



“Deconstruction of Ethology” A Reading of Jacques Derrida in the Light of the Ethological Debate

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ABSTRACT: Derrida developed his most famous reflections on Animality in the Seminars: *The Beast & The Sovereign* (2001-2003). My hypothesis is that there we can find Derrida's explicit interest for the ethological debate and its development. Indeed, I will show how deconstruction and ethological science are strictly connected for many reasons. If the historical scientific development of ethological sciences promoted the deconstruction of anthropomorphism (K. Lorenz, 1962), anthropocentrism (D. R. Griffin, 1979) and logocentrism (C. Safina, 2015; A. Neven, 2020), the theory of deconstruction uses these results with the aim to develop new conceptualities over the limits between Animals and Man. Thus, my aim will be to track the conceptual points of connection between Ethology and Deconstruction considering also the recent develops of cognitive and post-cognitive animal studies.

KEY WORDS: Biodeconstruction; Jacques Derrida; Ethology; Autoimmunity; anthropocentrism; anthropomorphism; Carl Safina



INTRODUCTION

The theme of the animal is certainly one of the most explored areas of research in the context of Derridean studies because of the clear relevance that the issue has in the author's whole work, by his own admission (Derrida, *B&S I* 20). However, no less intense is the interest both in the general context of philosophy and in that of contemporary science.

From a philosophical point of view, the opening of a post-humanistic scenario has placed in the foreground the question about the animal, frequently along with technology's and gender's questions (Haraway, Braidotti, Wolf). From a scientific point of view, instead, we are witnessing the flourishing of "Animal Studies": a wide range of disciplines, closely intertwined, ranging from zoology, animal biology, to ethology and primatology.

The aim of this paper is not to conduct yet another reconstruction of the question concerning the animal within Derrida's work, but rather to expose it in the light of an unprecedented comparison with the sectoral and scientific context of Animal Studies. On the background of Derrida's work commentary, I will nevertheless direct my analysis, in particular, towards the discipline of ethology for two reasons.

The first one is related to the internal debate within ethology which, clearly engaging some classical themes of philosophy, calls into question the intervention of the philosopher as a figure capable of assuming a prominent role in it. The second, on the other hand, concerns the core of Derrida's text which, while not abundant in explicit references, maintains a constant and attentive dialogue with ethological science, continually using its results to support the deconstruction of anthropocentric philosophical systems. This is a relationship between philosophy and natural science as a whole, which in Derrida is particularly fruitful and active from his earliest writings, as repeatedly emphasized in recent years by some authoritative scholars of deconstruction (Wills, *Dorsality*; Wills, *Inanimation*; Vitale, *Biodeconstruction*).¹ The place I identify to begin to extrapolate a certain mostly tacit and implicit dialogue between deconstruction and ethology is the context of the last two seminars of the French author, *The Beast & the Sovereign vol. I and II* and the posthumous text *The animal that therefore I am*. However, there is no doubt that this dialogue could also be profitably traced in earlier works. From that, as from many other points of view, the unpublished theme that I propose to deal with, (the relationship between deconstruction and ethology) is still by and large in an interlocutory and introductory phase, which aims to cast a preliminary glance in a direction that I hope can be further investigated by other scholars of the subject.

¹ Wills has investigated the theme of living in Derrida's work focusing on the *différance* between organic and inorganic, life and Death. Thanks to Vitale, instead, we are now able to reconstruct the encounter of deconstruction with Life Sciences such as genetics, epigenetics and immunology. My research follows explicitly the path taken by Vitale, in order to shed light on the prospects of deconstruction in the field of the life sciences.



THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MAN/ANIMAL OPPOSITION AS THE OPENING OF THE ETHOLOGICAL QUESTION

It is now urgent to clarify a conceptual ambiguity that I would like to bring out already from the title of this essay. In saying "Deconstruction of Ethology" I intend, in fact, to mark the possibility of the two senses of the genitive which connects the two terms. The genitive here should be understood as both objective and subjective, aiming at suggesting two divergent—but at the same time united—paths. In other words, Ethology, on one hand, can be deconstructed by Deconstruction, acting passively with it and, on the other hand, it can itself be deconstructive, in that case as subject of deconstruction: A Deconstructive Ethology.

My hypothesis—which I will also attempt to justify philologically within this essay—is that Jacques Derrida understood this pair (deconstruction/ethology) in the atmosphere of a peculiar *double bind* that challenges the rigid opposability of the terms—as it always happens in those oppositions that offer themselves to deconstructive analysis. However, such "confusion", rather than making us lose our way, offers us at least two speculative compensations, two tracks to follow. The first, more classical I could say, is the typically critical way in which philosophy interacts with science in an attempt to deconstruct its implicit assumptions, sometimes considered "metaphysical" (Deconstruction of ethology, with objective genitive). The second instead—in stark contrast to the phenomenological and ontological tradition intending to "destroy in order to found"²—indicates a different relationship between philosophy and science, where the latter "pushes" and guides the former (Deconstruction of ethology with subjective genitive). Let's say again that, in this regard, Derrida defines "fraught with difficulty" (Derrida, *B&S II* 274) that "philosophical gesture", typically Heideggerian, "[for which] the philosopher is the onto-phenomenologist who can make his own thesis of what is the presupposition, or even the hypothesis, of the zoologist" (Derrida, *B&S II* 274) and yet "the thesis depends on the orientation of the sciences (bio- and zoo-logy), but it has no need to be subjected to their proofs, to their tests, to their properly scientific Authority" (Derrida, *B&S II* 276).

I would say that Heidegger was the "negative model" on the basis of which Derrida has developed a counter-thought of animality and of the relationship between man and animal, as well as in this case, a counter-thought of the relationship between philosophy and science (Derrida, *Of Spirit*; Derrida, *Psyche*). To summarize, we can now hypothesize that deconstruction turns out to be both the subject and the object of ethology, depending on the case (which we will investigate shortly), and that would involve also the relationship between science and philosophy. However, regarding the latter relationship, we will not have the opportunity to say much more than what we have already mentioned in the introduction. Instead, we will be interested in understanding in depth and "from the inside" the subjective/objective relationship of

² I refer to Heidegger's expressed intention to take up a Husserlian "critique of the sciences", especially in *Sein und Zeit*.



deconstruction/ethology in order to show, first of all, how it is rooted in the deconstructive strategy of another oppositional pair: the one between man/animal.

The emphasis on the term “from the inside” is not casual since it concerns a debate that has in recent years ignited post-human philosophy and that field of philosophy which deals with the subject of animals. This debate aims at discussing and indicating the appropriate strategy to follow for coping with the human/animal pair. A peculiar example is *Zoographies. The question of the animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, where the author intends to review the animal question through different authors of continental philosophy. The last chapter mentions the work of Jacques Derrida: “Among contemporary Continental philosophers, Derrida is by far the most useful and insightful thinker in the domain of questions surrounding animality, and my general support of his approach reflects my respect for his original approach to the very difficult questions encountered in this domain of thought” (Calarco 156-157). However, at the end of the chapter, the author expresses a strong criticism of the strategy of deconstruction that, according to him, avoids “letting go” the opposition man / animal and reaffirm a “rhetoric [...] of abysses and ruptures between human beings and animals and among animals themselves” (Calarco 167). The paragraph called into question is entitled “letting go” and it refers in particular to a consideration contained in *The animal that therefore I am*, and successively re-mentioned in *For What Tomorrow* (Derrida, Rudinesco):

To suppose that I, or anyone else for that matter, could ignore that rupture, indeed that abyss, would mean first of all blinding oneself to so much contrary evidence; and, as far as my own modest case is concerned, it would mean forgetting all the signs that I have managed to give, tirelessly, of my attention to difference, to heterogeneities and abyssal ruptures as against the homogeneous and the continuous. (Derrida, *ATM*)

From this quote Calarco basically deduces two things. The first is that even though Derrida makes a strong critique of the traditional opposition between man and animal he would not finally give up to *letting go*. It would then follow that “once again, Derrida’s texts on the question of the animal are extremely vague in terms of their ultimate stakes in relation to the sciences, so it is impossible to know for certain what his aims are here” (Calarco 169).

Responding to Calarco’s criticism of the strategy of deconstruction, I will need to thematize the question of ethology/deconstruction starting from the deconstruction of the human/animal pair. The first observation concerns a substantial misunderstanding by the author of the term “abyss” as used by Derrida. In Derrida’s texts, the term “abyss” must be traced back to the logic of the *mise en abyme*³, which has been expounded several times. The abyss according to that figure is always seen not so much in its vertical depth, which would separate one bank from the other, but rather in a hyper/intra-

³ Expression that refers to a spiralized narratological structure that offers a multiplication of narrative and meta-narrative levels. Derrida for example employs it to explain the interpenetration of different epistemic levels in Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as analyzed in Derrida’s *To Speculate - on Freud*. Here the *mise en abyme* is used to show how each level of the Freudian text—the private psychological, the scientific, the meta-scientific and philosophical—is included in the other.



textual and hyper/intra-limitrophic depth, as a horizontal depth. To justify this interpretation, it is sufficient to go back and read *The Animal Therefore I am* in those passages where the quotations come from. In fact, a page before Derrida says:

It concerns or puts into effect another logic of the limit. [...] a properly transgressive if not transgressive experience of *limitrophy*. [...] Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. (Derrida, *ATIM* 29)

Therefore, the limit for Derrida is “oblique” and the abyss between the two margins complicates the limit itself, uniting in separation and separating in union, rather than *simply* separating or uniting. On the other hand, all this would already be obvious starting from the concept of *différance* itself which, as we know, is not a *simple* separative difference, but rather it is the condition of possibility of spatialization and temporalization between all dialectical opposites (Derrida, *Marges*; Derrida, *écriture et différence*; Derrida, *Grammatologie*).

Calarco's solution, which Derrida would not have had the courage to endorse, would then be “*simply* letting go the human/animal distinction” (Calarco 157). Assuming that the solution could be so *simple*, then one could ask why the author undertook to write a book about the opposition man/animal. If it were so simple to letting it go, why does he talk about it further? On the contrary, the Derridean question arises precisely from the awareness that a simple or even simplistic “letting go the opposition”, can only reaffirm it in other forms and in other words. What is interesting for Derrida is not to affirm peremptorily the end of a difference within language; it is not to say, suddenly, “from today we are *simply* animals”, but rather to show that in the statement “the animal that therefore I am” there is always the becoming-human and, conversely, a certain becoming-animal that has always been, and perhaps always will be in the historical and cultural process of the formation of human identity. Even if we want to say, in an apparently alternative way, “from today we are no longer animals or men”, we should then explain what we are or what we will be. Beyond the impossibility of formulating an ontology of the future (precisely because the ontology is structurally anchored to the present), then the problem becomes the gesture itself of *letting-go-to-go-beyond*, understood as a gesture of placing oneself higher, as a gesture of Sovereignty.

In the seminars on *The Beast & The Sovereign*, the deconstruction operating “from the inside” of the opposition man/animal shows how the gesture of an “exceeding” Sovereignty is rooted in the classical texts of tradition. The Beast and the Sovereign would have in common “a very singular position of being outlaws, above or at a distance from the law, the beast ignorant of right and the sovereign having the right to suspend right” (Derrida, *B&S I* 60) and this is because Sovereignty would be nothing more than a hypostatic revival of bestiality outside of the opposition man/beast in order to produce an “artificial prosthesis”, a “prosthetic-raise”. Derrida notes how in the classical texts on sovereignty —Schmittian concept of State, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, or Machiavelli's *Prince*— the same (onto-theological) logic of an artificial animality can be reproduced by virtue



of its being outside, above, beyond;⁴ the same “automatic, independent of will and even of desire, *bête*” (Derrida, *B&S* I 297) Derrida logic of a puppet or of the phallic erection that “rises above all comparable and sensory height” (Derrida, *B&S* I 288) It can be said that the whole seminar does nothing but name this fetishistic force, this “arch-force” characterized by an “economy of a *fathomless escalation* [that] has the effect of transforming these supermen into things” (Derrida, *B&S* I 268) which would then have its counterpoint in the inverse but complementary gesture of “founding” or giving an “*arché*”.⁵ There is no teleology without archeology, this is one of the classic teachings of deconstruction (Derrida, *Force de Loi*).

The years in which the seminar was written, moreover, offered the “live” of political events that reproduced precisely this phallus-teleology of sovereignty. In fact, Derrida sees in the rhetorical construction of the “Rogue States”, of the “exportation of human rights” and of “humanitarian wars”, once again the action of a Sovereignty that animalizes so to exclude (the “rogue states” are like wild animals, like lone wolves) and so to overcome law (international or national) imposing the domain of the strongest Nation State with a “bestial” violence. *Lyconomic* formation of the law then, since “It is always a matter of the law and of placing the other outside the law. The law (nomos) is always determined from the place of some wolf” (Derrida, *B&S* I 140). A wolf outside for a wolf above, for that Wolf who would be, finally, together Beast & Sovereign.

Sovereignty would reside in this *unheimlich* automatism of phallic erection, of *Ithuphallos*,⁶ that is of that priapic phallus which is always hyperbolically in erection. The *ithyphallic*-drive would be, however, according to Derrida, by its very nature an autoimmune-drive, because in the perpetual rejection of its other, of detumescence, of returning unerect (hence on all fours),⁷ the very possibility of procreation and survival

⁴ “Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governs the World) is by the Art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that can make an Artificial Animal” (qtd. in Derrida, *B&S* I 80); “To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term [*solche erhabenen Namen*] probably has certain incalculable effects [*nur den schrecklichen Anspruch manifestieren*] such as denying the enemy the quality of being human [*die Qualität des Menschen*] and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity [*Zur äussersten Unmenschlichkeit*]”; C. Schmitt (qtd. in Derrida, *B&S* I 109); “Thus, since a prince is compelled of necessity to know well how to use the beast he should pick the fox and the lion: for if he is only lion, he will not defend himself from snares: if he is only fox, he will not defend himself from wolves; so he needs to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to frighten the wolves. Those who stay simply with the lion are very unskillful” (Machiavelli’s Prince, qtd. in Derrida, *B&S* I 130).

⁵ In the third and twelfth lectures, Derrida highlights how Agamben in *Homo Sacer* would appropriate this foundational logic of sovereignty insofar as he would constantly attempt to position himself as “the first”. The first to say a certain thing about Foucault and a certain thing about Heidegger. See Derrida, *B&S* I 110-121 and 407-443.

⁶ “the *ithyphallos* is the hardness of the straight, rigid, standing phallus (*ithus* is straight, incidentally also, in the sense of rectitude).” See Derrida, *B&S* I 298.

⁷ In *the Animal Therefore I am* (134-136) Derrida associates phallic detumescence with the return to the quadrupedal state as a traumatic complex of the human being who rejects the “fall” towards animality. The defense against “Darwinian trauma” is still, according to Derrida, one of the deepest anthropocentric impulses for the construction of an autoimmune hierarchy of values. See also Wills, especially 15-42, for this kind of interpretation.



would be destroyed.⁸ Sovereignty is “The priapism, this infinite itifallism, the itifallism foreign to this detumescence that is the finitude of erection [...] which is a fatal pathology” (Derrida, *B&S* / 300). And the autoimmunity of the process of *ichthyphallic* sovereignty would come to light in the will to destroy the “other” in favor of the “own”, of a super-human, of a sovereign, of a Self beyond its own.⁹ In doing so, however, the living being would not eliminate anything but the condition of possibility of its own survival. As pointed out by Vitale in *Biodeconstruction*, Derrida's philosophy of living has always focused on highlighting the autoimmune nature of metaphysical logic that we inherit from tradition. Already from the seminar *La Vie La Mort* it is possible to find traces of this autoimmune logic, which according to Vitale would have been inferred from a comparison of the author with the immunology of the '90s by Ameisen (Vitale, *autoimmunity*; Vitale, *Biodeconstruction*).

THE ETHOLOGICAL DEBATE BETWEEN ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

We have thus seen, all too briefly, how Derrida imagines an autoimmune dialectic of Sovereignty that is constituted precisely, by *letting the Difference go*, in order to prosthetically/mechanically relaunch itself towards a metaphysical Highness. The Animal turns out to be that difference forgotten, marginalized and then exploited in favor of the power of a sovereign-man. I say this, both to answer Calarco's critique of the deconstructive strategy, but also to prepare myself to answer his second question, the one about the “relationship with the sciences of deconstruction”. Indeed, keeping well in mind the complex dialectic within the man/animal opposition and the constant autoimmune risk of its “revival” in Sovereignty, we can now attempt to propose a translation of this logic within an epistemological plane: the epistemological plane of ethological science. My idea is that Derrida imagined the ethological question in a certain way, precisely because he conceptualized this epistemological transaction, both implicitly and explicitly.

Before getting to Derrida's explicit position on ethology, however, I would like to briefly recall some elements of the ethological debate.

Since its first theorization (Lorenz, *Foundation of Ethology*) as an autonomous science from other animal studies, ethology lives the clash between two main currents: behaviorism and cognitivism. For behaviorists, the study of animal behavior must be explained as *simply* as possible, without having to assume complex functions where it

⁸ Derrida in the seminar notes how Aristotle himself warned against the ityphallic erection (always active) because “would produce in men only impotence without the emission of semen, and thus without generative power, and would produce only pain without enjoyment”, qtd. from Aristotle, *The Parts of Animals*, 689a 25-27 in Derrida, *B&S* / 300.

⁹ From the Latin etymology: “*superanus*” in which is more evident the root “Super” as above or beyond.



is not strictly justifiable,¹⁰ which generally implies a methodological reduction to the physiological characters of the living. In particular on the mental faculties (Bennett) communicative and linguistic (Beck; Robinson) behaviorists believe they should not grant almost nothing to animals.¹¹

On the contrary, already with K. Lorenz, the role of animal subjectivity and its mental faculties was taken more seriously (Lorenz, *Studies in Animals*). However, it will be especially with D. R. Griffin, *The Question of Animal Awareness* that ethology will take a turn towards what is still called “cognitivist ethology”. These new ethological studies attempt to restore dignity to animals by demonstrating that they possess attributes and properties historically considered as belonging exclusively to humans. Among the many empirical studies that have certainly favored the birth of this line, we remember for example the studies on the language of bees (Von Frisch) those on the language of chimpanzees (De Waal) and those on the mirror test (Gallup). The central epistemological question in the debate, especially after the publication of *The Conscious Animal*, on which the two schools of thought probably clash the most, is the antinomy between anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism (Wynne; Burghardt). On the one hand behaviorists accuse cognitivists of anthropomorphizing the animal by attributing human characteristics and not contributing at all in this way to its “epistemological emancipation” whilst, on the other hand, cognitivists argue that the exclusion of the animal, still enrolled in the Cartesian parameters of the animal-machine, necessarily leads to an epistemological hierarchy based on an anthropocentric dogma.¹² The *double bind* anthropocentrism/anthropomorphism turns out to be the real *impasse* of ethological epistemology. So, two features are clear from this debate, for what interests us now. The first is that we are still fully in the inside of dialectic man / animal and it is within this dialectic that ethology struggles to redefine a relationship of epistemological sovereignty between the two terms. The second note is that the question of Sovereignty, understood as *primus* and as *telos* is the implicit that motivates scientific positions. What is the place of man with respect to the animal and *vice-versa*? Who comes first and who comes second? How does one look at the other? From above, from below, from within or from without? (Nagel)

Our question then would be: how can Deconstruction help us into this game of parts? How does deconstruction fit into the *ethos* of ethological science in order to “overcome” the *double bind* of anthropocentric/anthropomorphic sovereignty? I conclude this paragraph by throwing within this huge problematic the most explicit position we can find in Derridean texts regarding it:

¹⁰ By virtue of a strict application of Morgan's canon: “In no case can we interpret an action as the result of the exercise of a higher psychic faculty, if it can be interpreted as the result of the exercise of a faculty occupying a lower step”.

¹¹ We will not have the opportunity to do so in detail, but it is clear that the authors concerned by Derridean deconstruction (Heidegger, Lacan, Descartes and Kant mainly) both in the seminars and in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, share these positions.

¹² Interestingly, from this point of view Griffin (75-85) tries to ethologically deconstruct Chomsky's positions on a “universal grammar” of man.



The critical or deconstructive reading that we are calling for would seek less to give back to the animal or to such an insect the powers here being denied it (even though that sometimes seems possible) than the wonder if the same type of analysis could not claim just as much relevance in the case of man (Derrida, *B&S* 165).¹³

DECONSTRUCTIVE ETHOLOGY AND/OR DECONSTRUCTION OF ETHOLOGY

The quote that closes the previous paragraph appears in the first seminar on *The Beast & The Sovereign* as a note to an even more eloquent remark by Derrida on cognitive ethology:

I speak of a 'semiotic system' and not of language, because it is precisely language that Lacan also rejects from the animal, recognizing only what he calls a 'code', the 'fixity of a codification' or a 'signaling system.' Other ways of calling what, in a cognitivist problematic of the animal that, while seeming to oppose it, often repeats the most worn-out platitudes of metaphysics, is called a 'pre-cabled response' or 'pre-cabled behavior'. (Derrida, *B&S* 165)

Derrida attributes these expressions to J. Proust (Proust, *Comment*) who would then replicate *worn-out platitudes of metaphysics*. These metaphysical assumptions are clearly those of the Cartesian animal-machine, which cannot respond but *automatically* reacts to external stimuli, unlike man who instead would know how to respond *authentically* through a real language. The reaction/response pair is at the heart of deconstruction in all works on the animal and we find it present, now, in the first place where Derrida directly encounters cognitive ethology. What Derrida suggests is that it would be impossible to attribute such definitions to animal language without attributing them equally to human language. What are the fundamental ontological differences between one and the other? Is it really possible to think our Response as totally different from a "pre-cabled response" as totally different from a Reaction, from an automatism, from a mechanism?

The same considerations recur in *The Animal Therefore I am*:

We are not concerned with erasing every difference between what we are calling *reaction* and what we commonly name *response*. [...] My hesitation concerns only the purity, the rigor, and the indivisibility of the frontier that separates-already with respect to 'us humans'-reaction from response. (Derrida, *ATIM* 125)

The deconstruction does not reveal the identity between human and animal language, but rather the dogmatic attitude that, on one hand, univocally assigns privative characteristics to that immense complexity of living beings violently and abusively gathered under the name of "Animal" while on the other, projects on humans, properties formed only in function of a negative model that does not possess them (the

¹³ "One must not be content to mark the fact that what is attributed as "proper to man" also belongs to other living beings if you look more closely, but also, conversely, that what is attributed as proper to man does not belong to him in all purity and all rigor; and that one must therefore restructure the whole problematic." Derrida, *B&S* / 90.



Animal). The Animal must not own so that man owns, so that man can be sovereign. However, Derrida's speech seems to suggest that even a simple requalification of the animal with a series of prerogatives and powers that are properly human would run the risk of falling back into anthropocentrism, precisely because these same "powers" (but a similar argument could be applied to "the rights of man") are forged in the logic of autoimmune sovereignty that we spoke of earlier. To reconnect with the epistemological *double bind* of ethology, briefly expounded at the end of the previous paragraph, we can now clearly recognize it in the Derridean position. Derrida seems to share precisely the same concern that haunts the background of ethological epistemology, since, on one hand, he recognizes the need to deconstruct the exclusivity of anthropic powers in order to avoid the most direct anthropocentrism ("Man owns and the animal does not own"), but on the other hand, he knows that transferring them, as they are,¹⁴ from man to animal it would reproduce an equally anthropocentric anthropomorphism.

The deconstruction of ethology (objective genitive) should therefore, each time, not only deconstruct the exclusivity of anthropic privilege by giving an animal its belonging, but at the same time, should attribute to man those privative characters typically assigned to the animal, such as *reactivity*. In essence, in order to avoid the *impasse*, Derrida suggests an extra step, which is, however, at the same time a step less, since it would be literally "appropriating an expropriation".¹⁵ Here we clarify the epistemological stakes, in my view, of the deconstruction of the Response/Reaction pair regarding human language. It would exemplify the move of Deconstruction that, after having expanded and shared with the other Living Being some human exclusivity, would then complete a real overthrow of the pair Man / Animal, with a further exchange of "Limits". Such a reversal, conducted *from the inside*, would not only be the rewriting of Animal/Man instead of Man/Animal, but would be a real "overcoming" of a Sovereign-Phallic-Anthropocentric logic of this opposition. An "overcoming" that, however, as we have shown, is anything but a *simple letting go*. The "Singularity" of living beings would be enhanced rather than cancelled and their difference would be the matrix of a comparative ethology performatively non-anthropocentric.

The deconstructive reversal then would lead us to re-evaluate, even with regard to man, the whole range of dis-values or privative values attached on the animal-automata, starting from that "radical passivity" of which Bentham speaks (Bentham). A "passivity that feels", but "does not speak" and yet is the condition of possibility for many of those "feelings" of those "emotions" that "we-humans" often evaluate

¹⁴ That is, as they have been thought of in our metaphysical and anthropocentric tradition.

¹⁵ *Ex-appropriation* is one of the concepts at the heart of deconstruction in numerous works by the author. In particular, see how in *Speculate - on Freud*, Derrida intends to re-appropriate that original expropriation called by Freud *compulsion to repeat* in order to imagine a radical other, ex-static, at the origin of the Proper, of the Ego. Note how the dialectic between the living presence of the Principle of Pleasure and the expropriating automatism of the compulsion to repeat, is in some ways analogous to the question of the couple Response/Reaction dropped in the ethological context.



positively. "Beyond words" (Safina) we might discover a whole world, a totally foreign other that is, however, what is most proper to us: hence its being *unheimlich*¹⁶.

It is appropriate now to return to the methodological distinction between the subjective genitive and the objective genitive of "Deconstructive Ethology". The considerations just made fall within the field of objective genitive, in the sense that what has been proposed is a deconstruction of the epistemological framework of ethological science. A typical gesture of philosophy which intervenes *before* science, highlighting its *apriori*, sometimes unreflected, in order to "refund" its foundations. A gesture that belongs also to phenomenology and ontology, as we said at the beginning. However, in the context of deconstruction, this gesture cannot be thought as isolated and is always accompanied by its opposite gesture that disqualifies, in fact, its foundational claim. A claim that would be *archeo-teleological* and therefore Sovereign; Philosophy sovereign of Science. There is probably nothing more wrong today than such a claim, for a whole series of reasons that we have only partly addressed.¹⁷ Deconstruction of Ethology then, understood as deconstructive Ethology, is the other side of the "limit".

Let's start from the quote on the strategy of deconstruction of ethology, highlighting one part: "(although sometimes this seems possible)". An opening of possibility, put in brackets, which however acts performatively in the mechanisms of deconstruction, throughout the seminar. I counted at least nine places where the recourse (almost always indirect) to ethological knowledge turns out to be a support for the deconstruction of anthropocentric statements.¹⁸ I will not be able to analyze these references individually for lack of time, but what interests me is to highlight how the deconstruction of ethology (objective genitive) does not exclude a constant and performative use of ethological studies. From this point of view, ethology is itself deconstructive and it can be seen mainly in the ethological studies, even after the seminars. Those studies, while being in the furrow of cognitive ethology, show always more and more the desire to avoid the anthropocentric/anthropomorphic *double bind*.

There would be a need for an exclusive study dedicated to the deconstructive dimension of ethology in recent years, as well as a detailed study of the history of

¹⁶ The face of the puppet so similar and yet so different; the Cartesian automaton so familiar and yet so disturbing; the monkey, our parent and *arché*, more human than man.

¹⁷ Reluctantly, I must note that many schools of philosophy in Italy, today, continue to be devoted body and soul in a construction, or rather in a re-construction, of a foundational ontology, which would then be able to reunify, as in the glories of theological and Thomistic memory, the "post-modern" fragmentation of knowledge. In addition to the attempts that proceed from the work of Derrida, betraying his deconstructive soul, such as those relating to a *New Realism* (Ferraris), I refer for example to what could be called "the Italian Heideggerian school" ranging from authors such as Cera to Mazzarella, but especially perhaps the most brilliant and original among them Russo. These authors after exhausting and too often uncritical (especially from the point of view of political philosophy) re-readings of the Heideggerian ontology, are finally able to show their speculative results in an ambiguously reactionary attempt to requalify Man in what they call a "humanology" opposed to the "post-human ideology" (Catena). In the name of Man, Mazzarella proposes an "unusual" vision of the gender question.

¹⁸ See Derrida, *B&S I* 162 (on "transgenerational transmission"); 165 ("pre-wired behavior"); 167 ("response and reaction"); 189 ("sexual parade"); 180 ("burial and mourning"); 283 ("simulacra, masks, and signifying prostheses"); 343 ("comparative anatomy"). See also Derrida, *The Animal Therefore I am*, 121 ("specular effect in pigeon", "Harrison 1939"); 191 ("feigning of feigning and sexual parade").



ethology to show how this trend (this is my hypothesis) is increasingly pronounced. For the moment, in conclusion to this paper, I will point to just a couple of references that seem to me representative of a deconstructive trend in cognitive ethology. Already in *The Conscious Animal* regarding a supposed power of humans to “be aware of their own death” D. Griffin states:

Miller, Galanter and Pribram (1960), Langer (1962, 1972) and others assert, without reservation, that man is the only animal capable of being aware of his own future death. But I suggest that we reflect for a moment and ask ourselves how any person knows this. What evidence does he have, either for or against? Indicative inferences can be based on the clear evidence that many social animals mutually recognize each other as individuals and on the observation that some animal mothers show signs of distress over the corpse of their dead young, which they carry for days (Goodall, 1968, 1971, 1975). How can one judge whether an animal can experience any notion of its own future death after observing the death of mates? (Cowgil, 1972). The negative data available can confirm, at best, an agnostic position. (Griffin 105)

On one hand, Griffin brings in support of his thesis some ethological evidences that show the existence in some animals of what I would call a form of “mourning”, on the other hand, however, he emphasizes that the “awareness [the consciousness I would say also] of his own death”, even for humans is a kind of impossible hyperbole. Ethology in this case performs that double movement prescribed by Derrida, since while it distributes a “power” to the animal (that of mourning) it brings back a lack (not being able to be aware of one's own death), a non-power to man which was previously assigned to the animal. The entire second seminar, *The Beast & The Sovereign Vol. II* focuses precisely on deconstructing that access to the “as such” of death, which according to Heidegger would make man a *weltbinded* and the animal a *weltarm*. Derrida “tries to imagine”—as Griffin suggested doing—death “as such” and it follows:

All our thoughts of death, our death - even before all the help that religious imagery can bring us - our thoughts of our death are always, structurally, thoughts of survival. To see oneself or to think oneself dead is to see oneself surviving, present at one's death, present or represented *in absentia* at one's death even in all the signs, traces, images, memories. (Derrida, *B&S II* 176)

Carl Safina's *Beyond words* seems to go in this direction as well, since the title itself calls for deconstruction. In fact, we are immediately disconcerted when, with regard to the cognitivist problematic (within which it is inscribed, however), he informs us that: “Consciousness is a bit overrated. Heartbeat, breathing, digestion, metabolism, immune responses, healing of cuts and fractures, internal timers, sexual cycling, pregnancy, growth-all function without consciousness” (Safina 37). Or again, regarding the theme of death:

Grief doesn't require understanding death. Humans certainly grieve, but they disagree on what death is. People learn widely varying traditional beliefs-in heaven, hell, karmic reincarnation, and other devices for keeping the deceased undead. The main thing humans seem to believe about death is: you never really die. (Safina 110)



Throughout this book, which I highly recommend reading, it is possible to detect an attempt to deconstruct not only anthropic privilege in general, but a number of human powers, including that of consciousness and language, and to replace them, by virtue of Bentham's precept, with what concerned only the animal, its passivity, its suffering.

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions about the relationship between ethology and deconstruction that we have tried to analyze in this essay.

What I hope to have clarified is the will of deconstruction to move "doubly" on both an epistemological and an empirical/scientific level, trying to deconstruct the anthropological-anthropomorphic *impasse*, however, without expecting to provide a sovereign ontology of science and without expect to give up all the empirical data of ethological science. It is precisely these empirical data that could confirm how the *ethos* of ethology is inherently deconstructive. In light of this, I believe that the deconstruction of ethology, in its two senses, can be a fruitful field of theoretical and scientific results deserving of further investigation. A field that guarantees the fruitful and productive interaction between science and philosophy, overcoming the vague claims of ontological foundationalism, without losing its critical mission.

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