

**CHARLIE BLAKE, CLAIRE MOLLOY AND STEVEN
SHAKESPEARE (EDS) (2012) *BEYOND HUMAN:
FROM ANIMALITY TO TRANSHUMAN.*
LONDON AND NEW YORK: CONTINUUM.
ISBN: 978-1-4411-5011-0**

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As Sean Cubitt makes clear in his preface to this collection, the sovereign subject of 'human' rights is an unstable taxonomic construction, dependent upon a perverse mythology in which 'innocence' is accorded to those, like animals and children, who cannot speak 'for' themselves. Ideas of citizenship and legal and political responsibility are based in the proof of an identity which is always in danger of destabilisation through its dependence on structures of difference. The instability of the category 'human' has been the subject of philosophical debate for centuries but it is only recently that the biological and informational sciences have begun to shake the ethical foundations of modernity by revealing a lack of real, material distinctions between ourselves and other animals or, indeed, between ourselves and machines. We are thus forced into a position in which the categories we have crafted to apply to only those who are understood as rational, and thus responsible, actors must be subjected to critical examination, as must the inhibiting distinctions between nature and culture and between the arts and sciences.

Charlie Blake, Claire Molloy and Steven Shakespeare's introduction to the volume offers the helpful term '*transitional animals*' (6, their emphasis) as a non-exclusive replacement for 'human' and its others in thinking the articulations which trouble 21st century ontologies. Indeed, Shakespeare's chapter, 'Articulating the Inhuman: God, Animal, Machine', is pivotal to the collection in that it foregrounds articulation as a methodology suitable to thinking the unthinkable which, as Cubitt tells us, 'is a hallmark of political life' (xviii). 'To articulate', writes Donna Haraway, 'is to signify. It is to put things together, scary things, risky things, contingent things' (1992: 324).

The force of articulation for Shakespeare lies in the fact that this 'putting together' cannot be thought without recourse to a transcendent principle. This is not a principle that organises or guarantees, rather it is thinking without Bruno Latour's 'crossed-out God' (1993: 13); the persistence of Christian theology in secular modernity under the guise of the 'laws of nature' which are then held in unquestioned opposition to equally law-bound categories like 'society', secured by Cartesian dualism. Tracing a line from Aristotle, through Kant, Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari, Shakespeare performs a brief archaeology of articulation which finds that 'putting together' must necessarily refer, in the end, to something that is 'unconditioned'; something that is outside the system of articulations and that enables it to remain dynamic. His proposition is that we thus cannot consider ontology without 'the shadow of God'. If, as he claims, articulation is what 'makes the organic possible' (250) then, like Haraway's cyborg, it 'gives us our politics' (Haraway, 1991: 150).

It is this sense of articulation which can be read as a sub-text across the twelve essays which comprise the collection concerned, as they are, with the marks and traces of species and machine symbiosis in cultural and social production. Ron Broglio asks, 'when the animals take up arms, what would induce them to spare the lives of humans?' (17), a question which illustrates his proposition that the rational, socially well-behaved human and the animal are articulated on the plane of 'idiocy', which is both opposed to 'common sense' and its undermining condition. Idiocy correlates with animality and animality with the unruly body. In the refusal of Diogenes, for example, to communicate other than through his body, the shaky foundations of cultural norms are dealt a severe blow as the materiality of the body imposes itself, strategically, between thought and what it hopes to express. Broglio's 'Incidents in the Animal Revolution' include sheep rolling over cattle grids to get to greener pastures, an octopus flooding a public Aquarium by opening a valve in its tank, a groundhog that bites the hand of a prominent politician and a chimpanzee throwing rocks at zoo visitors (to give just four of his examples). These are incidents of 'corporeal speech' (17), a speech which communicates but which does not signify (like direct action without the placards). To be attentive to corporeal speech would be to acknowledge a shared vulnerability (of the body) but also the vulnerability of a social system that 'keeps the animals at bay'. The animal revolution, then, is an upheaval in social relations, which occurs when shared vulnerability breaks through to challenge the 'civic human' (18).

Our fraught relationship with apes and, specifically, the chimpanzee, is the subject of Claire Molloy's 'Being a Known Animal', which explores attempts to 'humanise' the chimpanzee both through filmed representation and ethological studies focused on their potential to acquire a form of language. Behind these attempts, as Molloy points out, is a desire to prove a connection between intelligible communication and moral reasoning. What is revealed is that it is the successful chimp experiments which disappoint in this regard, rather than the failures. For instance, Washoe, the chimpanzee who famously acquired the ability to learn sign language, remained aggressive towards humans and was kept caged. Molloy refers us to the discussion of Washoe in Vicky Hearne's *Adam's Task*, in which she 'grieves' for language and the failure of our hopes that interspecies communication will prove, finally, that possession of language guarantees moral agency. Thus, the culture industries produce what Molloy calls 'narratives of disavowal' (45); Cheeta's starring role in the *Tarzan* films, *Bedtime for Bonzo*, in which a chimp is socialised to the extent that it can function as a 'well-trained moral agent and surrogate son' (41) and, more recently, *Being John Malkovich*, which, in keeping with the late 20th century discourse of animal rights, posits the chimp as acquiring a moral sense beyond that of which humans are capable through its experience of suffering at the hands of hunters. The implication is that, in the absence of language, a psychic orientation towards empathy is provided by memory and trauma. What is striking here (particularly in Molloy's stories of the failures of chimp training in Hollywood) is that it is precisely the idiocy of which Broglio writes that is disavowed.

Giovanni Aloï is also concerned with empathy but in the sense in which our ability to empathise with animals is limited to those that we can easily anthropomorphise through their physical similarity to us. More specifically, he is interested in the way that species are hierarchised in terms of their perceived ability to experience pain which, as he shows, is closely connected to 'the return of the gaze' (51). If Levinas is correct and it is the face of the Other which elicits an apprehension of ethical responsibility then, asks Aloï, what of animals that do not have faces? Or who, at least, do not have a physiology that enables them to return our gaze? 'I do not know', he says, 'if an insect has a face...' (53).

Aloï is concerned with the destabilising effect of art projects which address this question, like Catherine Chalmers' *American Roach* (2004), a photographic project in which insects are posed in

athropomorphising environments. Particularly controversial is her *Execution* series, which features dead insects substituting for humans in execution scenarios; they are apparently electrocuted, hung and burnt to death. On the one hand, the series can be read as a comment on how we must render the Other faceless in order to justify killing but, on the other, the irony of being forced to consider the ethical consequences of killing for art's sake by species we happily dispose of in our homes exposes the cultural determination of the way we value different forms of life.

Perhaps what is most interesting about the different projects Aloi considers is that they all rely, to a greater or lesser extent, on technology and, in some cases, cutting edge devices originally developed for commercial, military or medical applications as, for instance, in Kenneth Rinaldo's *Augmented Fish Reality*, which uses sophisticated robotics techniques to enable Siamese fighting fish to manipulate objects in their environment. In this sense, Aloi's chapter resonates with the final essay in the collection, Gareth Jones and Maja Whitaker's 'Transforming the Human Body', which considers the way that therapeutic prosthetics point to a 'beyond human' augmentation of the body. '[H]ow is one to determine', they ask, 'where the limits of normality lie?' (263). While it is true that bodies deemed 'normal' have historically marked other bodies as deviant or lacking, upgrading to what Steve Fuller calls 'Humanity 2.0' (2011) raises the spectre of new inequalities with concerning implications for how we determine the status of those who cannot or do not wish to become cyborg. But, as Aloi's chapter reveals, the kind of advanced technology which is exciting some to imagine a future where we are able to dispense with the body altogether is also bringing us uncomfortably close to other bodies which we had previously been able to dismiss as pests, able to be killed without remorse. Aside from its application in art projects involving animals, large-scale scientific projects like computer sequencing of genomes are revealing a breakdown, at the genetic level, of the taxonomies that have kept species apart so that what counts as 'normal' for both ourselves and other animals is increasingly brought into question.

Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson address this question through a discussion of the methodologies employed in art practice involving live animals. Pointing out that recent research has revealed startling similarities between the structure of human and whale brains, particularly in those areas which 'allow us to feel love and suffer emotionally' (78), they suggest that this points more urgently to the need for an approach to animal encounters which does not

simply accord them a status measured by what we understand as human intelligence. In what they call 'parities in meeting' (79) something akin to Broglio's idiocy is evoked to stand for their attempt to suspend rational engagement in their encounter with seals around the coast of Iceland. They see the project as a collaboration with the animals 'to find ways of working with what is there rather than what we would like or can contrive to be there' (89). The value of adopting this approach is that it allows an interrogation of the agendas that construct cultural representations of animals. As they point out, the animal 'itself' is lost in these representations or, rather, there is no sense in which we encounter the animal, only a reflection of our assumptions about both ourselves and other species. Equally, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson's various encounters emerge as a series of articulations at the level of the body in which play substitutes language as that which counts as a meaningful exchange.

Natalie Corinne Hansen's 'Horse-Crazy Girls' is also concerned with play; specifically, the injunction to femininity encoded in the play rituals associated with *My Little Pony* (MLP), a toy for girls which sanctions horses as love objects as part of the transition to normalised heterosexuality. Through a reading of Steven Klein's eroticised photographs of Madonna in a stable, Deborah Bright's photographic series 'Being and Riding', which features MLP as an object of sexual desire and Enid Bagnold's *National Velvet* (1935), Hansen explores girls' becoming-horse as a queer sensibility able to subvert the assimilation of female bodies to norms of gender and sexuality. Recommending the Centauride, a female centaur, as a figure which articulates across both species and gender boundaries, she proposes that the literature of childhood cross-species relating be read, against the grain, as a recognition of the potential for multiple configurations of both bodies and mature love.

Similar composite beings appear in the French Caribbean literature explored by Lucile Desblache. As she points out, writers of the Caribbean are historically placed to counter the entrenched oppositions of Western culture because they inhabit a culture of hybridity 'visibly constructed from fragmented entities' (125). And, in her reading of Patrick Chamoiseau's story 'Angèle and Werecat', it is again a little girl for whom the hybrid creature is a source of wonderment while the werecat, an identity in constant flux, is shunned by adult humans. Desblache reads Chamoiseau's collected stories in *Emerveilles* through the lens of colonial history, Creole tradition and the complex interrelationships between the Caribbean

landscape and its human and animal populations. Through the imagination of creatures that are not bounded by categorisation and the moral and social imperatives proper to fixed ontologies, animality functions as a trope for the possibilities of an emergent historical identity which owes more to Deleuzian rhizomatics than the teleologies of Western imperialism. And, again, it is worth noting that hybridity here is composed of articulations, not only across species boundaries but across historical time as a history is written which puts together, for example, dogs used to control slave populations with birds which 'weave links between earth and sea, water and wind, human and non-human' (130) in Creole mythology.

Felicity Colman's chapter 'Affective Animal' is concerned with prehistoric animal representation in the writings of Bataille and, specifically, the Lascaux cave paintings and their relationship to his thesis on the economy of consumption. Bataille's work has gained new relevance with the rise of animal studies, not least because he offers a way to think animality as excess; as a primary instigator of desire and as embodying the transgressive potential of the sacred. Colman here is primarily interested in the way that Lascaux can be said to mediate a form of consciousness which acknowledges the sacred in 'the consumptive energies required and produced by the hunt' (157) and which can provide an affective resource for externalising the paradoxes inherent in labour which ensures survival only through killing. Colman asks, 'where are the affective images of the animals we depend upon to be found today, and what forms do they take?' (152). Concentrating on cattle as a constant food source for human communities throughout history and pre-history, she finds that contemporary farming practices are mediated through imagery derived from popular culture, like the genetically engineered '*Belgium Blue Schwarzenegger* super muscle cow' (153) and the 'Disney-dairy lifecycle' (155) of the 'carousel cow milking method' (154). Colman's plea is that we consider this mediatation in light of Bataille as a means to, perhaps, attending to the emergence and the potential of the sacred in the expression of contemporary animal-human relations.

Donald L. Turner also turns to Bataille and, like Colman, his intention is to think animals *with* humans as a means to bring other animals into the community and thus into the purview of our ethical responsibility. For Turner, however, the concept of excess which is at the heart of Bataille's ideas can be used to structure an economy of love and concern which he finds by reading Bataille with Levinas.

While recognising the anthropocentrism of Levinas' 'phenomenology of the face' (168), he nevertheless recommends that a strong animal ethics can be read from Levinas' understanding of asymmetries of power between self and Other to provoke an emotional response and thus awareness of responsibility. This 'shock' (171), says Turner, is provided by encounters with individual Others, in whom one recognises suffering, rather than statistics which simply *report* suffering on a mass scale. However, he does not agree with Levinas that concern directed at another must necessarily detract from both care for oneself or multiple others. In other words, an economy of scarcity precludes an embracing animal ethics while one of excess can account for the possibility of generosity which, while potentially motivated by self-interest, nevertheless can extend from the suffering of one to care for many.

For Celia Deane-Drummond, however, caring for animals requires that we accord them the possibility of freedom. The problem she identifies is in how freedom is understood and, in particular, how concepts of freedom drawn from theological discourse can be applied to understanding animal agency. Focusing on studies of primates, Deane-Drummond explores the potential for their behaviour to be understood in terms of willed intentions. Although the evidence is far from conclusive, the literature that she surveys certainly points to apes' ability to ascribe states of mind to others which, as she points out, is understood to be a necessary condition for 'self-directed agency' (187). Surveying the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Deane-Drummond finds that theology is at odds with science in that, while Balthasar accords freedom to animals largely through the way that companion animals are seen to freely engage in loving relationships with humans, he stops short of according them agency and does not consider animals outside domestic arrangements. Deane-Drummond's conclusion is that an anthropocentric theology that distinguishes humans by their capacity for freedom is of limited value in crafting an ethical framework for dealing with other animals but that Balthasar's work seems to point to the possibility of an inclusive ethics. If Balthasar were able to acknowledge the findings of primate studies, Deane-Drummond proposes, his argument may be pushed to the point where humans and other animals would be seen to share degrees of freedom.

Although it is only Jones and Whitaker's chapter that directly addresses how technological interventions challenge the bodily coherence that has, traditionally, functioned to guarantee human

integrity, it is technology or, more specifically, *technics*, in the sense proposed by Bernard Stiegler which unites the various contributions to this collection. As Charlie Blake points out in his chapter 'Inhuman Geometry', Stiegler's concept of *epiphylogenesis* (Stiegler, 1998: 140, his emphasis) provides for a non-teleological understanding of evolution in its focus on inscription, the externalisation of memory in successive and various media forms, as the definition of what it means to be human. Blake, like Colman, turns to Walter Herzog's 2010 3D documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* to explore how tertiary memory structures a different temporality. While, for Colman, the filmed cave drawings at Chauvet Pont d'Arc are, in Herzog's words, 'frozen flesh of a moment in time' (156), Blake explores these affective animals in terms of their communication across time, of a shared consciousness but also of an aesthetic sensibility inseparable from technics. From this, he develops a theory of what he calls 'baroque evolutionism' (218), which he illustrates through a reading of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and David Cronenberg's film 'hybridization' (219) of the same name. What is persuasive here is that the articulations which put together different media, forms of inscription, impossible mergings and incommensurable lifeworlds inscribe a baroque temporality which, drawing on Deleuze and Bergson, Blake suggests, connects epiphylogenesis to virtuality. Our understanding of ourselves and other animals through art and technical externalisation, in other words, can refute the teleologies of current transhumanist ideas which take for granted the sovereignty of disembodied reason. Taken together, the essays in this collection offer a persuasive argument for what should count in crafting a politics for transitional animals and their reciprocal others.

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