

Sviðslistardeild

Sviðshöfundabraut

In what ways is it possible to challenge the power relations between humans and non-humans in performance?

*A closer look at the methodologies of giving non-humans agency in the works of
Performance for Pets*

Ritgerð til BA prófs á Sviðshöfundabraut

Gígja Sara Björnsson

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Abstract

In order to attempt to answer the question:” In what ways is it possible to challenge the power relations between humans and non-humans in performance?”, this thesis will begin to explore the power structures between non-human animals and human animals. The idea of performative agency, and non-human animal performance value will be looked as, as a means of calculating the place non-human animals occupy within the world of performance.

This essay will mostly focus on the thoughts of Lourdes Orozco, Gilles Deleuze, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Alan Read as a means of creating context and understanding the role of non-human animals within Western philosophy, the role of non-human animals in performance, but also as a way of attempting to contextualise the lack of agency of non-human animals in parallel to the plight of the subaltern. The performance duo *Performance for Pets* will be examined to see the methods used in order to try to challenge the power structures of non-human animals and human animals on stage. The vocabulary surrounding performance, non-human animals and power structures will be explored as well as the methods by which this vocabulary can challenge the space non-human animals occupy within our theatrical culture. This thesis will describe ideas behind anthropomorphism in popular culture and its’ role in creating an imaginative space which can in turn lead to empathetic behaviour from humans to non-humans.

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Introduction:

The title of this essay: “In what ways is it possible to challenge the power relations between humans and non-humans in performance?” demands a certain understanding of both the power structures that are prevalent in our society and culture, therefore the non-human animal must be situation within the notions of a minority or subaltern.

The terms non-human and human animals¹ have been greatly utilised by philosophers such as Guattari and Deleuze as a means of creating a distinction between sentient animals and humans, this also depicts the human as an animal, (a Darwinian classification, rather than completely distinct from other animals) specifically in the art and performance world.

This essay will mostly focus on the thoughts of Gilles Deleuze, Lourdes Orozoco, Gyatari Spivak, and Alan Read as a means of creating context and understanding the role of non-human animals within Western philosophy, the role of non-human animals in performance, but also as a way of attempting to contextualise the lack of agency of non-human animals in parallel to the plight of the subaltern. Gayatari Chakravorty Spivak’s essay *Can the subaltern speak*” will be looked at as a way of contextualising non-human animals within the vocabulary specifically utilised for humans, as a way of drawing parallels between their need for agency within the performing arts. This is an attempt to make assumptions for the purpose of this essay, in order to assume a different form of agency from non-human animals than is often used in academia. In order to begin to understand the power structures within performance, we must be highly aware of the fact that we cannot, as is, speak² to non-human animals, therefore

¹ The idea of the “Human/ non-human” is directly related to theories of “personhood”, these are terms utilised to Dershowitz, Alan (2004). *Rights from Wrongs: A Secular Theory of the Origins of Rights*. pp. 198–99. and Darwin, Meet Dershowitz (Winter 2002). *The Animals' Advocate*. 21

The terms non-human and human are utilised throughout “Being animal” by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guittari and are thusly used throughout this essay as is utilised by them.

we cannot ask them about their experiences, which places this essay in a grey area where the ideas of what animals need comes from human observation, and is therefore often biased and possibly easily misconstrued.

For the purpose of this essay, the idea of speech and communication can be a flowing terminology. Evolution has shown that the complex language Homo Sapiens have produced is linked to a social evolution but also to a biological function that makes it simpler for us to produce these specific sounds. Although there has been much effort to understand the different languages of species and to find out ways for communication between species, we are still not at a point where we can freely debate with non-human animals, and an understanding between non-human and human animals is not usually found through human vocabulary. This is precisely a point of power that this essay will attempt to understand by looking at Spivak's ideas about the subaltern.

As a premise to this essay we must begin to state that this is merely an attempt at understanding the broad narrative of non-human animals within performance, and that even the simple word "animal" is by nature problematic. For the purpose of this essay the word "animal" will be used as an umbrella term for sentient beings, preferring to use the terms non-human and human to create distinction between sentient animals such as cats, and humans.

In order to attempt to answer the question of this essay, we must first seek to understand these power structures between non-human and human animals.

As the subject of this essay is to determine if it is possible to challenge these said power-structures, it seemed of utmost importance to find a performance, or series of performances in this instance, one that attempts to defy this power structure.

Performance for Pets is a performative duo that seeks to decentralise the human non-human dynamic in performance, and thusly felt like the ideal subjects of such a question. This essay will therefore also look at their methodologies and examine the ways in which they recognise the problematics and tensions of this idea, as well as

examining how they deem it possible to challenge the power structures between human and non-human in performance.

1.Contextualising the non-human animal / Determining the power structures between non-human and human animals.

In order to contextualise the positioning of the non-human animal in art we must take a brief look at it's position within our culture.

The “Animal Question”³ has been debated throughout the centuries, therefore this question must be open to the notion that the word “Animal” is already a philosophically and culturally laden word. The idea of whether animals have a soul or not and questions about their agency and ethical rights have been investigated by philosophers from Aristotles to Descartes⁴. In evaluating these concepts we must be adamantly aware of the human-centric, or anthropocentric, approach of this discussion, without discrediting the essence of the questions around animals. In the case of most minorities, the key to understanding their need has been through verbal articulation Minorities such as queer people, black people in the West and women have fought for their rights through their use of speech. From Martin Luther's dream to Suzanne B Anthony's vote and imprisonment, it has been speech and protest that has provided the disenfranchised minorities their emancipation. This possibility is currently an impossibility for non-verbal animals.

“Then God said “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the objectified living beings, over

³ The “animal question” here, is a general term for the philosophical questions about animals that have been around for centuries. However we could link this idea to the book *The Animal Question : Why Non-Human Animals Deserve Human Rights*, a book by Paola Cavallieri, it is a wonderful concise statement regarding the ethical stand point of animal rights in the modern world. It delves into the world of bioethics and specisim, and mostly argues for the case of a more valid ethical stand point towards animals. Although this is not directly pertinent to this chapter, many of these notions surface throughout this essay.

⁴ Colin Allen and Michael Trestman, "Animal Consciousness," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 24, 2016, , accessed March 24, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-animal/>.

all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”⁵ Christianity has dominated the narrative surrounding animals for centuries, however the question of the purpose of non-human animals can even be traced as far as Aristotles. Aristotlean belief deduces that non-humans should not have the same rights as humans as they do not have a conscious, or a soul for that matter. Darwin’s *The origin of species* shocked the world by suggesting a biological categorisation of animals, including humans. Darwin’s theories were controversial at the time as the sciences were deeply connected to the Church of England, as they did not appreciate the direct link being made between humans and apes.⁶ This challenged the notion that human superiority was part of our birthright. Cartesian ontological beliefs of dualism deemed animals lacking in soul, but also described “La machine Animale”, the “Animal Machine”, ultimately claiming that non-humans were mechanical,⁷ that they did not really suffer because they did not possess reason, soul or feeling.⁸ Lacanian theory proposes a subversion of Cartesian thought, taking a linguistic approach in which he declares the difference between human and non-human to be the use of language, the human being

⁵ The Holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the original tongues and with the former translations diligently compared & revised (New York: American Bible Society, 1986).
Genesis 1:26

⁶ Audrey Gillan, "Church owes Charles Darwin apology over evolution theory, says senior Anglican," *The Guardian*, September 15, 2008, , accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/15/anglicanism.evolution>.

⁷ This theory was opposed to the Aristotelian idea that there are three types of soul (vegetative, sensory and rational) which would inform the bodies of the living, and that the human soul would understand these three types. Descartes, on the other hand, opposes an absolute mechanism in the extension (which therefore includes all bodies, including the human body) to the rational soul (which only the human animal can possess), thus founding a strict dualism. In this respect, the theory of machine animals is closely link to its dualism, rather than a hypothesis on the nature of animals.
Colin Allen and Michael Trestman, "Animal Consciousness," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 24, 2016, , accessed March 24, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-animal/>.

⁸ Lisa Yount, *Animal rights* (New York, NY: Facts On File, Inc., 2008).
p.4

the “parleetre” or speaking entity, the “parleetre” is what Lacan sees as the characteristic of human animals, that is to say, speech.⁹

1.2 Bringing awareness to the human-centric approach

The essay *Becoming Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible* is found in Deleuze and Guattari’s famous *A thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

Deleuze makes an attempt to distinguish three types of animals:

(...) individuated animals, (...) Oedipal animals “my cat”, “my dog”. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation and they are the only types of animals psychoanalysis understands, the better to discover a daddy, a little brother (...) Then there is the second kind, animals with characteristics, a genus, a classification (...) animals created in the great divine myths in such a way as to extract from them series or structures, archetypes or models (...) Finally, the more demonic, the pack animal.¹⁰

The pack animal is referring to the notion that the animal without specific characteristic to the human eye, is rendered as one of the pack, that is to say, is rendered demonic as it is always in relation to the greater assemblage of a multitude of animals. By creating these three distinctions, oedipal, the archetype and the pack animal, Deleuze is attempting to pin-point some of the assumptions that exist due to a collective imagination¹¹, thusly attempting to create an understanding around the power structures in which our cultural understanding of non-humans sets them in a

⁹ Adrian Johnston, "Jacques Lacan," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, April 02, 2013, , accessed January 24, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/>

¹⁰ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *LAnti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Paris: Editions de Minut, 1972. P 706

¹¹ In this context, the notion of collective imagination refers to the sets of symbols and ideas that are commonly assumed by a group or groups of people.

place of inferiority. These concepts, complex as they seem, are in essence an attempt to de-territorialize the concepts surrounding the space of the non-human animal. Deleuze is focusing on the fluidity in which humans and non-humans can coexist and find a place of commonality.

Although it is important to understand their forms of categorization or lack thereof, it is also important to understand the concepts behind “becoming” as it serves to understand the functions, but also the methodology of working with non-human animals and performance. “Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own”, as Jessica Bell summarizes in “The Animal Reader” “Deleuze and Guattari refer to becoming-animal as a unique process that resists comparisons to other processes.”¹² She goes on to explain that the thought of becoming does not involve linearity nor does it fit in with some sort of sudden transformation, or even a merging of non-human to human. The argument is that there is no center, no linearity, no hierarchy and therefore there is neither regression nor progression, thus the human is no higher than non-human or even reversed. “involution, on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression”.¹³ “Becoming” also seems to be a courageous jump into an idea of non-identity or even in the case of “Becoming-animal” a case of freedom through non-identity. The interest in forgetting the narrative surrounding non-humans perhaps does not help them in their plight for agency, but this theory may however be a tool that can be used in order to find mutual ground.

However as Richard Iveson argues in: Humanism’s Becoming-Animal:

Whether that is as a “pet” or as a “pack,” this exceptional tropological function, this uniquely human capacity to constitute something as something, is itself symptomatic of an all too familiar

¹² Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 2007. *Becoming Animal*. In Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (eds.), *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classical and Contemporary Writings*, 37-50. Oxford, UK: Berg.

(Summarized by Jessica Bell, Animal Studies Program, Michigan State University)

¹³ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *LAnti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Paris: Editions de Minut, 1972.706

human-animal discontinuity founded upon the possession of language being awarded to human animals alone.¹⁴

In other words, although this is an attempt to decentralize the narrative and produce a shift in how we perceive non-human animals, there remains a dualism inherent to our modes of communicating through language. This perhaps highlights the problematics surrounding the power structures that are often witnessed between non-human and human animals in performance, therefore we can note that redefining language within performance may be a significant shift in challenging the power structures between non-human and human animals on stage.

1.3 Decentralizing the narrative: What is the narrative around non-human animals, how can it be challenged?

Placing ourselves (humans) within a decentralized realm may seem to be the perfect rectification of liberty and understanding, a place where language and collective imagination do not “other”, a non-linear grey area where all living creatures meet, a sharing of understanding. freedom through non-identity. The interest in forgetting the narrative surrounding non-humans perhaps does not help them in their plight for agency, but this theory may however be a tool that maybe used in understanding how their agencies may become more attainable.

In Lourdes Orozoco’s book “Performing Animality” she discusses Frans deWaal’s idea of “anthropodenial”¹⁵, described as a place of denying the similarities between non-human and human animals throughout philosophy and science. This denial is a form of hierarchical behaviour that characterises the human as special, this being linked to

¹⁴ Richard Iveson quoted in Timothy Laurie, "Becoming-Animal Is a Trap for Humans: Deleuze and Guattari in Madagascar," *Deleuze and the Non/Human*, 2015, , doi: 10.1057/9781137453693_9.

¹⁵ Lourdes Orozco García and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). P19

our ability to speak but also an ability of self consciousness. It is perhaps the latter that becomes most interesting when discussing performance. Lourdes goes on to imagine a new definition for consciousness on stage :

“I would suggest that we abandon those more reductive definitions of performance in favour of those that affirm a more expanded view of what counts as ‘conscious behaviour’, ‘pretence’, ‘intention’ and so forth”¹⁶. This seems to not only suggest that the non-human animal may have agency to perform, but also it suggests a shift in the wording around performance and therefore a break from the anthropodential that suggests only humans can perform. If we are to argue that it is possible to decentralise the narrative of non-human animals in culture, then it must mean that we need to find ways to recreate a language around non-human animals. This coincides with Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of becoming, where they suggest a means of greater understanding by merging into the similarities between non-human and human animals; by doing so we may find a new language around performance that does not alienate non-human animals. In asking ourselves this question it seems important to define the role of non-humans in a slightly different theoretical standpoint, which is why this essay will attempt to classify non-human animals as subaltern in order to place them within the realm of those who are speechless but are in need of representation and have agency within the theoretical world.

A fear here would be a romanticization of what it is to be animal, a problematic stand-point where the idea of decentralization seems to be to be key to a form of liberation. However as the title suggests “becoming-intense, becoming animal..” we can perhaps assume that although the liberation is not to be linear it is linked to the idea of bettering our essence. One key position that will be used for the purpose of attempting to answer the question of this essay, is the notion that a decentralization could be key to a greater understanding. Thusly, we can assume that in many way Deleuze’s theories may support a view in which imagination and assumption could be

¹⁶ Lourdes Orozco García and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). P21

crucial in destabilizing or challenging power structures in performance. It is a way of conceptualising a space we inhabit where there is little to no difference between animal and human thusly ideally allowing for a freer agency of the animal and a deterritorialisation that would allow for an abandonment of the power structures determined through language and culture. A common form of such imagination is through anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism, or the idea of assuming human characteristics to non-humans, such as animals or even objects, can in a sense be seen as a reductive, or even a manifestation of the othering utilised in understanding non-humans. Anthropomorphism, it's shortcomings and uses will be explored in the second chapter of this essay.

In order to better understand how we may challenge the essence of power structures within our language and collective imagination of non-human animals, it seems important to examine the positioning of other groups that have been denied agency. Therefore we will examine Spivak's ideas about the subaltern as a means of finding the non-human's bearings within a context of voicelessness and minority.

1.4 Can the non-human animal be categorised as subaltern?

Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak* can be seen in essence an attempt to deconstruct Western thinking. She debates that Academic thinking from important names such as Marx, Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida all are ways in which Western ideals are perpetrated. Thusly she goes on to say that knowledge is not innocent, that what it offers is a commodity of sorts that is exported by means of financial gain.

Spivak's discourse revolves around colonialism, and ideas as colonialism. She disputes the form of the "other" explaining that othering is always a colonial thought. Othering is in it's nature an "Us versus them" dynamic in as much as the only way to describe the other is by agreeing in the so called "us". By doing so Spivak argues a similar thought as is presented in feminist culture, the idea that hegemonic vocabulary

is used by patriarchy as a way of power. “Cultural hegemony functions by achieving the consent of the masses to abide social norms and the rules of law by framing the worldview of the ruling class, and the social and economic structures that go with it, as just, legitimate, and designed for the benefit of all, even though they may really only benefit the ruling class.” Meaning that the ruling class dominates the narrative around the dualism, and defines the “us”.¹⁷

Spivak describes the Wests “desire for subjectivity”¹⁸, this is something we can readily link to the Western desires of understanding. It is through our desire to learn about cultures and identify them that we ultimately create a distance through which we desire to learn.

This is something that can be readily applied to the notion that humans have colonised non-human animals, and it is perhaps through our desire to know more about them that we have created distances through ethnography and zoology, categorising non-human animals as a means of observing them, all the while maintaining an element of dominance through creating the space they inhabit and distancing it from us.

She goes on to argue that research and knowledge are often terms used to justify cruel treatment, such as conquest of culture, and enslavement. Spivak uses the terminology “subaltern” which borrowed from marxist intellectual Anotonio Gramsci’s work on the “subaltern classes” in which he discussed people outside of a hegemonic power structure,¹⁹ but this word has been largely used to describe the colonised people of India.

¹⁷ Cole, Nicki Lisa, Ph.D. "Definition of Cultural Hegemony." ThoughtCo. <https://www.thoughtco.com/cultural-hegemony-3026121> (accessed March 20, 2018).

¹⁸ Kerner, Ina. "41. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak?" doi: 10.14361/9783839413272-042.

¹⁹ On Gramsci in: “Language and Hegemony in the Prison Notebooks." Language and Hegemony in Gramsci: 63-101.

Spivak pushed the subaltern narrative further, examining it not only in terms of history told by the proletariat, but as a postcolonial area of interest. She denied the idea that subaltern can be applied to a group that feels it is being left out, but rather argues that it has to do with the idea of being voiceless.

..subaltern is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for [the] Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie.... In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference. Now, who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern.... Many people want to claim subalternity. (...)They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.²⁰

In “can the subaltern speak”, Spivak argues that in the context of colonial production those who are voiceless are those without history and without a voice, she concludes that therefore this class of subaltern would be women.²¹ However, she goes on to say: “Yet even this does not encompass the heterogeneous Other. Outside (though not completely so) the circuit of the international division of labor, there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp if we close off our benevolence by constructing homogenous Other referring only to our own place in the seat of the Same of the Self”.²²

One could therefore argue that one of Spivak’s main thoughts here is that language and specifically academic Western language alienates certain subgroups and renders them voiceless especially through their preoccupation with Othering.

²⁰ Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 1988.p.45

²¹ Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 1988. P.4

²² Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 1988.

In essence Spivak is noting that without the possibility of entering a Western academic discourse a subaltern group becomes or remains voiceless as a historic narrative has rendered them excluded from revisionist theory; hence the subaltern cannot influence or have the possibility of influence due to their lack of articulation within the hegemony.

For the purpose of this essay it seems that it would be evident to see the correlation between subaltern human animal groups and the non-human animals. If we imagine that most of academic speech discusses non-human animals as Others we can perhaps imagine the parallels with colonialism of people and that of non-human animals; if the non-human animal is Othered by the same omission of agency due to a dialectic voicelessness. Othering, in reference to performance, may also create a fetishisation of the subject, whereas the subject is a visible but passive voice utilized to further the privileged human animals story.

If we start from the premise that colonising means to establish a colony, where there is one dominant structure that is not native to the other, one could argue that from what we know of the development of homo sapiens, the hunter forager was not a matter of human domination. We found use for each other, but as evolution continued our cohabitation may be likened to a colony where humans ruled and the nature of cohabitation quickly dwindled perhaps with the agricultural revolution but especially in modern times with the mass production of meat.

Moreover, a considerable body of critical scholarship has pointed out that the capitalist world-ecological system is inextricably linked to colonialism, defined not only as an unjust economic model, but also as a racialised, androcentric, and class-based hierarchy of knowing and being which still marginalises non-western cultures and histories.²³

²³ Escobar, Arturo. "Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality and anti-globalisation social movements." *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2004): 207-30

Using the premise that non-humans are a marginalised group as they are functioning within a system in which they have been colonised; we can suppose that since humans have classified non-human animals through Aristotlean or even Darwinian thoughts, our cultural dominance of non-human animals at least allow us to speak of them as marginalised and colonised. The question can however be posed as to whether the subaltern or even the marginalised can gain power within our economic system, slaves remained enslaved due to free labour, and only gained liberty through unity and ethical awakening. Perhaps the economic powers linked to the enslavement of animals will perpetrate this power structure, however since this is part of the definition of the subaltern it can be argued that this exact relationship to economy is what can label non-human animals as subaltern.

If we think of this in Michel Foucault's terms of power-knowledge relation structure²⁴ we could argue that in order for us to be made aware of the subaltern it must find a way into a language we understand. If animals do not have the ability to partake in a language that human animals understand, it begs the question, if the area of the subaltern is the humans who are left-out of the hegemonic structure, but who have the possibility, however slight to enter it, can we categorize animals as subaltern?

Non-human animals do not have a representative within a verbal realm, a human animal who can speak but also resembles them. Although non-human animals do not have the qualities necessary (at the time being) to communicate verbally with us, for the purpose of this essay it will be argued that non-human animals could fall within the realm of the subaltern as they are an oppressed species and the dichotomy between non-human and human animals is in many ways an Aristotlean and at least a discursive construct as the language and philosophical thought around non-humans has placed them in a submissive position. We could however argue that a non-human animals mouthpiece could be an animal rights activist fighting against the disenfranchisement of non-humans, which brings us to the means by which we could

²⁴ Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Can the Subaltern Speak?, 1988.

give or imagine giving animals a voice, thusly challenging the power relations between non-human and human.

Having established both the human-centric nature of subjects relating to non-human animals, we can move on to the theories behind the performative value of non-human animals.

“Becoming-animal” contextualised the hierarchical structures towards non-humans, but also offered a theoretical standpoint on where humans inhabited the same space as non-humans, that is by “becoming” animal we may gain a more holistic understanding of the experience of being non-human. Deleuze’s theory has given an insight into our relation to animals and how we may find the essence of animals, however looking at Spivak’s ideas of the subaltern allows us to further the essays purpose, to determine the modes of hierarchy, and the determining factors of hierarchy, but also the importance of subverting this.

For the purpose of the essay I would like to propose that the subaltern can in many ways have a similar position within a theoretical context as the place of the non-human animal, thusly placing the non-human in the category of the subaltern may allow for a degree of leverage within the discourse of the non-human as a minority that deserves agency. As this essay deals with the non-human in performance, it is necessary to contextualise the place of the non-human as a performer as a means of pursuing the question of how to challenge the power structures interpreted through the analysis of Deleuze Guattari and Spivak. However, it is important to remain keenly aware that although it may be important to situate non-human animals in a theoretical realm, this is also a form of anthropomorphism that is often criticized within the school of Animal Theory.

2. Non-Human animals in performance

2.1 A look at Alan Read's take on the performative value of the non-human.

Alan Read's *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement the Last Human venue* explores the notions and language within performance and theatre as a new manner by which to politicize performance.

Read discusses Giorgio Agamben's ideas which seek to question the idea of infancy preceding language and thusly the notions of experience of performance for the non-verbal. He then proceeds to quote Agamben in "Infancy and History" :

Animals are not in fact denied language; on the contrary they are always and totally language ... Animals do not enter language; they are already inside it. Man, instead, by having an infancy, by preceding speech, splits the single language and, in order to speak, has to constitute himself as the subject of language – he has to say I. Thus, if language is truly man's nature ... then man's nature is split at its source, for infancy brings it discontinuity and the difference between language and discourse.²⁵

Read continues by saying "*regarding the tension between humans and other animals in theatre. If performance has commonly been associated with this, that is, human, what would be at stake if it were to acknowledge that? – another animal. A category of performance that I want to mark by calling it performance "as such" must, if it is not solely human*"²⁶. Read is questioning the nature of the word "performance", seemingly criticising it's human centric approach, but also aiming to redefine it, "performance as such" is therefore the performance we know, involving human

²⁵ Discussing Agamben in : Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.159

²⁶ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p 160

animals. This brings forth the question of the language around performance and non-humans, but here Read is also finding ways of determining the imbalance within the field.²⁷

Read goes on to discussing Walter Benjamin's ideas of language "as such"²⁸ an assumption that there is no language "actually existing" other than human language, the gap between human language and other languages (non-human animals, DNA, other beings in space, computers) can be called language "as such". Through this idea Read proposes to look at performance by similar means, that is to say "performance as such". If performance can be discussed with similar terms as Benjamin's idea of language we can say that "performance as such" relates to the performances we are accustomed to and opens an other understanding of the idea of performance, thusly allowing non-human animals a part in performance, as it creates a wider sphere of what can be labeled as performance. In allowing "performance as such" to exist Read is also discussing the idea of a certain naturalisation of theatre in which non-humans are not part of that form. He proposes a thought by which to include animals in performance and to acknowledge their performativity, he talks of anthropomorphising wherever necessary, all the while being aware of human animals as only a particular type of performer rather than the only, hoping "to move current thinking about the relations between humans and other animals in performance beyond the acknowledgement of a shared history of violence towards a material sense of how suffering and loss that arises from that history can be encountered and acted upon".²⁹It would seem that Read acknowledges anthropomorphism in performance is it has the effect of smoothing out differences and expanding the language surrounding the word "performance".

²⁷ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p 82

²⁸ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p 82

²⁹ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p 82

Alan Read talks about Richard Schechner's idea that "A great difference between human and non-human performers is the ability of humans to lie and pretend (...) most animal performances are automatically released fixed and stereotyped. There is no irony (...) no back and forth play between the role and the performer".³⁰

David William's counter argument to this is that it is "precisely the inability of the animal to sustain fictional ironies that makes for its quality of presentness."³¹

As Orozco describes Read's thinking in *Theatre and Intimacy* as a means by which to "reconceptualisations would allow performance studies to engage with animal performance as other than mechanical (...) they would also offer an opportunity for the field to expand its remit and understand performance as other than human."³² In other words, Read is looking for a reconceptualisation as a means of providing agency and challenging power structures, much as Spivak looks to identify the subaltern to allow for them to be heard and Deleuze looks for a means by which to "become animal", Read is implying a lexical shift in order to create an alternate means of understanding performance.

Read seems to be pushing for the idea that "performance as such" could be integrated into our theatrical language as a means of giving non-human animals agency. Orozco describes Read's writing as a way of letting performance and theatre studies to move away from a cartesian model of thought and rather towards a new frame of thinking where non-humans would be allowed their own creativity and new opportunity:

As such the presence of animals demands that practitioners, audiences, scholars and students alike reconsider their current approaches and

³⁰ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 107

³¹ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 107

³² The mechanical language surrounding non-humans can be directly traced to the cartesian thoughts of the "animal machine"

methodologies: it demands a relocation of agency in which animals are not just objects in performance, but also its active agents.³³

This idea of agency is perhaps the key notion that there is some form of communication between non-human and human animals. In an interview with Jacques Derrida, Derrida distinguishes between a human interaction with a non-human animal, and the non-human interaction from a human towards an animal.³⁴ He describes the first as being the key to understanding violence, as it is the essence of a power structure, whereas the latter is a means of communicating and showing empathy towards another being.

The last human venue is the place of performance where such distinctions between humans and other animals are played out – a venue for the coming together of a repertory of self-evident facts where there is no knowing how the self will survive, and abundant evidence that it will not. How a self becomes evident is a fact of theatre that requires an understanding of the dynamics of intimacy (the proximity of relations) and engagement (the conduct of associations).³⁵

If we associate this with Deleuze's "Becoming", we could distinguish an interest in the reconsideration of context and redefining the dynamics and agencies of both human animals and non-human. After having established an interest in giving non-human animals agency, as well as speaking of a venue of coming together, Read seemingly has given theatrical context to the ideas of "being animal" as well as deducing that the power relation between non-humans and humans place non-human animals in a position of minority.

³³ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p 82

³⁴ Jacques Derrida And The Question Of "The Animal", YouTube, December 18, 2008, accessed January 15, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ry49Jr0TFjk0%3A36.0:36>

³⁵ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p 107

2.2 Anthropomorphism and the projection of humans onto non-humans

In a 2016 masterclass with Jane Goodall in Iceland, Ms. Goodall was asked “do you feel that the anthropomorphism of animals in literature, specifically children’s literature, is detrimental to our understanding of them?”³⁶ , in a voice of almost disdain she replied “No, making animals more like us is the first step to showing them respect, it creates imagination and a liking of animals that cannot be taken away from them, that is what sparked my interest in animals.”³⁷ Here Ms. Goodall the question related to a naive form of creating empathy through anthropomorphism, However her answer captured the essence of what the members of *Performance for Pets* will describe later on in this essay, the idea of the spark, the ultimate creation, that through a lack of speech we could at least imagine. In the book *Here am I – Where are you?*³⁸ Konra Lorenz says “If we feel ourselves emotionally affected by the behaviour of an animal, it is a clear indication that we have intuitively discovered a similarity between its behaviour and human behaviour. We should not conceal this in our description.” , however earnest this statement may be, it does point to a problematic side of anthropomorphism, that of a anthropocentric narrative, we can only empathise with

³⁶ Björnsson, Gígja asking Jane Goodall in a masterclass at the University of Iceland June 2016

³⁷ In “Thinking with Animals New Perspectives in Anthropomorphism” .. “These longings for transcendence by taking thinking with animals to the limit often emerge in the context of field sciences like ethology, in which the researcher “goes native” in order to investigate animals in the wild. Laboratory studies of animals have usually stood opposed to anthropomorphizing tendencies: the proper scientific attitude is defined as cool, distanced, objective.” Jane Goodall’s history is full of a lack of understanding, she was not seen as a scientist, her love of animals and her gender made it difficult for her studies to be taken seriously. This idea of “going native” seems to be the main focus of the fear of anthropomorphisation within the scientific realm. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, *Thinking with animals: new perspectives on anthropomorphism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005

³⁸ Konrad Lorenz, Michael Martys, and Angelika Tipler, *Here I am - where are you?: the behaviour of the greylag goose*(HarperCollins, 1992), 260.

that which concerns or reminds us of human-animals. In her essay *Animals Love Theatre* Rachel Rosenthal³⁹ criticizes the use of non-humans in theatre and categorises this use in two ways. One, is the use of animals in performance for humans to assert dominion, the latter to perform anthropomorphized beings that embody human traits and failures. She goes on to say demonstrating otherness is an area for possible inclusion.⁴⁰ Perhaps this is still linked to a problematic anthropomorphism, however she seems to be asking us to remain aware of the subject of other-ness rather than attempting to avoid it.

One of the main questions around anthropomorphism is that it is often utilized as a mere projection of a human-centric narrative. In *Thinking with Animals* Lorraine Daston states “Animals simplify the narrative to a point that would be found flat or at least allegorical if the same tales were recounted about humans.”⁴¹ Therefore, the use of non-human animals in performance is often anthropomorphic in a ventriloquist manner, the animal is used to project thoughts and feelings of humans. This is an aspect that is often criticized about popular culture, using non-human animals to portray human sentimentality means that they are ripped of their agency. In popular culture the term “Bambi Effect”⁴² is used to describe the objection of the killing of likeable, but to the detriment of the less likeable creatures to whom people will feel less empathy and for whom there will be less media coverage. Inasmuch as strong movements for the preservation of animals is important, it is also important to note that this does not relate to the non-human animals’ agency, purely the narrative we have constructed around it. The animal becomes an icon, which is where Daston

³⁹ Rachel Rosenthal, "Animals Love Theatre," TDR: The Drama Review, March 05, 2007, , accessed February 1, 2018, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/210844>.

⁴⁰ Rachel Rosenthal, "Animals Love Theatre," TDR: The Drama Review, March 05, 2007, , accessed February 1, 2018, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/210844>.

⁴¹ Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, *Thinking with animals: new perspectives on anthropomorphism* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007)

⁴² The term “Bambi” relates to Walt Disney’s popular film *Bambi*, an adorable deer that most people would not want to harm.

argues that the difficulty seems to be in achieving an integrated view of the animal in the imagery of human history.⁴³ Levians would perhaps argue that this “interruption of (his) egoism coming from the face of Other that transforms my being in the direction of generosity.”

Lorraine Daston declares that “thinking with animals can take the form of an intense yearning to transcend the confines of self and species, to understand from the inside or even to become an animal.” She notes that “this is a desire with a long history and that it was once directed as ardently to angels as it now is to animals.” A yearning to transcend most certainly relates to Deleuze’s longing to become-animal, but also relates to Read’s interest in the non-human performer as “Literally – realised, to become in some way more real, more than palpable and present, to become really excitable, or at least just a bit ‘less fake’”. In other words, the longing to understand non-human animals is also an interest in overcoming the ego and finding some form of truth in performance, whether it be through observing non-human on stage, unaware of its performative value, or attempting to find this truth through “becoming animal”.⁴⁴

Daston depicts the imagery of animals that we are bombarded with on the internet, often by mentioning the human characteristics that are highlighted, eyes, or facial expression. This reminds us in turn of Baudrillard’s “hyperreal”, an animal that is more real than reality itself, and in placing the non-human animal within the realm of the hyperreal, we are assuming that its’ significance is not related to its true state of being. Baudrillard’s theory of simulacrum⁴⁵, the idea may be then that the non-human

⁴³ Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, *Thinking with animals: new perspectives on anthropomorphism* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007) p.9

⁴⁴ Alan Read, *Theatre, intimacy & engagement: the last human venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.4

⁴⁵ Jean Baudrillard and Sheila Faria. Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).p2

animal's placement in our collective imagination is in its representative form rather than its' natural form. Non-human animals seem to take the role of mirroring, or creating a fantasy for us to revel in. It also relates to our interest in relating to that specific animal:

Thinking with animals, is increasingly thinking with individual animals. That historical shift in the “morphos” of anthropomorphism, which can be readily traced to the late nineteenth century, has not only structured how we think with animals but how we act in relationship to them as well, fueling debates about the agency and moral standing of animals in human society. It is also thinking about what it would be like to be that animal, as opposed to thinking about the structures and processes of animal cognition and emotion. The contrast roughly parallels that between an introspective approach to human thought, in which the psychologist turns inward and examines the contents of his or her own consciousness (...)⁴⁶

In essence, we are watching the performance of animals, daily, perhaps without giving a second thought to their agency. Perhaps one theme we can take in order to answer the question of this essay is that there must be a conscious effort at allowing the non-human space for agency. Thusly, we may conclude that anthropomorphism, though controversial, seems to be an accessible form of understanding non-human animals, hence offering them agency in performance.

3. 1 A look at non-human animal agency in performance

Tom Regan's *Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights* states “When all is said and done, the only adequate moral response to vivisection is empty cages, not

⁴⁶ Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, *Thinking with animals: new perspectives on anthropomorphism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). p. 10

larger cages”⁴⁷. This argument concerns animals in laboratories however it can be adjusted to thoughts of animals in entertainment. That is to say the idea that humans can provide better facilities for animals working in entertainment versus those who say that the mere thought of animals in entertainment is an unethical thought.

Non-human animals are a source of great popular entertainment, on the *Performance For Pets* website they state “Animals have been entertaining humans throughout the ages in circuses and zoos, entertainment by pets has overtaken the Internet, every pet is in a sense a performer for humans.”⁴⁸ They go on to say “Contemporary pets no longer have a practical function in the household. Cats don’t need to catch mice; dogs no longer need to guard the house. Pets have upgraded their job descriptions and line of work to what we call immaterial or affective labour. In short, pets manage to make a living out of just being themselves instead of producing something. And that we find very contemporary.”⁴⁹

Indubitably an anthropomorphic, and perhaps slightly tongue-in-cheek response to “how did you come up with this idea”, however they have suggested that pets are already being exploited, being used as entertainment, but also are proposing an anthropomorphic way of understanding their agency, or a way of imagining common ground.

⁴⁷ Regan, Tom, and Jeffery Moussaieff. Masson. *Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. P.2

⁴⁸ The word “pets”, does not encompass the world of non-human animals.

⁴⁹ [Http://www.performancesforpets.net/info/](http://www.performancesforpets.net/info/), , accessed January 22, 2018.

3.2 Interview with *Performance for Pets*

Armed with the ideas that non-human animals could be classified as a minority, that there is a philosophical interest in understanding them without creating an atmosphere of dominance, as well as there being an interest in changing the ideas behind performance, giving non-human animals agency, the duo *Performance for Pets* were interviewed. *Performance for Pets*'s two performers, or perhaps they may be depicted as performance enablers, are Kroot Juurak and Alex Bailey. Kroot and Alex first interview the person associated to the pet, in order to understand the animal and what it likes,

As Alan Read discussed the idea of anthropomorphism as a tool that seemed natural to find commonality, the performative duo were asked how they felt about anthropomorphism being used as a means of understanding non-human animals. They explained that they were working with an idea they like to call “animorphising”, where they try to act as the non-human animal and imagine what they are experiencing. They discussed anthropomorphism, as a means of imagining how non-human animals feels. Alex went on to say that the idea of art, the idea of performance and theatre are all man made conventions. Kroot continued by asking, “what is something that dogs do that we just don’t understand but that they know how to do better than us, we need to imagine that”. This resonates with the key principle of the essay which is an attempt to determine the power structures from humans to non-humans and the means by which we can decentralize these structures through performance. Kroot and Alex’s claim to listen to the non-humans as a way of allowing them to lead a performance, thus giving them agency, however this agency seems to only have a place within the performance as they are working on the grounds that performance is a man made term that they are attempting to challenge.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Kroot Juurak and Alex Bailey, *Performance for Pets*, interview with author.

A recent Danish paper had used them as an example by asking dog psychologists whether dogs understood art, the conclusion of the article had been that dogs do not understand art. However, they gladly explained that to even trigger such a discussion was an accomplishment and that it meant that perhaps some people would begin to imagine what the dog sees and question our relationship to the word *audience*, which in essence relates to our ideas surrounding the terminology of performance.

Alex's response was to say that the intrinsic value of these beings is that we as humans and animals (non-human animals), inhabit this Earth together and are using each other, most art works seem to not show the value of these creatures, "so that's the one good thing that we're doing, we're addressing the audience as pets, even though pets is usually just cats and dogs, at least by labelling them as audience members it places them in a place where we can value their interpretation of what we do." ⁵¹

He continues:

Retrospectively, if it's accepted that cats and dogs are collaborating, that this is a joint effort, then we can begin to look at it in the sense that they (the non-human animals) are making the art, it must be logical. And if they are artists, then they too can be audiences to artistic practices. ⁵²

After having established the notion of the non-human as spectator I was interested in whether or not they viewed non-humans as a minority or even subaltern. As the interview mostly related to their practice Alex discussed what he saw as an indication of their minority status. In describing the involvement of animals in art they continued by saying that they felt that the status of animals in art was similar to how art has treated many minorities, that to say that it is effectively closed off to said minorities but hold a place through being subjects and motifs in paintings and sculpture.⁵³

⁵² Kroot Juurak and Alex Bailey, Performance for Pets, interview with author.

⁵³ Kroot Juurak and Alex Bailey, Performance for Pets, interview with author.

3.3 Methods proposed to challenge the power structures in performance:

Kroot continued that the ways in which people approach non-human animals is also important, she discussed the idea that humans enjoy non-humans in videos and photography but that this is often more exploitative as the animals are often being made fun of and forced into uncomfortable situations. However, she goes on to say that Every new performance is a new shift in the art world, and that they're making this shift with them.

This idea of making a shift together is perhaps another form of hoping to give non-humans agency. In a sense their ideas on anthropomorphism can narrow down the structures within their work, they seem to allow for a certain of imagination, imaging how it is to be an animal, in doing so they suggest an agency and although we cannot be certain that this attempt is completely understood by the pets, the fundamental aspect of their performance is precisely an attempt at giving space and thusly we can assume that this is at least an conscientious pursuit to decentralizing the human narrative around performance and giving voice to the subjects at hand. In a world where we assume non-humans to be subaltern, giving them the stage as such is an act of political defiance in the face of a western male centric theatrical form.

Performance for Pets can be in many ways seen as a form of giving space for the non-human to act as it wants. *Performance for Pets*'s ideas seem to coincide with Una Chaudry's idea set forth in "The Stage lives of Animals" , "based on simple appreciation and a respectful kind of curiosity that is, and has long been, a powerful alternative to anthropocentric and exploitive cultural animal practices."⁵⁴,

Performance for Pets seems to both acknowledge the power relation between non-human and animal in performance, as well as attempt to challenge it by rethinking the narrative of performance and it's subjects. Moreover, they are attempting to find a quintessence, an almost magical ground, where they aim to communicate and receive consent from a non-human animal in order to upheave its' agency. From their

⁵⁴ Una Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals: Zooësis and Performance* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an Imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2017). p.194

interview it can be somewhat deduced that they favour the idea of using imagination, and anthropomorphism can fall into that category if utilized with consideration of its possible problematic nature. By acknowledging the power structure, changing the dynamics of the form and language and utilizing imagination, *Performance for Pets* seem to be decentralizing the human centric narrative around performance and therefore allowing for a challenging of human to non-human power struggles through performance.

3.4 An Analysis of *Performance for Pets* in relation to the theories discussed within the essay.

In *Performing Animality* Lewis is cited as discussing ‘limbic resonance’⁵⁵, defined as ‘a symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other’s inner states’. This Limbic resonance would be a satisfying definition for what Kroot and Alex are attempting to create. Understanding this is in a way also a way of understanding Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming”. If resonance and attunement are at the forefront of performing with the non-human, it is no longer a question of imitating, it is a means of finding an unspoken language. Kroot and Alex are not attempting to stage the non-human as a means of playing out its ontological narrative, the non-human is not presumed to be in character of the “pet cat” or “pet dog”, it is in essence a willing participant:

How might we ‘understand performance as other than human’?
How might we consider ‘a relocation of agency in which animals are not just objects in performance, but also its active agents’?
Interspecies performance, the new kind of “animal act”—is that, whatever else animals may come to mean in the piece (and they will undoubtedly mean many things), we will be reminded—or we will want to remind ourselves—of their real existence, their actual

⁵⁵ Lourdes Orozco García and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). P. 32

being as members of a biological species with a specific morphology, geography, and history.⁵⁶

This quote from *Performing Animality*, reminds us of the space occupied by the non-human animal without the sense of anthropomorphism, it discusses “interspecies performance”, relating to the notions of recreating a language around performance. It also bids us to remain aware and curious about the non-human animal for what it is. This is an important factor in Kroot and Alex’s performances, as their performance is meant for the pets, and is therefore expected to be appreciated on its own terms.

In Peter H. Steve’s “Rachel Rozenthal is an Animal” he states :

“The truly postmodern animal, is neither paraded on stage as a naïve symbol of some human fable, nor is it placed before us as if it could possibly mean nothing, as if the artist is somehow beyond or outside the web of culture, language, symbol, etc. that makes the appearance of art possible.”⁵⁷

If we are to follow this thought of the post-modern animal, we must assume that although non-humans can be given some form of agency it is important to remember their positioning within our culture. This relates to ideas of minorities and the notion that a non-human animal body will, presumably, always be laden with cultural significance. This thought, however, presumes an audiences’ appreciation of the non-human animal, whereas what Kroot and Alex are interested in is finding agency for the non-human. Steve’s point is however important in the sense that it would seem naive to pretend that the non-human’s appearance in performance is not intricately linked to its placement as a minority or at least as an entity that is traditionally overpowered by humans.

⁵⁶ Lourdes Orozco García and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). P. 88

⁵⁷ H. Peter Steves, "Rachel Rosenthal Is an Animal," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* Vol. 39, No. 4, a Special Issue: THE ANIMAL (December 2006), Pp. 1-26:.

3.5 Performance as such / Art as such

The ideas brought forth by the *Performance for Pets* seem to fit nicely with Spivak's ideas of subaltern. Moreover, for the purpose of this essay we assume that non-humans fall under the term subaltern, we could perhaps argue that art, in this situation is a form of language. Using a similar idea as Read's switching of "performance as such", it can be proposed that we use the "art as such", art in this instance including performance and theatre. If the art world is seen as a language, impenetrable by non-humans then perhaps performance is the most likely place for non-humans to find a space within the ambiguous world of art. Thusly I was interested in the specifics of the methodology used by *Performance for Pets*, as it seems that although giving a subaltern group a means by which to express themselves; this would normally pertain to matters of verbal and written expression.

On being asked in which ways they are aware of these power dynamics, Kroot answered that doing anything with animals is exploitative, that the question was how they could minimize it. Both Kroot and Alex feel that they are trying to give animals their own agency, to give them the ability to chose and to judge their own movements.

Conclusion

Before attempting to write this essay I had very specific idea of the problematics regarding the idea of anthropomorphism and the idea that humans are in such a place of privilege that we only feel we can show empathy to those with whom we can relate.

Throughout the writing of this essay I wondered if anthropomorphism will be seen as the starting point, nearly a naive starting point, to offering non-humans agency?

However interesting and inviting Deleuze's ideas of "becoming animal" may seem, I do wonder whether they create a similar naivety and near fetisization or at least romanticization of the non-human as almost magical, a power to be tapped into, rather than the non-human having an agency completely unrelated to anything most humans find interesting. I wonder if we will ever be able to decentralise the human animal.

However as presently we have no form of verbal communication with non-verbal animals, we could argue that being a non-human mouthpiece is perhaps useful and pertinent to matters of legality, however as a means of expression it seems critical to identify the process of working with non-humans, as a way of seeing how and if it is possible to shift the narrative and decentralize the human, thusly challenging the power structures at hand.

I was drawn to *Performance for Pets* as they fell under a category of internet quirkiness that I felt could be easily dismissed, but felt a personal interest in the idea that they created a shift in the audience. The fact that it could be dismissed as a viral VICE video about offbeat artists made me wonder about the position we put animals in, an assumption that only humans can understand art. I enjoyed their ideas about attempting to give agency, that they seem so focused on imagining, on trying to imitate something that may seem fundamentally unimportant, but highlighting it and creating a space for the non-humans to interact seemed to give them agency.

The definition of non-humans is so often related to their lack of being something that we are, lack of verbality, lack of soul, as these do seem to be the ideas proposed by science and artistic culture. Othering, as a means of understanding ourselves and

placing ourselves within the world can however create a constant dualism. This of course relates to the idea that the language itself is where the power structure lies, language becomes the strongest stronghold in ideas, therefore ideas of subalternity in performance can be related to the power struggles within language. Othering will always pertain to their powerlessness, perhaps a mutual agreement, however far fetched it may seem, would be to refuse the power structures of language and allow for a larger fluidity within language.

For the purpose of this essay we can then discuss the calamity that is the naturalization of a specific form of performance, thusly bringing us to the notion that minority groups could be given a stronger voice if the language around performance were to be more lenient. Personally I see the naturalization of a specific form of performance as an affliction, minority groups could be given a stronger voice if the language around performance were to be more lenient. Perhaps imagination is the only tool we have that can bring us closer to the voiceless, and therefore I wonder if imagination is the key tool to creating a realm of understanding and of rethinking the power structures within our world. If we can imagine a huge shift in perspective than there is perhaps hope for us to create agency for non-humans on stage, however must we not then challenge the dominance in language? I wonder if giving non-human animals agency on stage will lead to a shift in understanding, an exercise in rethinking collective imagination and creating new pockets of spaces where non-humans may be offered agency without having to remind us of ourselves. Until then, I will presume that the keys to challenging the power relations of non-humans and humans on stage are to acknowledge the context of the power dynamic, and to use imagination to create a space that hopefully provides agency to the non-human animal.

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