

# I Wan'na Be Like You-ou-ou: Tracing the Deconstruction of Anthropocentrism in Disney's *The Jungle Book* (1967)

*Hugo Uys*

## Abstract

Contemporary society is undeniably marred by the routine violence which it exacts upon animals. For post-structuralist thinkers, this violence begins with the anthropocentrism of human language. This paper thus follows the post-structuralist work of Jacques Derrida, specifically his strategy of deconstruction, in order to disrupt the anthropogenic violence continually inflicted upon animal beings. In so doing, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing destabilisation of the anthropocentric human(animal) hierarchy by tracing the deconstruction of anthropocentrism in Disney's *The Jungle Book* (1967). Accordingly, I draw on Derrida's strategy of deconstruction to show how the ostensibly stable human(animal) hierarchy is underwritten by anthropocentrism which is always already contingently established and prone to reversal – and hence, open to its own displacement as a matter of ethico-political urgency. Ultimately, it is shown that *The Jungle Book*, upon its deconstruction, does not merely reconfigure the human-animal relationship, but renders the very term 'animal' nonsensical.

## About the author

Hugo Uys is currently enrolled for his BA(Hons) in Philosophy. Thereafter, he will be completing his LLD dissertation on the legal philosophical framework surrounding contemporary animal advocacy in South Africa. His over-arching research engages with the emerging posthumanities in an effort to disrupt anthropocentrism and foster cross-species solidarity.

## 1. Introduction

It is widely recognised that animals suffer greatly under contemporary societal norms (Bryant, 2008: 6), and that such suffering is reinforced at a cultural, institutional, and systemic level (Jones, 2015: 474). For Jacques Derrida, such violence against the animal begins in human language – “a gesture towards the animal which is essentially political in nature and silences them” (Sayers, 2016: 371). Such a silencing establishes and maintains a hierarchy between the human and the animal. This paper aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to return agency and voice to animal beings (Petersmann, 2021: 108; Haraway, 2015: 6; Despret, 2008: 127) by deconstructing one paradigmatic invocation of the human(animal) hierarchy. Specifically, this paper traces the deconstruction of anthropocentrism at the hand of the 1967 animated film, Disney’s *The Jungle Book*.

Prior to undertaking the deconstruction, the theoretical framework for the discussion will be provided. Specific attention will be given to the nature and aim of the deconstructive project, as well as that deconstructive terminology which is of most interest to the deconstruction which will be undertaken. Thereafter, a brief conventional reading of the text will be given. Finally, equipped with the proper theoretical framework, this paper will turn to argue for a deconstructive reading of *The Jungle Book*. Such a reading will intervene in the human(animal) hierarchy to draw attention to the contingency of the current structure, and to show how this hierarchy can be reversed and, ultimately, displaced. It will be argued that such a reading not only reconfigures the human-animal relationship ethically and theoretically, but also begins to trouble the very possibility of the term ‘animal’.

## 2. Theoretical Overview of Deconstructive Techniques

Before turning to consider the text, it is necessary to establish a theoretical framework for the discussion by providing an overview of deconstruction and some of

the techniques it employs. As such, a brief description of the deconstructive project will be provided, whereafter I will discuss the post-structuralist view of signification as dually constituted by *différance* and trace.

### 2.1. What is Deconstruction?

If this paper aims to deconstruct a hierarchy, it is perhaps prudent to ask for a description of what such a ‘deconstruction’ would entail. Yet this is no simple task. It is often easier to say what deconstruction *is not*, than to say what deconstruction *is*. This is also the approach taken by Derrida himself in his ‘Letter to a Japanese Friend’ (1983). On the one hand, Derrida explains that deconstruction is neither analysis nor critique (Derrida, 1983). Whilst such procedures aim to reduce complex structures to simple elements or problems, deconstruction resists such attempts inasmuch as it eschews the very notion of originary simplicity in favour of originary complexity (Culler, 1982: 96).

It might be noted that, insofar as it is not merely ‘original’ but indeed ‘originary’, the complexity at hand cannot be relegated to some temporal past which we might overcome and/or distance ourselves from. Rather, originary complexity both remains always already present, and remains “inceptual” as the very origin which primordially and persistently underlies the very network of signification as such (Van Manen, 2017: 823). Thus, as Van Manen points out, it “connotes origination, birth, dawn, genesis, beginning, and opening” (ibid.: 824), more than the mere historical newness of ‘originality’.

On the other hand, deconstruction neither is, nor can it be made into, a method – that is, into a series of fixed steps and/or procedures by which to deconstruct a text (Derrida, 1983). Rather, any deconstruction is necessarily deeply contextual and singular, and thus cannot be reduced to an abstract and generalised set of operations. All texts can thus deconstruct – “deconstruction takes place everywhere it takes place” (Derrida, 1983) – but every text deconstructs in a singular and distinctive fashion.

It would not be satisfactory, however, to remain confined to a series of negations. As such, bearing in mind the abovementioned caveats, and read as openly as possible, deconstruction might be described as a “philosophical strategy” – both “a strategy within philosophy and a strategy for dealing with philosophy” (Culler, 1982: 85). Such strategy is used to identify and problematise the violent, hierarchical, and oppositional institution of meaning, in order to break open naturalised and overly-sedimented meanings which work to establish and maintain unjust hegemony (Cruise, 2015: 14; Culler, 1982: 156-157).

Despite the above, it remains of the utmost importance to recognise that deconstruction is not something which is undertaken by a deliberating subject – “deconstruction takes place” (Derrida, 1983). In other words, “the object of deconstruction is always and already in deconstruction” and “[t]he subject, therefore, is subject(ed) to the object(ive) of deconstruction” (Gunkel, 2021: 28). Hence, the role of the thinker is not to perform or carry out the deconstruction, but simply to accompany, or bear witness to, the text’s own self-deconstruction.

## 2.2. The Double Movement of Deconstruction

As mentioned above, deconstruction seeks to problematise a hierarchical and oppositional account of meaning. Such an account is *logocentric*. It is precisely this logocentrism which is the ultimate target of all of Derrida’s work. Logocentrism is the idea that there can exist a self-standing, independent term whose meaning is free from any relationality to other terms (Culler, 1982: 93). Under such an understanding, this self-standing term will occupy the position of the ‘*logos*’. However, underneath this *logos* there are also subordinate terms, namely ‘terms which mark the fall,’ which exist as mere derivative or parasitic add-ons to the *logos*. As such, a logocentric approach to meaning is a hierarchical one. Logocentrism necessarily creates “not a peaceful co-existence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy” under which one term, the *logos*, “dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.)” (Derrida, 1981: 56-57).

Deconstruction intervenes in the logocentric hierarchies of meaning which are at play within a text by means of a *double movement*. First, deconstruction undertakes a close reading of the text which takes seriously the existing structure of meaning (Culler, 1982: 85). Second, a deconstruction reverses and displaces the hierarchy (ibid.: 86). Reversal is used only to show the contingency of the current hierarchical positioning. This by itself is not sufficient, since it would leave the oppositional, hierarchical conceptual infrastructure intact (Gunkel, 2021: 60). As such, lest a new hierarchy simply come to be naturalised, it is also necessary to simultaneously displace the hierarchy. This entails a reconfiguration of the terms to stand in a differential, rather than oppositional, relation with one another.

## 2.3. *Différance* and Trace

A proper account of the deconstructive project is incomplete without mention of Derrida’s most influential neologism – *différance*. As a point of departure, Derrida does affirm the structuralist view of language as constituting a socially conventional system of arbitrary and differential signs (Culler, 1976: 19). Derrida, however, is not satisfied with an account of meaning as static difference between signs which characterises Saussurian linguistics. As such, Derrida radicalises the Saussurian notion of difference by arguing that signs are not marked by difference, but rather *différance* (ibid.: 97). *Différance* indeed encompasses ‘difference’ – it marks both that way in which the meaning of signs is an instance of active, temporal, ongoing difference between two signs, as well as one of passive, spatial, graphic difference (ibid.). However, aside from its connotation to difference, *différance* also connotes ‘deferral’. In this sense, the meaning of any sign is both deferred in time, as well as deferred to the authority of other signs – other signs which themselves defer to other signs themselves already deferred to other signs, and so forth in an ongoing series of endless signification (ibid.).

Once it is recognised that all signs are marked by *différance*, and if this means that all signs always already

refer to other signs to obtain meaning, then signs must be understood as mutually interpenetrating. Insofar as Sign 1 is not Sign 2 or Sign 3, there is some vestige of the meaning of Signs 2 and 3 which reside within Sign 1. These vestigial fragments of differential meaning found within all signs is what Derrida names 'trace'. For a sign to be meaningful – that is, meaningfully refer to other signs – it must thus contain within itself aconceptual aspects of that which it is not (Culler, 1976: 96). It follows from the ubiquity of the trace that all signs are always already bleeding into one another to affect and infect the meaning of each other. Crucial, however, is to understand that the trace is an "aconceptual concept" (Derrida, 1988: 118). This means that no positive predicates can be ascribed to trace as if it is a concept capable of bearing attributes. Instead, trace is a purely negatively conceptualised concept insofar as it designates all of that which a sign in question *is not*, yet without which the sign would not be intelligible. As such, there are no positive meanings – "[t]here are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces" (Derrida, 1981: 26). It is primarily at the hand of such trace that I will trace the deconstruction of anthropocentrism, and its human(animal) hierarchy, as found in *The Jungle Book*.

### 3. Conventional Reading of the Text

Before deconstructing the text – or rather, bearing witness to how the text deconstructs itself – it would stand us in good stead to briefly consider a conventional reading thereof. *The Jungle Book* (1967) centres on a 10-year-old human boy, Mowgli, who was brought up by a pack of wolves in a jungle. After hearing that the fearsome man-eating tiger, Shere Khan, has returned to the jungle, it is decided that Mowgli must leave the jungle for his own safety. The pack decides that he must be returned to the human settlement which lies on the border of the jungle. Mowgli's other long-time caregiver, a black panther named Bagheera, commits to escort him to safety. On their way to the human settlement, Mowgli almost falls prey to the python named Kaa who tries to devour him, but is

ultimately saved by Bagheera. Thereafter, the pair encounters an elephant patrol which Mowgli momentarily joins after befriendng a young elephant calf.

Once again spurred on by Bagheera, the pair meets a sloth bear, Baloo, who takes custody over Mowgli. Shortly hereafter, Mowgli is abducted by a troop of apes who take him to King Louie the orangutan. Upon meeting Mowgli, King Louie confesses his desire to be like a human, thus offering Mowgli safety among his troop, provided that Mowgli, as a 'man-cub', teach him how to start and wield fire. Mowgli confesses that he does not possess such knowledge, and is ultimately saved by Baloo, disguised as an ape, and Bagheera. After their escape, Mowgli again protests his removal from the jungle and runs away from his companions. He once again encounters, yet escapes, the jaws of Kaa, and is then accepted amongst a flock of vultures as a fellow outcast. It is here that Shere Khan finally comes face to face with Mowgli, though Mowgli ultimately prevails by scaring Shere Khan off. In the end, Bagheera and Baloo delivers Mowgli safely to the 'Man-Village' and, despite some hesitation, Mowgli ultimately walks off into the village.

I would therefore suggest that, within the text, Mowgli's humanness is presented as a seemingly self-standing and independently meaningful sign. Within the narrative, all the animal characters which surround him immediately identify and recognise Mowgli as human. It is also because of his status as human that the other animals in the jungle seek to protect and ensure Mowgli's safety from the tiger, Shere Khan. Consequently, a conventional reading of *The Jungle Book* affirms a hierarchy between human and animal under which the human is elevated to the logos, whilst the animal is cast down as the term which marks the fall. The efforts of the animals to ensure Mowgli's safety affirms the position of the human as that being which is, or ought to be, exempt from being harmed by nature – that is, the realm of animals. This is so even if such exemption comes at the cost of the actual or threatened harm of other natural entities, such as the very animals themselves. Ultimately, the

text also culminates in Mowgli's return to the human settlement – a symbolic triumph of the safe and homogenous human world over the dangerous and heterogeneous animal world.

#### 4. Deconstruction of the Text

Despite this aforementioned conventional reading, I argue that the anthropocentric human(animal) hierarchy in *The Jungle Book* is contingent and unstable – and, hence, always already tends toward its own deconstruction. To this end, a close-reading of the text will be undertaken to evaluate various criteria as the possible ground for Mowgli's humanness. It will then be shown that the human(animal) hierarchy is, in fact, unstable and can, and must, be reversed and displaced. Finally, I will consider the ethical and theoretical implications of such a displacement.

##### 4.1. Close Reading of the Text

As I argued above, it is Mowgli's humanness which comes to the fore as an ostensible logos – that is, as a seemingly self-standing and independently meaningful attribute. It is therefore necessary to undertake a close reading of the text to establish, *intra-textually*, what such humanness denotes. It is trite that, in our day to day lives, we tend to think of the capacity for language-use as separating the human from the animal (Wolfe, 2013: 7). Indeed, in explaining his desire to be human, the already-upright King Louie himself sings: 'I want to walk like you, talk like you, too'. Yet, language-use cannot suffice for the given text. Within the text, both Mowgli and his nonhuman companions possess the ability to speak to, and be understood by, one another. In fact, the first linguistic word to be spoken within the text is uttered by Bagheera, a black panther, whilst Mowgli's own first utterance is not a word but a wolf-howl. Furthermore, even King Louie expresses his desire to be human already in and through language which is fully intelligible to Mowgli. Despite this linguistic reversal, there must thus remain something which marks the difference between human and

animal, since the viewer does not suddenly perceive these animals as human simply because they speak.

What is it then that sets the human apart? Within the text itself, it is suggested that the ability to start and wield fire sets the human apart from the animal. Interestingly, though, even for the text itself, such an ability to wield fire marks not so much a *state of being human*, but rather an *event of becoming human*. As King Louie explains in song, '[y]ou see it's true, an ape like me / can learn to be human, too'. Within the text, the wielding of fire thus only grants access to the status of 'human' once it is, and continues to be, wielded. For this reason, it matters little that King Louie is an orangutan, because once he learns the secret to 'man's red fire', he too will 'stroll right into town / and be just like those other men'. Yet, though this seems to provide an answer to our question, the matter becomes somewhat complicated once considered in relation to Mowgli himself.

If we are taking the text seriously, equating humanity with the wielding of fire raises some difficulties since Mowgli reveals to King Louie that he does not, in fact, know how to start and use fire. Now certainly one might argue that Mowgli nevertheless possesses a *capacity* to wield fire, but this point holds equally true for King Louie – hence his very request. If a current inability to wield fire marks King Louie as not yet, but potentially, human, then we must apply this same logic to Mowgli. At best then, accepting the wielding of fire as criterium might be said to render both parties *potentially human*, but it cannot account for why one party (i.e., Mowgli) is indeed regarded as human, whilst the other party (i.e., King Louie) is not. It is also notable that, towards the end of the narrative and immediately upon having wielded (lightning-caused) fire, Mowgli rejoins the 'man-village', having now become human.

Nevertheless, there must have been something else which, also and already, had set Mowgli apart as a human, since the viewer did not suddenly see him as animal, as not-yet human, once it was revealed that he did not know how to start a fire. I would argue that

*within the text and throughout the narrative*, there are two attributes which uniquely set Mowgli apart from the animals – first, he is not confined to performing a single nature and continually adapts his behaviour to whichever animal he is with, and second, Mowgli is the only character being hunted by other animals. I will elaborate on each in turn.

As a general rule, within the text, all the animals perform only their own natures. In other words, Baloo the sloth bear acts like a bear, Bagheera the panther acts like a panther, the wolves act like wolves, the elephants act like elephants, etc. However, Mowgli's own behaviour stands in stark contrast with this. Mowgli does not perform solely one nature. Rather, throughout the text, Mowgli adapts his performance to mirror whichever type of animal he is interacting with. When he is with the wolves he howls and plays with the wolf pups as if he is himself a wolf pup. Similarly, Mowgli easily falls in line with the elephant patrol, Baloo quickly manages to teach Mowgli how to perform 'being a bear', Mowgli effortlessly joins the dance of the apes, and comfortably joins in the vulture chorus. It is especially noteworthy that it is precisely at these moments in the text, where Mowgli *performs* different animal natures, that the characters break into song and, quite literally, put on a *performance!*

There is, however, a singular exception to my premise that it is only Mowgli who performs multiple natures. In attempting to save Mowgli from the apes, Baloo, the bear, indeed does perform the nature of a different animal when he infiltrates the apes' dance. I argue that this does not undermine my premise. First, Baloo can only achieve this by wearing a disguise. Furthermore, this disguise is also destined to fail and reveal his true nature as a bear. Mowgli, on the other hand, never makes use of a physical disguise and at no point does any of the animals ever cast his performances into question. I posit that this affirms, not negates, Mowgli's unique capacity for performing various animals.

It must also be recognised that there are two remaining encounters with other animals, in neither of which

Mowgli mirrors said animals' natures – his encounter with the python Kaa, and his encounter with the tiger Shere Khan. Crucially, in both these encounters, Mowgli is being hunted or lured – that is, he is placed in direct danger. This must also be understood as an attribute which is unique (albeit, perhaps, in a secondary and supplementary fashion) to Mowgli within the text. Although other animals are also, at times, placed in danger by Shere Khan, such danger is an indirect one insofar as the danger arises solely from their relationship with the real target, Mowgli.

I wish to show that these two grounds – that is, Mowgli's capacity to perform various animal natures, and his status as target – are joined at root, and are not two discrete grounds of/for Mowgli's humanness. In those encounters where Mowgli comes face to face with the tiger or the python and he is placed in direct danger, he is cast in the position of *prey*. Derrida, however, draws our attention to the fact that this position of prey is a structural position of sacrifice which is societally reserved for (nonhuman) animals (1992: 18). This societal fact, that the human is that being which eats without being eaten, is founded and maintained by a complex set of unjust hierarchical relations, which Derrida coins carnophallogocentrism (*ibid.*). Therefore, even in those instances where Mowgli is not actively mirroring the performance of an animal, he is nevertheless cast into a passive animal state of 'being prey'.

As such, at all times within the text, Mowgli is either actively performing animality (by mirroring) or passively performing animality (by being rendered prey).

#### 4.2. Reversal and Displacement of the Hierarchy

It has now been shown that those two attributes which sets Mowgli apart as uniquely human are both, in fact, attributes of animality. In deconstructionist terms, the implications hereof are twofold. First, Mowgli's 'humanness' is found in his ability to perform various animalities (whether active or passive). As such, his 'humanness' is no more than a sum of traces of various animalities. Hence, Mowgli is human

insofar as he is not any other animal, yet he is only human because of his ability to perform the animalities of the animals that he is not. Thus, the 'human' is constituted by the trace of the 'animal'. Mowgli, in other words, can exhibit no 'humanness' in and of himself – he can only be, or become, human in relation to the animals around him. Stated in terms of *différance*, it is therefore seen that, like meaning itself, the 'human' is not self-sufficient. Rather, through the endless play of *différance*, Mowgli's 'humanness' is always already dependent upon a differentiation from the 'animality' of the other animals; animals to whom, in turn, the meaning of such 'humanness' is always already deferred.

Second, if Mowgli's modes of being are limited to either a mirroring of animality, or performing a generalised prey-animality, then he does not have access to an authentic and non-imitative mode of being. The animals within the text, however, can and do perform their *own* natures – and hence, have access to spontaneous authentic modes of being. It is on this basis that the hierarchy which institutes the human as logos can be reversed, since the animal turns out to be more authentic than the human. Stated differently, the animal is not intelligible as a fallen, lesser imitation of the human. Rather, it is the human which is constructed from the animal, such that the animal is, in fact, the condition of possibility for the human.

As explained earlier, mere reversal is not sufficient; it is also necessary to displace the hierarchy. It is therefore argued that both the human and the animal partake in an *archi-performance*. Such an *archi-performance* must be understood as any mode of expressing being – that is, any mode of performing being *humanimal*. Being humanimal thus contains within itself the capacity to perform one's own nature, to mirror the nature of another, as well as to be cast in the passive role of edibility. Importantly, such a recognition also moves beyond an axiology of authenticity. Though such a notion might aid in illustrating the reversibility of the prevailing human(animal) hierarchy, its continued theoretical use and its essentialist, exclusionary,

and fascistic colonial commitments are perhaps best left behind (Stillman, 2021: 164; Maddison, 2013: 295-296).

So understood, as participating in a shared humanimality, the animal can no longer be a derivative, parasitic addition to the human. Rather, both the human and the animal must now be grasped as simply two different modes of being humanimal. In this light, Mowgli's return to the 'Man-Village' also no longer marks the symbolic triumph of the human over the animal. Rather, the move marks an opportunity for Mowgli to learn how to spontaneously – that is, animalistically – be human, and hence troubles any neat human/animal divide altogether.

### 4.3. Implications

The deconstruction of the human(animal) hierarchy within the text has both ethical and theoretical implications beyond the text. Ethically, once such a deconstruction renders the distinction between the human and the animal unstable and porous, we can no longer categorically exclude the animal as a subject within the realm of ethics. This demands of our ethical theories to "reckon with the human-in-the-animal and the animal-in-the-human", and since "[t]he human and the animal can no longer stand in opposition to each other [...] the superiority of the former cannot be justified on the inferiority of the latter" (Vrba, 2006: 89).

Such a reckoning offers to bring about a fundamental change to our moral and political discourses insofar as our normative orientation would shift away from "ethical extensionism" towards "ethical contractionism" (Acampora, 2006: 5). Post-anthropocentric ethical contractionism, in other words, would shift the burden off of those who seek to *join and include* animals in normative deliberation, and onto those who would seek to bifurcate the humanimal in order to *excise and exclude* animals from ethico-political consideration. Thus, as Acampora puts it, it is not the movement toward inclusion and consideration, but rather "the movement toward dissociation and nonaffiliation that needs to be justified against a background of

relatedness and interconnectivity” (Acampora, 2006: 5). The deconstruction of the human(animal) hierarchy therefore implores us to interrogate the ways in which our current normative frameworks are preconfigured to uphold, justify, and conceal the unjust domination of animals.

Theoretically, such a deconstruction shows that the categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ are not neatly divisible, but constituted by *différance*, and mutually infecting and affecting trace. This recognition can entail nothing short of a total reconsideration of what it means to consider ourselves ‘human’. Indeed, in light of the aforementioned discussion of *The Jungle Book*, the work of Nidesh Lawtoo becomes rather salient. In his recent book *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation*, Lawtoo seeks to develop “mimetic studies” as a new and transdisciplinary field of enquiry which would revolve around the “realization that humans are imitative animals” (2022a: 12-14). Through a reclamation of the ancient Greek concept of *mimesis* – “hastily translated as imitation or representation” – Lawtoo works to reframe and re-evaluate the ontological, epistemological, and ethical significance of being ‘human’ inasmuch as *mimesis* “reveals the anthropological, psychological, sociological, biological, neurological, and ontological foundations of an eminently relational species that perhaps prematurely designated itself as *Homo sapiens sapiens*” (2022b: 2).

Shifting our self-understanding away from that of *Homo sapiens sapiens* and towards that of *Homo mimeticus* would entail an abandonment of modernist idea(l)s of transcendence, autonomy, originality, and mastery. To recognise ourselves as fundamentally mimetic creatures – as always already in relation to the nonhuman world which surrounds us – is first and foremost a matter of existential humility, of reckoning with our inescapable finitude. Thus, for Lawtoo, to be human *qua Homo mimeticus* is to confront, unflinchingly, our “all too mimetic condition vulnerable to nonhuman agents that had tended to remain in the shadows but always haunted the myth of an autonomous, self-sufficient, and purely rational *Homo*

*sapiens sapiens*” (2022b: 4). So understood, Mowgli comfortably aligns with a conception of *Homo mimeticus* – he is a literary exemplar, even, of a new imitative, vulnerable and relational ‘human’. Far from being relegated to the annals of the Disney archive, *The Jungle Book* thus continues to model for us “an immanent, embodied, and shared human condition on planet Earth that is constitutive of our post-literary, digitised and increasingly precarious lives” (ibid.: 5). A deconstructive reading of the text, in other words, so destabilises our long-held views about humanity that it cannot but resound doubly and at once – both in the domain of our ethical deliberations (i.e., the formulation of a post-anthropocentric ethical contractionism) and of our theoretical scholarship (i.e., the emergence of mimetic studies).

Finally, there is an additional, and certainly more radical, theoretical implication. If the human is understood as but one possible mode of being animal, it quickly follows that any species-specific behaviour is but yet one more possible mode of being animal. The near-infinite variety of such species performances demands of us to recognise that “[t]here is no reason one should group into one and the same category monkeys, bees, snakes, dogs, horses, arthropods and microbes” – these are “radically different organisms of life” (*Jacques Derrida And The Question Of “The Animal”*, 2008). Derrida recognises that to put all nonhuman animals in one category which stand opposed to the category of the human animal is “a stupid gesture – theoretically ridiculous – and partakes in the very real violence that humans exercise towards animals” (ibid.). As such, under a recognition of the fluidity of being humanimal, the category of ‘animal’ ultimately dissolves into *non-sense* – not wholly ‘nonsense’, but certainly less sensical than our anthropocentric frameworks have thus far conceded.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has thus borne witness to the deconstruction of anthropocentrism, and its constitutive human(animal) hierarchy, in Disney’s *The Jungle Book*



(1967). To this end, I discussed deconstruction as a philosophical strategy which works to identify, reverse, and displace violent conceptual hierarchies. In contradistinction to a conventional reading of the text, it was seen that the human(animal) hierarchy within the text cannot be sustained and must be displaced by the recognition of an archi-performance in which both the human and the animal partake. Finally, such a recognition had two important implications. First, species boundaries are porous and shifting, and such a recognition always already undermines any attempt to establish stable and naturalised domination along species lines. This, in turn, necessitates a reorientation of both our normative deliberations and our theoretical formulations. Second, the very concept of 'animal' – as a homogenous grouping

of non-human beings – comes undone inasmuch as the infinite fluidity of animal being resists nearly all rational attempts at such a gross generalisation.

Ultimately, this paper has shown that the 'human' cannot be understood as fully separable from the 'animal', if such a thing exists. It is, therefore, only through a troubling of the human/animal distinction, and by following the trail of the humanimal, that we might meaningfully intervene in prevailing norms of 'animal' subjugation, and effectively disrupt the anthropogenic violence continually inflicted upon other-than-human beings.

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