Animal Encounters: Performance, Animality & Posthumanism

"Life is a domain which possesses a wealth of being-open, of which the human world may know nothing at all." Heidegger in *Fundamental Concepts.*

The question of human nature in philosophical enquiry confronts the binary opposition of human and animal. Nietzsche, for example, critiques the metaphysical precedence of humans as biological evolutionary models in relation to animals as 'other'. The presence of the animal, further seen in the works of George Bataille, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari among others, simultaneously demands a rethinking of human and humanist subjectivity but also resituates the discourse of the subject in terms that identify a definite 'other' in the very possibility of 'becoming-other-than-human.' This is a paradox that marks a clear rupture in the classical discourse of subjectivity. On the one hand, animality profoundly enacts posthumanist, non-anthropocentric perspectives, but on the other, it restates humanist conceptions conceived on the human-animal binary.

The aim of this interim event is to explore how performance challenges the dimension of human subjectivity in its encounter with animals and animality. From the baiting of bears in Elizabethan theatre to the inclusion of 'attack' dogs on stage in the recent work of Romeo Castellucci, animals have existed in a tense and often antagonistic relation to performance, performers and the theatre. They have served as a cipher for the very limits of performance and as a reminder that theatre's history is bound to a human history of cruelty. More recently, performance has pointed a spotlight on broad issues of human-animal relations and has offered a space for greater affinities and relations. We are interested in thinking about the paradox of the animal in performance in relation to human, posthumanism, and the 'being-open' to possibilities in the future.

We invite explorations that might explore such themes as:

• The performativity of animality as ways of perceiving, defining, and reinstating 'otherness'

• Animal performance and neoliberalism: Animal, human and the state of exception

• The animal politics in performance and representation

• 'Becoming Animal' and the political 'other'

• States of affect: acts of violence or pleasure in animal performance

• Performing animal ethics: ecological, economic, and environmental practices in performance

We invite proposals (300 words) for 20 minute presentations from researchers and artists who would like to participate in this event. The aim is to focus not only on delivering short, pre-prepared interventions/ provocations/ papers but also to address the themes of the meeting through on-going discussion and debate.

Please note: You need to be an existing member of TaPRA to present or attend. If you are not, you can become a member at the cost of £10. Registrations will open by the end of March and you can register via Eventbrite (details to follow)..

Abstract

Neither Light nor Language
This paper takes the context of responding to the film, *Dark Light* (2014) by Maria O'Connor, as a provocation to engage with aspects of the work of Jacques Derrida on the animal and the human. *Dark Light* develops as an essay film that references a series of philosophers, establishing how various philosophical frameworks have questioned the boundary that separates the human animal from its others. However, *Dark Light* complicates this register of presentation of philosophical positions in three ways. It does so in a disrupting of cinematic conventions with respect to languages and their translations. It also presents an enigmatic visual score whose resonance with a voice-track is allusive and open. Thirdly, it grounds its ethics on a question of sexual difference, as if sexual difference primordially opens our concerns with animal ethics. Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign*, precisely an encounter with philosophers concerning the separation of the human and the animal, itself opens with a tracing of sexual difference. The paper initially engages two tropes developed by Derrida, one concerning *anthropos* as a mediating of the divine and the bestial. The other concerns a differentiation between the notions of feigning and feigning one's feign, as if this difference is that which separates the animal and the human. The paper aims to ask how one encounters *Dark Light* as phenomenon, how it might be considered otherwise than as a reification, a thing or object of encounter, as de-vivified representation. Perhaps, obscurely, we ask how life living becomes the radical agency of the film's encounter.

Bio
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Neither Light nor Language

He says, there, right at the beginning, they—we—are going at each other. They—we—are making a scene. Making a scene. He says "stealthy as a wolf." He repeats that phrase … *stealthy as a wolf*. And in doing so, he asks what it might mean to commence, to begin a Seminar, a lecture, with that phrase, as if one is to make a scene, as stealthy as a wolf. So begins Jacques Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign*, an (almost) final lecture course by Derrida on what I imagine to be our concern today. If it is the 'human' who appears to be in his sights, it is sexual difference that will have become his question: the *la* and the *le* of sexual difference, the beast, *la bête*, and the sovereign, *le souverain*. They are at each other; they are making a scene, this beast and this sovereign. From the wealth this seminar affords us, I want to excerpt just two small themes in order to introduce a short commentary on Maria O'Connor's essay-film, *Dark Light*. One concerns what stealth would always already employ, necessarily and contingently, at a moment where we precisely would not be able to tell necessity from contingency, a capacity, a capability to feign, and moreover, to feign that one is feigning. The second is the constituting moment of the human as that being which

intervenes in the theo-zoological, an *anthropos* that mediates between the beast and the sovereign. 'Man' is the scene that is made in a theo-zoological struggle, in their going at each other. When we begin to think these two themes together, supposing we are able to think them at all, a question arises concerning the fundamental locale of the human as that being caught between an undecidability of a feign, or to feign, of feigning, simulating the phantasms of appearance, and of feigning that feigning, as if there is a grounding locale precisely of the human as that animal who doubles its own dissimulations and thereby thinks its divinity. That dissimulation is a becoming-contract between humans that precisely excludes from its contractual bonds the beast and the sovereign, the *la* and the *le* of sexual differences, as if the human is itself-alone self-legislating. At stake, then, is performativity— precisely making scenes of sexual differences—that I would name life-as-differentiator.

Derrida finds that philosophers eventually get around to requiring differentiation of the human and the animal: "For Heidegger as for Lacan and so many others, the point at that time was to lay a new fundamental anthropology and to reply to and for the question "What is man?" This moment has not at all been left behind, it is even putting forward new forms of the same danger" (171). Jacques Lacan is the one who suggests that while animals feign, only humans are able to feign that they are feigning. This becomes a question of light and language, seeing and saying: an animal cannot be a subject, which is to say a relation of one signifier to another, a subject *of* the signifier, and hence constituted in the Symbolic, in the locus of the Other. Animals have no unconscious. Their relations to otherness are specular, which is to say, confined to the Mirror Stage, as instinctual behaviour, especially in sexualizing specularity. But this specularity would never be the constituent of the Gaze, concerned as the latter is with the insistence of the letter in the unconscious, desire and demand. In short, the animal reacts instinctually, while the human responds, which is to say, as subject to the locus of the Other, to Law and transgression, the human is responsible. The animal is neither responsible nor irresponsible. The question of right, law and the good do not arise for it. This would be Lacan's position that would as well be proximate to Heidegger's. Derrida deconstructs this binary 'reaction-response', as if we could essentially mark their difference, or ground their differences. Responsibility would never be that about which we have categorical certainly: "Having doubts about responsibility, decision, one's own being-ethical, can be, or so it seems to me, and ought perhaps to remain, the indefeasible essence of ethics, of decision, and of responsibility." In this sense, then, an ethics would encounter in its differentiations and multiplications reactings/responses whose decidability would always already be brought into question, as if one could essentially and each time draw a line between feigning, pretending as re-acting, and pretending-to-pretend, effacing traces, as re-sponding. This difference of re-acting and re-sponding asks for another logic of decision, another thinking of life, living beings in their sovereignty as living self-sufficiency. Neither light nor language would be the stakes in this, as if we humans, in our bestial divinity have that vantage point from which life is clarified, seeable and sayable—totalizable.

My contention is that Maria O'Connor's film *Dark Light* evades all essential logics of the rational animal, all grounding assumptions of the speaking animal, all decisive and categorical thinking on the human as ethical responsibility. Its sexual differences feign, re-act and pretend-to-pretend, re-spond to another thinking of life, to an undecidability as to who or what this film is for, as if it is for no-one quite human, but yet addresses a life, singular and immediate. In this sense it evades a definition of light's clarity or language's wanting-to-say, intentional consciousness. Rather, in relays between visibilities and statements, it unsettles matter's determinability into forms and a voice's soundings into meanings. We follow neither, while yet tracing the contours of each. We seem not to know how to react nor to respond. And yet we are affected. It is this affect that I want to explore, this affective life living itself in my going along with it, that seems to me to open the semblances, re-semblances, re-actings and re-spondings to *Dark Light*'s archive of sounds and images.

She says—he wrote her. That's how *Dark Light* commences, in more ways than one. She-he wrote, she was going at them. Without hesitation. She, at times, erased her traces. She does that, dissimulates, counterfeits all of her coins. It makes valuation chaotic, im-measureable. Vain, even—as if it is a question of looks. She and he make a scene that concerns the instability of our logics of sense, that we are irredeemably on the outside of the outside, abandoned to the oblivion of an existence whose sensibility we are forever awaiting. It never comes. All the while we have narrated the doxas of philosophical outsides, as if there is a passageway to there, as if there is an opening to the open as such, as if we masterfully master the dissimulations of life's living without remainder—indifferently reception, conception, deception. All the while this building, this constructing, this writing and performing, this acting, re-acting and responsibility we think accedes to life, accelerates it, vivifies it. All the while we de-vivify, we take theoretical stances, disciplinary regions, as if life, my life, my living, is recoupable and re-countable. For the most part it is not. *Dark Light* neither says nor shows as if *it* is a thing, living or dead. It is not a thing we encounter, an object whose meanings encounter a subject. Its *expression*, its taking-notice is a making-prominent that we *awhile* it, and for the most part we have no determination of a 'myself' who encounters it. We encounter meaningfulnesses (or not) rather than a thing, expressions—meaningfulnesses from out of life living itself. This would be the counter-logic or counter-actualization of the film—neither its projections nor derivations but an alerting to our a-whiling, our living-in its company, its accompanying, its—our—en-owning. And that would also be the contingent necessity of all living.

The Humanization of Being

Introduction

What horizon of questioning allows us to make sense of the broad theme or question of the Post/Human condition? It is suggested that the present constitutes a post-humanism, which may or may not at all be related to a question of the human. Clearly though, the horizon offered here suggests that we are yet or still caught in a fundamental questioning of anthropology and philosophy, as if philosophy's fundamental question was the 'human.' We may note that from the 1960s at least this question has been recurrent for continental philosophy. We might say it has marked a crisis of thinking for philosophy since Nietzsche's engagement with nihilism and that from the end of the eighteenth century enlightenment thinking is constituted on the crux of anthropology and philosophy. We note two key references from the 1960s in Michel Foucault's 1966 Les Mots et les Chose, *The Order of Things*, to which we will return in a moment, and the 1968 conference in New York on "Philosophy and Anthropology," the occasion for Jacques Derrida's "The Ends of Man," a text that addresses initially a particularly humanist reading of Heidegger in France and then a deconstruction of 'belonging' and the 'proper' in Heidegger's own thinking that for Derrida insinuates an essential humanism for Heidegger even as anthropocentrism is eschewed, and what Derrida would encounter as an aspect of Nietzsche non-assimilable to Heidegger's thinking. I want to begin by making reference to Foucault's conclusion to *The Order of Things,* by way of introducing aspects of Nietzsche's *Will to Power* and Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's Eternal Return of the Same, before returning to Foucault's work of the late 1970s as an encounter with the crisis of humanism and nihilism that takes a path neither strictly Nietzschean nor Heideggerian.

We are probably all familiar with that concluding paragraph of Foucault's *Order of Things*. However, I will quote from it, if only for the startling and simple expression of its prose, and the ease with which it presents the possibility of erasure of what since the end of the eighteenth century has constituted a ground to our being:

> One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area — European culture since the sixteenth century — one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. … As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.
> If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility — without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises — were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (386-387.)

Of course, the question that goes begging here, and the question that in many respect prompts a conference of this type is of what would that new mutation of being human be composed? Would technology or animality, for example, constitute another ground to the question of being human? This end would pose the question of what new beginning, what other form of the human would or could emerge. Yet we would see in such a consequential questioning precisely the continuation of the anthropology of humanism, precisely the prolonging of the figure of man, the restating of an anthropocentrism at the heart of a philosophical location of the human. And we would have overlooked, perhaps, what Nietzsche was asking of thinking and the human with respect to the surpassing of nihilism. And in this overlooking we would have perhaps missed the difficulty of Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche on the humanization of Being that goes to the heart of the struggle with Nietzsche's 'thought of thoughts.'

Will-to-Power

Thus we look to Nietzsche's *Will to Power* as an encounter with a crisis of humanism that does not simply become a site of philosophical avant-gardism, precisely as the prolongation of the humanism of the human. We know how it starts, with a Preface:

> What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism. This history can be related now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach its end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect. (#2 p. 3.)

Nietzsche, the one who has passed through nihilism, 'leaving it behind, outside himself,' presents a 'gospel of the future' in *The Will to Power* as a countermovement to nihilism yet a

countermovement that necessitates a perfect nihilism. The antimony for Nietzsche was Christian Morality and its consequent truthfulness: appeal to the highest values as an antidote to nihilism, and the abrasive and abusive work of truth dissolving that knowledge of the absolute in the adequate knowing of things: "Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems "meaningless" — but that is only a *transitional stage*." (10-11). Nietzsche's "highest man" abolishes the will, abolishes any notion of knowledge in itself. The highest man, the overman, is composed of "the greatest multiplicity of drives,": "Indeed, where the plant 'man' shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully." (506-507), and the most powerful instinct is life itself, "the lust to rule, affirmed." Thus Nietzsche will oppose Dionysus and "The Crucified." At stake will be, in a quest for the greatest suffering, a Christian redemption from life, for a spiritual after-life, or in the dismemberment of Dionysus, the promise of life (542-543). Eternal recurrence abolishes all teleology, goal, progress, in the sense that if the world had a goal, it would have been reached: "If there were for it some unintended final state, this must also have been reached. If it were in any way capable of pausing and becoming fixed, of "being," if in the whole course of its becoming it possessed even for a moment this capability of "being," then all becoming would long since have come to an end, along with all thinking, all "spirit." (546). Without will, there is only will to power, perhaps most concretely summated by Nietzsche in a new world conception: "its excrements are its food." (548).

Going up and over man

Martin Heidegger undertook an extended lecture series on Nietzsche over four years 1936-1940, interrupted at times by the commencement of war. The lectures were published in German in 1961 in four sections and translated to English in four volumes between 1979 and 1984: The Will to Power as Art; The Eternal Recurrence of the Same; The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics; and Nihilism. Heidegger will always be guided in his reading of Nietzsche by Nietzsche's overturning of Platonism undertaken in *Twilight of the Idols*, and discussed by Derrida in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. Heidegger emphasises that Nietzsche inverts Platonism without twisting free from Platonic metaphysics, without escaping Platonism. In his discussion of Nietzsche's *overman*, his emphasis is on inversion, in this case inversion of reason and animality. Heidegger suggests:

> The over in the name *overman* contains a negation; it signifies a going up and "over" man as he has been heretofore. The no of this negation is absolute, in that it comes from the yes of will to power. It directly concerns the Platonic, Christian-moral interpretation of the world in all its overt and covert transformations. Thinking metaphysically, this negative affirmation steers the history of mankind toward a new history. (Vol III, 217)

If the metaphysical definition of the essence of 'man' has been understood as 'rational animal,' Heidegger suggests that this as yet has not been questioned primordially, that metaphysically it has been engaged in a thinking of the being of beings, but not more primordially as "the truth of Being and thus the relationship of the essence of being with the essence of man." (217) Thus, in his question of the essence of man, Nietzsche will continue to engage metaphysically in an inversion of the rational animal with respect to will-to-power, that is with respect to nihilism.

Thus Heidegger emphasises that with metaphysics, thought is the enabling perceiving as representation of what comes to presence as the being of what is. In the modern age, the ground of this representing is certitude, perceiving as judging correct, "tribunal that decides about the beingness of beings." (219) In this sense, reason becomes the absolute, culminating in Hegel's phenomenology as "Being's bringing-itself-to-concept as absolute self-appearing." (223) Heidegger quotes Hegel: "The act of dividing is the force and the labour of the *understanding*, of the most wonderful and grandest, or rather, of absolute power." (223)

With the nihilistic interpretation of metaphysics, understanding posits value and thought is the calculating proper to the securing of what is, as valuation. In the negation of reason, in the inverting of the rational animal, thought is not negated in the sense of being eliminated. Rather, it is relegated to serve will-to-power as animality. However, animality itself has been inverted in the sense that it is not mere sensation: "The name body identifies the distinctive unity in the constructs of domination in all drives, urges, passions that will life itself. Because animality lives only by bodying, it is as will to power." (218) Heidegger notes Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*:

> But the awakened and knowing say: I am *body* entirely, and nothing else; soul is merely a word for something about the body. The body is a great reason, a plurality with one meaning, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd. An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call "spirit" — a little instrument and toy of your great reason. (218)

We thus recognise in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's nihilism as will to power, that the modern age presents, in Nietzsche's diagnosis, as a fundamental inversion of prior metaphysics, wherein rationality as the absolute power of understanding is transposed to animality as bodying will to power: "*Body* is the name for that configuration of will to power in which the latter is always immediately accessible, because it is always within the province of man identified as "subject." Nietzsche therefore says: 'Essential: to start from the body and employ it as the guideline.' (223) Thus the will, which in prior metaphysics served as "self-legislation" for representational reason, is now "pure self-legislation of itself … the pure powering of power." The essence of will becomes the being of beings constituting the horizon of disclosure as such for what presents itself to our representing, while representing is nihilistic, as the reckoning of valuative thinking, subject to the "empowering of overpowering." This constitutes at once the supreme dehumanization of man, as the rational animal of prior metaphysics and the supreme humanization of man as that being that is capable of bringing itself before itself in its essence, in what Heidegger words as the "supreme consummation of its own essence and in the way *to be* this essence itself," and in citing Nietzsche: "Not 'humanity' but *overman* is the goal!" (226) Thus we recognise Zarathustra's "midday" as "midpoint … between beast and overman" between a rational animal whose body is base animality and an inversion of this in the supreme, the most powerful instinct, in life. (Vol 2 79)

Being as a whole
It is in his analysis of "Being as a Whole as Life and Force; the World as Chaos" that Heidegger gets to the heart of the matter, if one can say his one thousand pages on Nietzsche has a heart. I say "heart of the matter" for the particular emphasis Heidegger gives to the notion of being as a whole, and the difficulty he recognises in the primordial disclosure of being as a whole. We may

remember the difficulty the being as a whole of Da-sein presented in *Being and Time*, necessitating the thinking of being-for-death as its disclosed moment. The question of being as a whole is essential for Heidegger as ontological questioning in the fore-having of the thematic unity of the being of beings. (*Being & Time* 214). Heidegger moves through ten key moments in his determination of "what stands in view" and "the way it stands in view," or the *essentia* and *exestentia*. In summary, Nietzsche does not juxtapose the inanimate and the animate, the living and the dead: "Our whole world is the ashes of countless living creatures: and even if the animate seems so miniscule in comparison to the whole, it is nonetheless the case that everything has already been transposed into life — and so it goes." (84) (As an aside, it would be useful to give some considered thinking to an essential relation of Nietzsche to Heidegger here on Heidegger's being-for-death.) The pervasive character of the world is force, not to be equated or subsumed under force understood as calculative in physics or as dynamics, but precisely as will-to-power as the disclosure in nihilism as the being of beings. Force is not infinite but limited. Thus the totality of the world is finite, hence the finitude of being as a whole. But as there is no equilibrium of forces, there is no standstill, rather a perpetual becoming, not a genesis or progress but a changing and passing away. The finitude of the world is not surveyable or knowable as such. Hence *becomings* produce infinite effects, innumerable appearances. For Heidegger, Nietzsche insufficiently thinks the spatial and temporal, though he is "on the trail" of them: "Viewed as a whole, Nietzsche's meditations on space and time are quite meagre." (90) Space, for Nietzsche is bounded and time is actual, unbounded and infinite. The primordial structure of the being as a whole as life and force fore-grounds force, finitude, perpetual becoming, innumerability of appearances, bounded character of space and infinity of time. This collective character of the world, Nietzsche suggests in the Gay Science to be "chaos," with unity and form excluded *ab initio*. (91)

This exclusion from the beginning is the precautionary measure to avoid the introduction of anthropomorphism, a defence against the 'humanization' of being. For Nietzsche, there is no goal, purpose or intention but equally no purposelessness or accident. Heidegger comments here on the de-deification of beings: "Truly metaphysical thinking, at the outermost point of de-deification, will uncover that path on which alone gods will be encountered — if they are to be encountered ever again in the history of mankind." (94) Yet, at the same time Nietzsche calls for the supreme 'humanization' of beings. If 'chaos' is the *ab initio* warding of all anthropomorphisms of beings, all we can say is *nothing*. This *nothing*, Heidegger suggests may well be the most human of humanizations in which we catch sight of the task of determining being as a whole. For Nietzsche, necessity is the trait or trace of chaos. How would this dehumanization of being yet be a supreme humanization? Heidegger explores this via the *Doctrine of The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. 'Man' is decisively and solely that collision of the future and the past that affront one another in the Moment. Heidegger digs to a more primordial questioning: initially the question "what is man?" which he suggests has yet to be essentially thought outside of metaphysics' history of the rational animal and its more recent inversions, whose engagements with technology or humanized technologies continue to obscure the essential nature of the question. But he will go further and suggest the question "What is man?" cannot be asked without the prior question of what is being as a whole: "the latter question embraces a more original question, one which neither Nietzsche nor philosophy prior to him unfolded or was able to unfold." (105)

We are by now on the most familiar of Heideggerian thinking on the forgetting of the question of Being and the essence of human being as the belonging of human being to Being. Nietzschean "eternal return" becomes here the midday of the propriative event of a temporality of being that "no timepiece measures: that point in being as a whole when time itself is as the temporality of the moment. We are returned to the *Augenblick,* the glance of an eye, already encountered as authentic Da-sein in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics.*

The Biopolitical

I will conclude, as I began, with Foucault. If we are to believe Foucault's own testimony that it was all Heidegger and Nietzsche for him, the path of thinking of the question of 'man' cannot neatly or in a summary fashion be so simply read. It is significant that in his *College de France* lectures of 1977-78 he provides an important corrective or further resolution to the understanding he gained in his research for *The Order of Things*. He suggests that his later research on the emergence of "population" as a new entity on the horizon of understanding humanity at the end of the eighteenth century, allowed him to recognise the extent to which the emergence of the forms of knowing and techniques for control of populations constituted the grounds for the emergence of the modern episteme in labour, life and language. Foucault suggests: "The population is not conceived as a collection of subjects of right, nor as a set of hands making up the workforce; it is analysed as a set of elements that, on the one hand, form part of the general system of living beings (the population then falls under "the human species," which was a new notion at the time, to be distinguished from "mankind") and, on the other hand, may provide a hold for concerted interventions …." (S.T.P. 366). Perhaps it is the case that our own concerted efforts to think and rethink this subject of right was long ago overtaken by another entity under the eighteenth century claim that man is nothing other than a figure of population. (379) Perhaps it is this figure of population and not the individuated subject that is essentially Heidegger's concern with beings as a whole and perhaps it is this figure, and not that of an individuated subject who knows, that may be erased in its fragility. Whatever the case, we may want to shift our horizons from asking if man is the animal who got bored or whose disclosure of temporality is ecstatically technological. Rather we might ask if the necessity of this species would have ever coincided with a question of being.