical work of unknotting in order to loosen the hold of the dominant humanimal assemblage, and produce lines of flight away from the intersecting processes of humanization, animalization, and racialization.

What follows in the next two sections are examples of transversality in action. In the first section, I describe the knotting together of the state apparatus, postsocialist condition, animals and racialized human

⁹ Guattari, Félix (2000). *The Three Ecologies*. Translated by I. Pindar and P. Sutton. London: The Athlone Press, 44.

animals. In the second section, I give a close description of the art world, the public, and the art work around which and in which multiplicity of material-semiotic processes knot and coalesce. The third section offers a theoretical explanation and reflection of what appears as the knotting of humanimal assemblage through these two case studies. In conclusion, I offer a concept of ontological heterogenesis as the unknotting for a critique of forceful relation of multiplicity of elements within the humanimal assemblage.

The State, Postsocialism, and the Animals

In the summer of 2018, together with a number of passers-by, I was a witness to the death of a dog. The attacking dog ‘belonged’ to a white Serbian family with a house nearby, while the attacked dog belonged to the Roma family living in a shack between the white Serbian family’s house and my building. The police were also called to restore order. The Roma family was clearly alarmed, claiming that their dog was to blame for the attack (which she was not, she was barely moving being pregnant). Emergency animal rescue service, when they finally arrived, would do nothing but put her to sleep since she was ‘ownerless’. This event took place in a street surrounded by recently made buildings, an effect of investment urbanism, an aspect of the postsocialist condition in Belgrade.

This event included several material-semiotic body-flows of different historical provenances that became particularly intensive in their weaving together. The state apparatus in the form of the police shined bright, as a couple of police officers tried to restore order in the group of gathered and highly emotional people. The affective atmosphere of the event was one of panic, fear, and sorrow, tightly relating the white people

around the body of the dying dog (me included). The Roma family kept to themselves, away from the eyes of the gathered group of people, after explaining to the policemen what happened. They obviously did not want to have anything with the police, nor with the group of white people around the dog. The Roma did not want to have anything with the police, that is, the state with its long history of racialized repressive measures against the Roma people. On the other side there was the white Serbian family that reacted rather violently to the situation, and who counted on their status as white and Serbian (and aggressive masculinity) in their approach to the neighboring Roma family and concerned gathered individuals. The father from the family was going around shouting at people for calling the police, blaming everyone for what transpired except himself.

All these body-flows with varying histories were gathered in the space that enabled the death of a dog, with the body of the dying dog being a focal point of the event. The shack, the house, and the surrounding apartment buildings are arranged in such a way to produce densely occupied space in which conflicted individuals and groups of people rub against each other intensively. The density of the space was produced by the investment urbanism. Investment urbanism is an aspect of the postsocialist condition, a condition that names a several decades long transition from self-governing socialism to liberal democratic sociopolitical order and economy based on market capitalism. The beginning of postsocialist transitional economic and political state is usually dated to the year 2001, the year when Slobodan Milošević fell after a decade of dictatorship marked by the dissolution of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia that followed the dissolution, years of economic sanctions

followed by hyperinflation and social decay, Kosovo war and NATO bombing campaign to end it in 1999.

The 21st century began with the rise of democratic rule, and with the sociopolitical and economic reforms aimed at accession to the European Union. What these reforms entailed is radical change of the form of production. Namely, Serbia had to change from self-governing socialism which entailed state and worker ownership of means of production to the privatization of means of production. Also, the rule of one party had to be changed to liberal democratic framework. That is, the market had to be deregulated and the state and worker owned property privatized, all under the banner of democratic reforms. In a word, the whole economic and sociopolitical system had to be reordered.¹⁰ The reordering is still underway in 2021, with chapters for the EU accession being opened slowly or none at all depending on the success of required reforms.

Investment urbanism has followed this trajectory of deregulation and privatization toward a supposed (neo)liberal European future.¹¹ Belgrade infrastructure has undergone several major (re)construction phases, the first before World War I with the aim of constructing the nation-state, the second after World War II with the aim of repairing the destroyed city but also to build a new, socialist society. The third phase is the postsocialist one, marked by the investment urbanism boom enabled by the relaxed regulations in relation to urban planning for the purpose of attracting investments. This relaxation of regulations has

¹⁰ See Calic, Marie-Janine (2019). *A History of Yugoslavia*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.

¹¹ For a detailed description and discussion see Petrović, Jelisaveta & Backović, Vera (Eds.). (2019). *Experiencing Postsocialist Capitalism - Urban Changes and Challenges in Serbia*. Belgrade: University of Belgrade.

been followed by the lack of control of private capital, as well as the inadequate law enforcement resulting in a newly built urban environment overburdening the existing infrastructure, which has not been maintained properly even since it has been built in socialist times. The new overbuilt urban environment affects the lives of both human and nonhuman inhabitants in various ways,¹² especially (dis)abling the movement of bodies-flows due to the density of the built environment and overburdening of infrastructure.

The event of the death of the dog has played out as a consequence of intertwining of body-flows of various durations and intensities. Spatially, it has played out between apartment buildings built as a result of investment urbanism taking over a neighborhood that used to consist of smaller residential houses with plenty of space in between them to include grass fields that served as spaces for the Roma to raise their improvised residences. With the appearance of apartment buildings that space shrunk bringing white Serbs, state apparatus, animals, and the Roma ever closer. Important spatial difference, however, is that white Serbs cannot be moved, while the Roma are exposed to both civilian and state surveillance and the ever present threat of being evicted.¹³ Whiteness of Serbs is also produced as a spatial effect of property ownership, that is, as an effect of investment urbanism and the postsocialist transitional socio-economic state.

¹² For a study of *invasive* species of insects such as Asian lady beetles (*Harmonia axyridis*) and brown marmorated stink bugs (*Halyomorpha halys*) in urban ecology of Belgrade, which are also racialized, see Filipović, Andrija (2021). "Three Bugs in The City: Urban Ecology and Multispecies Relationality in Postsocialist Belgrade". *Contemporary Social Science*, 16 (1), 29-42.

¹³ For an example from 2009 see Kilibarda, Konstantin (2011). "Clearing Space: An Anatomy of Urban Renewal, Social Cleansing and Everyday Life in a Belgrade *Mahala*". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 24 (1), 593-612.

While the Roma family lives in a shack together with several dogs, whiteness of Serbs is also cast as a voluntary relationship with animals in the form of keeping pets, which is performed in an 'orderly manner' such as walking the pets on leash in designated areas within public spaces, usually public parks. Whiteness is, thus, produced through spatio-temporal technologies, such as the distribution of effects of investment urbanism and transition toward market capitalism. It is those who are racialized as white that gain everything from the recent real-estate boom and economic transition toward market capitalism, while the Roma are displaced from those parts of the city that are deemed favorable for investment and pushed further to the city margins and into abysmal living conditions. This also affects human-animal differences and relations, as the Roma and their relations to animals are erased from the public view (the becoming-companion of the animals), while the dominant image of animal as a pet in urban ecology is maintained and through it human-ness as white-ness.

Art, Art World, and the Public

Building on the description of the event of the death of a dog in the previous section, the second knotting together of body-flows that I will describe is related to the production of the humanimal assemblage through Zoran Todorović's piece *Gypsies and Dogs* (2009). Todorović, in his own words, realized the video "as a street intervention, where begging children, and city stray dogs, equipped with hidden micro cameras, were filming segments of their everyday existence, and particularly some of its symptomatic moments".¹⁴ Then he presented the

¹⁴ Todorović, Zoran (2016). "Introduction". In Zoran Todorović (Ed.), *Gypsies and Dogs II: Symptoms and Traces of the Public Reception*. Beograd: ProArtOrg, 1.

filmed material as a two-channel video installation first at the Museum of Contemporary Arts Vojvodina in Novi Sad in 2009, and then in the Museum of History of Yugoslavia as a part of the 50th October Salon in 2009.¹⁵ Todorović's piece caused several waves of uproar among the members of the public, with a number of public discussions organized and various media outlets airing reactions of concerned parties throughout the years after the exhibition. The first public debate was held in 2012 in Cultural Center Rex with various actors from art, culture and law circuit from Serbia and abroad taking part in discussion.¹⁶ Another debate was held in 2014 organized by the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade.¹⁷ In other words, a material-semiotic knotting of dogs, Roma, art, art institutions, cultural workers, artists, university professors, media, and a number of other material-semiotic body-flows was formed.

I will not address the issue of material-semiotic knotting from the point of view of universal white humanity, which would require axiological and aesthetic judgment of the artwork in question. I will, however, look at this artwork as one semiotic-material body-flow among many other human and nonhuman body-flows that circulate within the socius and thereby unsettle universal white humanity's claim to universality and human-ness. How were the various human and nonhuman body-flows

¹⁵ October Salon is an annual manifestation in Belgrade dedicated to the exhibition of contemporary visual art, both domestic and foreign. It was founded in 1960 by the city of Belgrade, internationalized in 2004, and since then each year an individual or a group of curators selects a number of artworks in accordance with the year's theme. For more see www.oktobarskosalon.org.

¹⁶ See Cultural Centre Rex (Ed). (2012). *Debate on the institutional treatment of the work of art "Cigani i psi" (Gypsies and Dogs) by Zoran Todorović: Essays by participants written after the debate held in Rex Cultural Centre on April 27th 2012*. Belgrade: Cultural Centre Rex.

¹⁷ See Seecult. (2014, December 22). *Cigani i psi - javna recepcija*; <http://www.seecult.org/vest/cigani-i-psi-javna-recepcija>

knotted together then? At the level of the very materiality of the artwork, its content is intended to be a focal point of knotting together various body-flows, and Todorović achieved this by filming the content with noise and imprecision with intention to leave space for the viewers to organize it according to their own cultural codes. However noisy the content, Todorović still coded an overall framework of experience by not only bringing together dogs and Roma children in the forceful ontic closeness thus enabling the work of the humanimal assemblage but also projecting an image of dogs being companions to the children, as both of them are living in the streets instead of homes, which is another marker of racialized relations between human and nonhuman animals. Todorović conceived the piece with the title

as a functional part of the work construction... with the idea that it would create presumptions and expectations within the public, expected to interpret the presented visual content along those lines. The visual content was conceptual and technically realized with lots of noise and imprecision, thus not providing much information about the filmed event. This informational void was filled in by the public inscribing their own content onto these images depending on the position each person was occupying in relation to the racist political code, or the code of political correctness which is also a way of marking the other.¹⁸

A visitor of the October Salon describes the installation in the following way:

¹⁸ Todorović, Zoran (2016). "Introduction". In Zoran Todorović (Ed.), *Gypsies and Dogs II: Symptoms and Traces of the Public Reception*. Beograd: ProArtOrg, 1-2.

The video is a low quality recording of a rather chaotic movement of the camera. The child itself cannot be seen, other children are visible and once, the child's hand. There are lots of cars and a rumour of a conversation, several hands handing over almost closed car windows some money to the child. On the other video there is a very poor recording of the dog's movement, it moves amongst some people, allegedly these people are of roma nationality, we can see a brown child's hand caressing intermittently the dog's head in front of the camera, we cannot see the dog itself, we can just see this hand caressing its pelt in front of the camera, and that's it.¹⁹

The first wave of reactions this piece caused immediately upon exhibition in 2009. As Todorović notes, "polemics and protests within various political, activist and art circles (appeared) mainly circulating through emails, blog posts, daily magazines or analytical texts in professional publications, which resulted in some noticed theoretical insights".²⁰ These theoretical texts as well as other less analytical ones – both digital and non-digital, as reactions and analyses appeared in various media including printed daily papers – made Todorović's piece "an art-book of sorts, further accompanying the work as its constitutive part, and part of its installations, endowing it with a specific post-media format in the sense that this work becomes its own medium, opening a broader discursive and performative field".²¹ A vast network of intersecting texts of various types – theoretical texts published in

¹⁹ Usernameka. (2016). "Gypsies and Dogs - Help Yourselves". In Zoran Todorović (Ed.), *Gypsies and Dogs II: Symptoms and Traces of the Public Reception*. Beograd: ProArtOrg, 1. The text continues with reflections on the relation of Todorović's work with racism, fascism, and child exploitation.

²⁰ Todorović, Zoran (2016). "Introduction". In Zoran Todorović (Ed.), *Gypsies and Dogs II: Symptoms and Traces of the Public Reception*. Beograd: ProArtOrg, 2.

²¹ Todorović, "Introduction", 2.

scholarly journals, journalistic texts published on websites and in print, blog and email list posts - is seen as constitutive of the artwork as such. The work itself becomes an assemblage gathering together a multiplicity of material-semiotic body-flows that are overcoded in diverse ways across materialities (affects, signs, bodies) and across temporalities (various pasts and presents at the times of exhibitions, reactions, publications, etc. as well as futurities projected by diverse actions, desires, and intentions). The multimateriality of *Gypsies and Dogs* includes, then, digital and analogue media, body-flows that include both embodied and non-corporeal aspects of their becoming. In its non-corporeal aspect - which does not mean immaterial as it is as effective as any embodied matter - the knotting of *Gypsies and Dogs* also implicates various institutions as diverse as activist non-government organizations such as the one fighting for Roma rights, alternative cultural spaces such as Cultural Centre Rex, human rights organizations (Yugoslav Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights), to the faculties and universities given that Zoran Todorović as well as some other participants of public debates are university professors. It also implicates social class, considering who the participants of discussions are in their social positions (NGO workers, professors), but also the visitors of the Salon as well as the Roma children who beg on the streets. In this way, *Gypsies and Dogs* becomes a multimaterial and pluritemporal network producing connections with other more or less complex networks and assemblages within the socius.

The knotting of *Gypsies and Dogs* encompasses the non-corporeal but material institutional forces in all their diversity which gathered around it. And what gathered them is the conceptual, spatio-temporal, and affective closeness of dogs and Roma children as produced in the work. What made the public a part of the artwork throughout the years even after the installation was taken down after the end of October Salon is

the labor of the humanimal assemblage. Given its multimateriality, *Gypsies and Dogs* does not only participate in the constitution of humanimal assemblage through its discursive and performative aspects, but through its affective dimension as well. Affect here is understood as both the capability or potentiality of a body to act and be acted upon, and as an actualized and codified potentiality in the form of an emotion and thought. In this regard, Todorović's artwork works with a number of cultural codes on the one hand, and on the other it, through both content and form acts on the bodies of the viewers. A codification of flows of matter is performed at the level of actualization of virtual capabilities of individual bodies in their encounter with the artwork. For example, in a reaction on the piece that appeared in a post on a personal blog, the author writes that in Todorović's piece "there is a weird defeatism", and understands "this work as another image of misery I am seeing and that torments me".²² Moreover, the author also feels "resigned" to the fact that "we are thinking of art concepts while Roma children from the settlement do not have fingers as they were bitten off by rats while they were babies".²³ *Gypsies and Dogs*, then, affects the bodies of the viewers inducing reactions across the whole emotional spectrum as well as enticing the conceptual bodily capabilities.

What this explanation of various levels of multimaterial network called *Gypsies and Dogs* shows is that the production of humanimal assemblage is a hypercomplex process that entails codifications and overcodifications across multiple scales, materialities, and temporalities. Overcodifying processes of racialization, animalization, and

²² Usernameka (2016). "Gypsies and Dogs - Help Yourself". In Zoran Todorović (Ed.), *Gypsies and Dogs II: Symptoms and Traces of the Public Reception*. Beograd: ProArtOrg, 2, 4.

²³ Usernameka, "Gypsies and Dogs - Help Yourself", 7.

humanization are effective on the level of the virtual, the level of pure potentiality of the body to act and be acted upon. Then, after shaping the individual bodily sensorium, overcodifying reaches over to non-corporeal networks of institutions. The movement is both diachronic and synchronic, and also simultaneous, actualizing at the moment of encounter with the artwork. Production of identity and differences within the humanimal assemblage concerns in equal measure both intensive and extensive aspects of becoming, with various nodes playing more important roles at one point changing with time and across space.

Knotting the Humanimal Assemblage

What then does the humanimal assemblage do? It weaves and knots a multiplicity of multimaterial and pluritemporal material-semiotic body-flows in such a way that it produces ontic differences between human and nonhuman animals through overcodifying processes of racialization, animalization, and humanization. Since racializing processes are quite different between the Blacks in the United States and the Roma people in Serbia, the effects are also different. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson writes about “ontological plasticity” as the result of racialization in the United States, meaning that Black individuals can at the same time be attributed such cultural characteristics as to appear subhuman and superhuman. More precisely, plasticity is defined as “a mode of transmogrification whereby the fleshy being of blackness is experimented with as if it were infinitely malleable lexical and biological matter, such that blackness is produced

as sub/super/human at once, a form where form shall not hold: potentially ‘everything and nothing’ at the register of ontology”.²⁴

For Jackson, the aim of plasticity is to “fluidify life” and “fleshy existence”, it is “a praxis that seeks to define the essence of a black(ened) thing as infinitely mutable, in antiblack, often paradoxical, sexuating terms as a means of hierarchically delineating sex/gender, reproduction, and state of being more generally”.²⁵ A specific kind relation between human and nonhuman animals follows from this ontological plasticity that pertains only to the Black people. Namely, according to Jackson “*the African’s humanity is not denied but appropriated, inverted, and ultimately plasticized in the methodology of abjecting animality*”, meaning that “the discourse on ‘the animal’ is formed through enslavement and the colonial encounter encompassing *both human and nonhuman* forms of life”.²⁶ Blackness comes to signify animalized humanity, that portion of humans that are included in universal humanity but as “lower” humans, those humans who are closer to animals. Plasticity, then, names this ontological malleability of blackness that at the same time is both human and animal, and that enables the very difference between these forms of life.

The Roma in Serbia, on the other hand, never appear superhuman, except perhaps when they are used for children of Serbs to be scared into obedience by their parents. Thus, it follows that the Roma are not made ontologically plastic but *rigid*. Their ontological status is produced as subhuman through the processes of racialization and it remains as such.

²⁴ See Jackson, Zakiyyah I. (2020). *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*. New York: New York University Press, 3.

²⁵ Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, 11.

²⁶ Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, 23, italics in original.

The Roma are still human, though excluded from the socius, and thus produced through various spatio-temporal racializing technologies as subhuman. The dogs that live with them are produced as their companion animals, and they are also excluded. As I have described in the first section, the pregnant attacked dog is seen as ‘ownerless’ by the state apparatus and thus easily killable and removable. Both the Roma and their animals are thus excluded from the socius in a similar vein. If a specific characteristic of the postsocialist humanimal assemblage is to be found it should be sought here, in the weaving together of differences and identity of the Roma and animals through spatio-temporal technologies of exclusion, that is rigidification. Exclusion and racialization/animalization act at the same time, mutually conditioning each other, producing an effect of ontological rigidity. Neither the Roma nor their companion animals can move beyond their designated environment, meaning that there is no ‘upward social mobility’ for the Roma nor there is ‘becoming-pet’ of their animals. This is the ontologically rigid spacetime that they share in the sense that there is no mutability or change.²⁷

In contrast to the Roma-animal assemblage, white Serbian-animal relationality is also produced as ontologically rigid but in the terms of voluntary relationality with animals. While white Serbs are not movable or malleable, in both ontological and spatio-temporal terms, their relations with animals is what contributes to their racialization as white in the sense that becoming-pet of an animal is what enables white Serbian difference from nonwhite Roma people and their non-pet

²⁷ Another aspect of ontological rigidification is Roma’s positionality in relation to organic and non-organic communal waste and landfills, see Saethre, Eirik (2020). *Wastelands: Recycled Commodities and the Perpetual Displacement of Ashkali and Romani Scavengers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

animals. As noted, it is the postsocialist condition as a change toward market capitalism that enables white ontological rigidity and it is additionally supported by investment urbanism. White Serbs as owners of private property are literally unmovable compared to the Roma who live in shacks. Consequently, it is capitalism as one body-flow among the multiplicity of others, though more encompassing and persistent, that enables racial difference and the humanimal assemblage in general. More precisely, capitalism is what rearranges elements within the assemblages of body-flows in such a way as to not only enable differences between species and racial differences but also to intensify them for the purpose of extraction of value.

Art here plays an important role across several material-semiotic registers in the production of racial and ontic differences between human and nonhuman animals. As seen in the second section, *Gypsies and Dogs* affectively produced an entire network of actors across time – most importantly, confirming in their reactions class, racial, and species differences of various actors. Art plays a constitutive role in the workings of the humanimal assemblage, at one point producing differences between humans, at another differences between human and nonhuman animals. Todorović's piece takes part in the production of ontological rigidity within humanimal assemblage that sets the racialized darkness of the Roma apart from the humanized whiteness of ethnic Serbs. It rigidifies each of them into the position of ontic closeness and remoteness, respectively, to the animals, which are differentially produced as pets or mere companions. And by working across a whole network of multiplicity of actors, *Gypsies and Dogs* affectively includes them – the artworld, NGO system, the university, mediasphere – in the workings of the humanimal assemblage.

Conclusion: Toward the Unknotting

Reading the production of racial differences between the Roma and white Serbs alongside the Afropessimistic thought shows that the way to begin to unravel the humanimal assemblage and the role art plays in both lays neither in the direction of ontological rigidity nor ontological plasticity. Ontological plasticity as a theoretical and critical move would mean repeating repressive conceptualization that has arisen from the conditions of slavery. Ontological rigidity, on the other hand, would mean the repetition of the very ground that produces oppressive and exploitative socio-political hierarchy within the postsocialist socius. Where does that leave us? Can we find a way out of binary opposition between rigidity and plasticity?

A possible answer lies in the concept of transversality, the thinking-across, as described in the introduction. As we must not think in terms of plasticity or rigidity, we need to think across these terms, which is also an “ecologic” logic. Considering that both rigidity and plasticity are violent and forceful apparatuses, we need to look how these come into being and how are singularities constituted in relation to them. Rigidity and plasticity are “constructed and maintained by multiple assemblages of enunciation”,²⁸ with territorializations that capture singularities-in-constitution. From this point of view, racialization, postsocialist condition, nascent neoliberal capitalist order, and artworld, all of them function to capture flows of matter, singularities-in-constitution, and tie them together in a single assemblage. Thus, the knots of the humanimal assemblage need to be unraveled by critical attention to the moments of

²⁸ Guattari, Félix (2000). *The Three Ecologies*. Translated by I. Pindar and P. Sutton. London: The Athlone Press, 55.

ontological heterogenesis, which would disclaim any pretension to plasticity or rigidity by releasing the elements of the humanimal assemblage from being forcefully related to each other.

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