

Chapter Outlines for *On the Surface: Thinking with Animals and Art*

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Introduction "Staying on the Surface": This brief introduction situates the book within the current debates in animal studies, philosophy, and art. Art remains at the service of the human even as it tries to undo previous definitions of humanism to arrive at a "becoming" that is in affinity with animals. My own project takes a tangential approach to that of Steve Baker's exemplary *Postmodern Animal*. I am interested in the way art reveals the world of the animal as a necessary lacuna in human knowledge. That is, art reveals the inability to articulate the world of the animal. Art sets a limit, a blindness to our insight, while at the same time providing us with the palpable biotopic zones of interaction where the boundaries of worlds jostle one another. These places of meeting or "contact zones" become the productive surface of human-animal interaction.

Part I. Approaching Animality

Chapter 1 "Meat Matters": Many of Damien Hirst's best known works grapple with the seemingly alchemical, violent transformation of life to death and opaque to knowable as animals become meat. To understand the significance of such alchemy, this chapter traces meat as the metaphysical moment when the animal is killed for full presence, material, and meaning. Nature is laid bare, made lifeless and exposed, in order to be subsumed within cultural intelligibility. At the same time, the notion that nature can be made fully present to us is worth reconsidering. How do the metaphors of nature hiding and nature revealed ground our understanding of animals and how might we begin to think outside of this predominate approach to nature?

The relationship between meat and knowing can be found in Francis Bacon's justification for dissection and vivisection. For this 17th century natural scientist, knowledge attained in cutting open animals helps restore humans to an Edenic world. Such empirical and positivist claims about the ability of science to restore human well being are furthered by G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy. For Hegel, through dialectic tension the material world is subsumed by consciousness into full knowledge and intelligibility. In his *Encyclopedia* eating becomes the transformation of dead matter into life and intellectual consumption transform matter into self-presence. These valences of dissection and consumption provide a means of grappling with Hirst's work. At the same time, as we'll see throughout this chapter, meat is never simply the animal made intelligible. Meat has its own frictions that prevent human intellectual and physical consumption of the animal.

Chapter 2 "Body of Thought": The former chapter takes up the issue of art as a cutting open and consumption of the animal body. The current chapter considers a means of artistic engagement modeled after the figure of Dionysus. Here consumption becomes a performance of human animality and a plane of immanence by which the human meets the animal. Fredrick Nietzsche's satyr as both animal and man grapples with the tensions in this double way of being which is intimately woven into Nietzsche's ontology. In contrast, Martin Heidegger's shepherd of being keeps the animals, including his own animal nature, at a distance as something to be herded or managed. Artists and scholars

working with animals have a similar task of recognizing the ground from which they work—be it the intimate animality indicative of the satyr, or the distance or obfuscation of one's animal nature as figured by the shepherd. To be a bit more forceful in this claim, I have ventured from the ontology implicit in the satyr and the shepherd to the means by which they stage their eating, and I have equated eating, consumption, and incorporation with epistemology. The problem of the satyr is how he incorporates, makes singular and whole, his divided body (*corpus*). The satyr's Dionysian feast is a frenzy of destruction that doubles the fragmented nature of his own being. His eating and his epistemological ability to know or make sense of his self and his world remains as fragmented as his human-animal nature. In contrast, Heidegger's shepherd of being knows and manages his flock, but his eating (what Derrida calls his *bien manger*) is never explicitly discussed. The shepherd is stuck between his managing and eating, or between *manage* and *manger*. We know that the shepherd will take his sheep to the butcher but how the cutting up and eating (or epistemologically, how the divisions leading toward knowledge) take place gets averted. Carolee Schneeman's work, and in particular *Meat Joy*, exemplifies Dionysian art in which the animal cut open becomes the site of a frenzied feast of destruction which doubles the fragmented nature of our being and comments on the act of artistic creation.

Part II. Animal Worlds

Chapter 3 "Making Space for Animal Dwelling": The animal's perspective of the world has been strikingly described by the early 20th century scientist Jakob von Uexküll, a founding figure in ethnology and biosemiotics. His work has informed how science, philosophy, and art address animal life. In "Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men," Uexküll moves beyond mechanistic biology to develop a line of inquiry into the animal's sense of its surroundings, something close to an animal phenomenology. Uexküll presents an infinite variety of perceptual worlds that are "manifold and varied as the animals themselves." Each animal species holds its own point of view and its own distortions of the actual earth. These perspectives reflect how the body of the animal has evolved over ages to adapt to the earth and meet the animal's needs. We are left with the understanding that there is no single unitary world and no unified space or time. Instead, time moves differently for each species and each animal senses and shapes space quite differently.

Artists Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson work in the margin between an animal world and the human world. They do not provide a perspective from the animal's point of view nor solely from the human's. In as much as the animals' worlds are unknown to us they remain what Rainer Maria Rilke calls a "nowhere." Yet as explored and recovered in the artists' works *nanoq: flatout and bluesom* and *a fly in my soup*, the images reveal a "nowhere without the no." We cannot know this "no" through direct investigation and interrogation of the animal or its dwellings (its "going astray"). Indeed, only by upending the groundedness of home and recalling the stray (animal) in our own dwelling, our world, can we obliquely glimpse another's abode. Rilke claims that "We know what is outside us from the animal's face alone" Following Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson as they track the animals' worlds, we can begin to understand an "outside us" that is in our very midst.

Chapter 4 "Contact Zones and Living Flesh": Animals are said to be poor in thought; they have little interior reflection and consequently, little by way of selfhood and no means of attaining transcendental thought. So, to take up the animal means valuing that from which we differentiate ourselves, the animal and its life on the surface. I'm interested in imagining how the surface as a theoretical space occupied by the animal has a productivity and meaning different from the privileged self-reflection of the human subject. In other words, how does the animal and its non-interiority produce thought differently? How might we value surfaces despite the overvaluation we put on the transcendental heights of culture and the well being of our interiority? The work of artists Olly and Suzi provides a test case for breaching the divide between human worlding and the "poor in world" or mere surface lives of the animal as explicated by Martin Heidegger. The artists' paper spread out as surface between the animal and the artists creates a contact zones between the surface lives of animals and the work of art. What develops is a productive site for pidgin language that counters human interiority as the space of rational thought.

Since the world of the animal as a world remains foreign to humans (or as Thomas Nagel says we will never know "what it is like to be a bat" from the bat's perspective), we can only know the animal through surfaces. We know it through contact with the surface of the animal and the surface of the animal's world or "bubble" as Uexküll explains. Olly and Suzi work with the animal surface, its living flesh, as well as the surface of the animal bubble as it meets our own in contact zones. The resulting marks on paper are instructively different from animal portraiture and the history of animal painting. The pieces of paper have circulated in a human-animal economy and bear witness to an animal world. This witnessing is not a knowing and consuming that subsume the animal and its world and subsequently deprive animals a space outside of human understanding. These works leave the mystery of the animal and its world in tact while calling attention to its existence.

Part III. Becoming

Chapter 5 "A Minor Art": Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari can provide a way of thinking about pidgin language discussed in Chapter 4. Their book on Kafka introduces the concept "minor literature" in ways that will be useful for thinking about a contact zone. They see Kafka as a writer who "marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague." He has found a way to turn "their literature into something impossible—the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise." One of the features of this minor literature is the move from metaphor to metamorphosis (what Deleuze and Guattari will later characterize as "becoming"). The good metaphor and obedient literary image works because of a social agreement based on selection. Selection signals the proper relationship between vehicle and tenor. The well regulated metaphor manages elements to be included and those to be discarded in the relationship between vehicle and tenor. Pidgin languages botch or misplace these proper relations. The result is the death of "all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation. Metamorphosis is the contrary

of metaphor. There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word. The thing and other things are no longer anything but intensities overrun by deterritorialized sound or words that are following their line of escape." Sound or words or even, one might add, gestures and bodies lead us away from established social configurations, away from metaphors of which we have forgotten they are metaphors now inscribed as social truths. We are lead instead to meanings and marks of signification whose selection is based on the hybridity of two worlds being negotiated tentatively and temporally. Meaning becomes immanent to a particular place and time within a particular set of quasi-social exchanges.

When Marcus Coates enacts his shamanistic rituals as artistic social intervention, when he descends to the "lower world" and squawks with the birds and grunts with the deer, he is enacting a minor art. Animals challenge language and representation that too often purports to be disembodied thought. To think alongside animals means to distribute the body of thinking, creating a distribution of states or plural centers for valuing, selecting, and marking/making a world. Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* works against the power of representation and established aesthetics: "Representation has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilizes and moves nothing. Movement, for its part, implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation." Here, representation is a false depth that coincides with the false depth of interiority, both of which serve as a retreat from contact so as to stage a coupe. That is representation and interiority attempt to assimilate difference, and to value and select from the Outside or the Other based on its own criteria. To make thought move and to do real work at the horizon of the unthought, representation should, following Deleuze, create a friction, reciprocity, and exchange between the human symbolic system of representing and the physical world shared with other creatures, the marks and remarks of various *umwelts*. Coates's masks and dances are not a disguise nor a mimicry. They are a flattening of human interiority toward a minor aesthetic.