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### I EAT THEREFORE I AM an essay on human and animal mutuality

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**H**ow does the human come to be? What is at stake in this question is a determination of the ways in which the existence we name “human” is constituted. Here, I attempt to approach an answer through an examination of the treatment of food in seminal moments of Western thought.

In the Western tradition, the majority of the efforts to define the human include explicit or implicit comparisons with animals. Through such comparisons certain qualities are devised, qualities that the one category is claimed to possess as opposed to the other. Derrida summarises the results of such a history of comparative definitions when he provides us with a “list,” including “*logos*, history, laughing, mourning, burial,” and shame as some of the qualities that humans attribute exclusively to themselves (*Animal* 5). Further, Derrida locates “from Aristotle to Lacan” – including “Descartes, Kant, Heidegger and Levinas” – what is denied to animality: “response” (33). In his analysis, Derrida shows that “response” and “reaction” overlap, yet all these philosophers strive to “precisely and rigorously” separate “response” (which, for them, characterises human existence alone) “from reaction” (which comes to characterise animal existence (*ibid.*)). Through this extraction of “reaction” from “response,” then, the human is defined as distinctly human.

Two patterns or schemata that delineate the production of the definitions of the human emerge from Derrida’s analysis. The first one, derived from his list, can be termed “addition of humanness,” and the second “extraction of animality.” It seems that Joanne Faulkner is elaborating on this second schema when she argues that aspects of “our bestial corporeality,” for example “nutrition, defecation and generation,”

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have been “distilled and put aside” in definitions of the human (76). In so far as these bodily functions are mutual to humans and animals, Faulkner suggests, they are “put aside” in order for the human to be distinctly human.

Faulkner, nevertheless, is not referring to Derrida’s work when making this claim, but to Giorgio Agamben’s and, more specifically, to what he calls the “anthropological machine,” which is held responsible for producing definitions of the human. Agamben’s machine reveals the importance of lingering not merely on the qualities that come to define humanity but also of digging deeper to discover *how* these definitions are produced. When describing

this machine's functions, Agamben seems to be presenting us with two schemata such as those we located above. The machine, he explains, defines man and animal by producing "the inside" through "the inclusion of an outside," or "the outside" through "the exclusion of an inside" (*Open* 37). These two processes are "symmetrical" and thus in conjunction with one another (*ibid.*).

The "inclusion of an outside" corresponds, to an extent, to what we termed "addition of humanness" and the "exclusion of an inside" to the "extraction of animality." If these two functions of the machine produce definitions of humanity and animality then we are now compelled to discover what allows these functions in the first place. To do this, we need to have a closer look at this machine and its parts. Since the machine can function both by including "an outside" and by excluding "an inside," then we can perhaps envisage it as something larger that encompasses these processes – a machine that includes them as two mechanisms. It is on the locus of their intersection, the point where these mechanisms overlap, that I want to focus now.

What I am attempting to describe is the way Agamben's machine might be constructed: two mechanisms or schemata that merge with one another at a mutual point. This could be called a "structure" (the structure of the machine which enables its parts to function) in the way Deleuze describes this heavily loaded term. Firstly, says Deleuze, "there must be at least two heterogeneous series [...] to form a structure" (*Logic* 50). These two series are manifested in the two mechanisms or schemata we have envisaged as the anthropological machine's parts. Secondly, Deleuze argues, "each of these series is constituted by terms which only exist through the relations they maintain with one another" (*ibid.*). Accordingly, the "inside" depends on the "outside," thus the "inclusion of an outside" (or the "addition of humanness") is in conjunction with the "exclusion of an inside" (or the "extraction of animality"). The third "conditio[n] for a *structure*" that Deleuze provides us with is the intersection of the two schemata or series (*ibid.*). "The two

heterogeneous series," he explains, "converge toward a paradoxical element, which is their 'differentiator.' [...] This element [is mutual] [...]; it belongs to both series at once and never ceases to circulate throughout them" (50–51).

It is such a point of convergence that I want to think about here – the *mutuality* of humanity and animality, "a paradoxical element" in Deleuze's words, which functions as their "differentiator." It is, paradoxically, the human and animal's mutuality, I will argue, that seems to have made possible their conceptual differentiation in Western thought.

Lévi-Strauss refers to that which combines "the conflicting features of two mutually exclusive orders" as a "scandal" (qtd in Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play" 358). What for Lévi-Strauss is a "scandal" is, in a sense, what Deleuze refers to as the "paradoxical element" towards which two heterogeneous series converge. It is such a "scandal" or point of convergence that is the focal point of this essay. Faulkner names it in her identification of the mutual elements between humanity and animality: it is nothing other than the simple fact of nutrition, the need for food.<sup>1</sup> Such a point of mutuality, Derrida observes in reference to Lévi-Strauss, "is something which escapes" the terms of the opposition that is in question each time, "and certainly precedes them – probably as the condition of their possibility" (357).

What follows is an attempt to show that food, as such a point of mutuality between humanity and animality, seems to function as a "condition of their possibility" in the Western tradition, that is to say, it has been utilised as a means to their conceptual distinction. Food, then, is not "put aside" as Faulkner claims; rather, it is conceptually central in seminal definitions of the human.

### the philosopher disdains food

"The genuine philosopher disdains food," Socrates declares, because his "concern is not for the body" but for "the soul" (*Phaedo* 10). This soul seeks to "attain the truth" through philosophy, but food distracts it with the

needs of the body; food is, then, a “hindrance” to philosophising (ibid.). This philosophising soul that Socrates is referring to is the “rational soul” that humans alone possess. In so far as philosophising is understood as an exclusive capacity of the human, Socrates is almost presenting the philosopher as the human being “proper” as a result of his disdain for food. Socrates, then, does not only seem to oppose body to soul and food to philosophy here, but also food to “proper” humanness.

Let us consider for a moment the passage in the *Republic* in which Socrates speaks of what he calls “lawless appetites” that are “present in all of us” but “held back in check” by reason. “They wake up,” he says,

whenever *the rest of the soul* – the rational, gentle, and ruling element – slumbers. Then *the bestial and savage part, full of food or drink*, comes alive [...] and seeks to [...] gratify its own characteristic instincts [...] *there is no food it refuses to eat.* (270; emphasis added)

Leaving aside the temptation to draw parallels with elements that would later appear in Freudian psychoanalysis, let us focus here on Socrates’ association of food with the “beast” (which he contrasts with rationality). This “beast” is not something external to the human; Socrates talks about the bestial *part* and the rational *element*.<sup>2</sup> The former governs a *part* of the human soul, whereas *the rest of it* is ruled by rationality.

In suggesting that we “neither starv[e] nor overfee[d]” our appetite for food (*Republic* 271), Socrates makes clear that the rational element works on the bestial element (and is thus in conjunction with it); in other words, rationality mediates the appetite for food. The only form of humanness that can be actualised, Socrates seems to be implying, is the result of mediation, a mediation that is here related to food, an element mutual to both humanity and animality. In this sense, the human in Platonic thought is suspended between a non-actualisable “pure” humanness and animality.

Despite Socrates’ claim in *Phaedo*, the philosopher in Plato’s oeuvre does not disdain food;

after all, he is clearly preoccupied with it. (Let us recall that in texts like *Gorgias*, *Protagoras* and *Symposium*, food, drink, sophistry and philosophy appear alongside.) In fact, in *Timaeus* the mediation of food, this time not by rationality but by the “lower belly,” appears to happen *for the sake* of philosophy. The lower belly is “a receptacle” for food; it retains and solidifies it so that it “might be prevented from passing quickly through and compelling the body to require more food,” which would make the “whole race an enemy to philosophy” (67). Even though food is here still in contrast with philosophy, Timaeus suggests that its mediation, specifically its solidification in the abdomen, allows philosophy to happen.

For Timaeus, then, philosophy is almost what Derrida calls “*la merde promise*” – the result of the solidification of food, the “leftovers” of eating, the “*restes*.”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, when Socrates talks about the “lawless appetite” for food and about “*the rest of the soul*,” referring to the “rational element,” it seems that this “rest,” this rational element that philosophises (a quintessentially human quality), is nothing but the *restes*, the remains of eating. Thus, the human and animal’s mutuality (manifested in their mutual consumption of food) becomes their differentiator in so far as it makes philosophy possible.

There seems to be an agreement between Plato and Hegel in the functions they attribute to food. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for example, food-related mediations enable the birth of a philosophising human self-consciousness.

Food functions as a symbol of the object, which lacks inherent meaning; the meaning that humans find in objects comes from the human spirit itself. “Even the animals are not shut out from this wisdom,” Hegel argues, for they are “assured” of the complete lack of meaning in objects such as food; hence, “they fall without ceremony and eat” (65). Hegel suggests that we learn from the animal’s attitude to food, because it helps us understand that the meaning we think we find in objects is metaphorical, in the etymological sense of the word (from the Greek *metaphora*, “transference,”

“carrying over”). Once man realises that the meaning he finds in an object is transferred to it from himself, Hegel says, the first stage towards the constitution of self-consciousness, which characterises humanness, is completed.

The second stage is marked by another transference; this time, from the object back to the human spirit. When an animal finds and eats the food it seeks, Hegel writes, it “finishes up with the feeling of self,” because the self’s need for it is thus satisfied (157). Similarly, when the human spirit encounters an object, and meaning in this object, it finds satisfaction, because it was the spirit itself that had transferred meaning to the object in the first place. In Hegel’s words, “just as the instinct of the animal seeks and consumes food, but thereby brings forth nothing other than itself, so too, the instinct of Reason in its quest finds only Reason itself” (ibid.). This is how the human spirit achieves consciousness; it encounters itself in the object thereby asserting the self through the mediation of the object.

The final stage that marks the constitution of the human is completed with the realisation of this process of transferences in its totality, that is, the transference of meaning from the human spirit to the object, and from the object back to the human spirit/consciousness. Consciousness thus comes to realise that what it perceived as object was nothing but itself, posed as object. As Hegel declares at the end of *Phenomenology*, “[c]onsciousness must know the object as itself,” attaining, in this way, the state of self-consciousness which comes to characterise human existence (480). The process is completed, then, with the annulment of the object.

This self-consciousness for which the object is nothing but itself is somewhat like Timaeus’ global “animal” that

had no [...] organs by the help of which he might receive his food or get rid of what he had already digested, since there was nothing which went from him or came into him: for there was nothing beside him. Of design he was created thus, his own waste providing his own food. (*Timaeus* 20)

Similarly, if the all-encompassing human self-consciousness that Hegel presents us with were to eat food as the object, it seems that, like Timaeus’ animal, it would be eating its own waste.

This, however, is only a dream, an ideal of complete self-sufficiency, as Hegel is well aware; he acknowledges, for example, that since self-consciousness knows that it is attained through the mediation of the object, this knowledge necessarily “makes it aware that the object has its own independence” (109). If self-consciousness has to negate the object in order to be born, then this “explicitly affirms that this nothingness [of the object] is [only] for [self-consciousness] the truth of the other [the object]” (ibid.).

The object not only exists independently of self-consciousness but even prior to it: it is, after all, the object that allows meaning to be transferred from the human spirit, which means that it is the object that actualises meaning in the sense that it makes meaning perceivable. Since actualisation is a form of creation, it appears that it is the object that creates (perceivable) meaning. It is, then, the means to meaning and, ultimately, to the creation of self-consciousness, which characterises human existence and distinguishes it from animal existence.

In so far as food stands for the object in *Phenomenology*, we might say that food allows the creation of meaning and the constitution of self-consciousness and, therefore, of the human. This notion of *standing for* is important here. Hegel talks about food *as such* only in relation to animals. When it comes to humans, this “as such” undergoes a transformation; it becomes a “standing for,” a symbol, a metaphor of a concept – the concept of the object. The human’s need for real food does not seem to be a concern in *Phenomenology*.<sup>4</sup>

Hegel, however, like Plato, cannot be seriously “accused” of believing in an ideal of “pure” humanness conceived of as an existence totally freed from the corporeal, from food as such, from animality. In presenting the constitution of self-consciousness as a result of a series of food-related mediations (food being

an element associated with the animal realm in *Phenomenology*), he implies that “pure” humanness is impossible. After all, in order to philosophise and thus constitute self-consciousness, Hegel has recourse to food, which, in this sense, appears to open the passage to philosophy and, by extension, to the birth of the human. Food is transformed into a symbol, a metaphor, a concept of the object. This conceptual object, in its turn, allows the process of the transferences of meaning to occur, which finally leads to the attainment of self-consciousness. Therefore, this object (and, by extension, food) cannot be “altogether done [away] with [...] to the point of annihilation”; rather, it can only be “work[ed] on,” as Hegel asserts (116). This is a working on and of an element mutual to humanity and animality which, while revealing that they are cognate, simultaneously renders their differentiation possible.

### lest he put forth his hand and eat

In both Judaism and Christianity not only humans and animals but also the divine appear to eat. This point of convergence, their mutual consumption of food, becomes a means to their differentiation – this time through dietary distinctions. According to Genesis, in the prelapsarian state animals are “given every green herb for meat” whereas humans can eat “every herb bearing seed” and the fruit of trees “yielding seed” (Gen. 1.29–30), except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life because such knowledge and immortality belong to God. God’s creations are, then, vegetarian. As we learn from the chapters following the expulsion from Eden, meat serves as nourishment only for God (through sacrifices), because he is the giver of life. Since life belongs to God, humans are not allowed to kill except for sacrificial reasons.

When man disobeys and acquires the knowledge of Good and Evil, thereby crossing one of the three dietary lines of distinction with the divine, God bans him from Eden “lest he put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3.22). After the Flood, when God accepts that

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humans have an inclination towards evil, he allows them to kill in order to eat meat. The right to take life inside them through eating meat would mean that another one of the dietary boundaries of distinction with the divine would be crossed. Therefore, God introduces a new dietary prohibition to ensure separation. This time, he prohibits “eat[ing] flesh with its life, that is, with its blood” (Gen. 9.4).

Significantly, food functions as a means of differentiation not only between but also within categories. Jews, for example, as a chosen people, have to adhere to additional dietary prohibitions to ensure the “purity” of their racial identity: when it comes to meat-eating, they must eat only clean beasts. Jean Soler deciphers the directions given in Leviticus and Deuteronomy and devises a system that explains which animals would count as clean and which as unclean. For example, unclean beasts are those that “show an anomaly in their relation to the element that has ‘brought them forth’ or to the organs characteristic of life” in that element (63). A clean animal, then, would be one that keeps to the element that characterises its existence (fish/sea, birds/air, and so on).

These enforced dietary prohibitions as well as the elaborate distinctions between foodstuffs (primarily in the Old Testament) imply that the separations between and within categories have to be actively preserved. Since differentiations spring from mutuality, such distinctions are not inherently clear; if food is a border between categories, then, like every border, it both separates and joins them. This implication of joining becomes clearer in the New Testament with the consumption of flesh and blood at the Last Supper; in such a consumption, the human and the divine merge.

The edibility of Jesus’ flesh and blood is worth pausing on, for this is a characteristic that is not exclusive to divinity – all three categories either are, or become, flesh and blood: animals are such from their creation; man is fashioned out of clay and when God breathes into him, he becomes a creature of flesh and blood; and, finally, the son of God becomes incarnated in flesh and blood in Christianity.

This mutual characteristic of their existence, their flesh and blood, renders all three categories, in one way or another, edible. Humans, as we have seen, are given permission to eat animal flesh and God seems to nourish on animal blood, through sacrifices. In instructing Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, God seems to suggest that he could also feed on human blood. Further, Jesus' flesh is eaten and his blood is drunk at the Last Supper and its reenactments in the ritual of the Eucharist. This complicates further the structure I have been trying to describe here: if the point of convergence of the three categories is their mutual consumption of food, then it seems that at this mutual point each category can also become food; members of one category can serve as nourishment for members of another since they are all creatures of flesh and blood.

Derrida's claim that eating is always a "metonymy of introjection" and that we must therefore "identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorized" thus comes to mind ("Eating Well" 115). Since members of all three categories are creatures of flesh and blood, and since this mutual characteristic renders them all potentially edible, it seems that any ingestion of the other can be understood as the ingestion of the self; one eats and is eaten at the same time – the other's consumable flesh and blood is the self's consumable flesh and blood. In this sense, consumer and consumed appear to be profoundly of "one flesh," "one blood." It is such an understanding that could found what Sara Guyer terms "an ethics of cannibalism," an ethics that would allow a fairer, more respectful relationship between eater and eaten, self and other, human and animal ("Albeit Eating" 67).

Flesh and blood, then, join humanity, animality and divinity by rendering them mutually edible. Simultaneously, this point of their convergence, this border that joins them, is also a border that separates them – it is the point where the possibility of their differentiation is constituted. This is manifested through blood in particular. As we have seen, the blood of clean animals is differentiated from the blood of unclean animals: the former must not be

shed, for unclean animals are inedible, whereas the latter can be drained so that their flesh can be eaten. This distinction ensures the differentiation of the Hebrews from other races. As a chosen people, Jews must not "contaminate" their "purity" by eating animals of unclean blood. Guyer observes that blood-based separations "emphasise the stakes of [...] a situation of subjectivity that uses ingestion as its metonymy" (76). If this is so, then we could say that the incorporation of the clean flesh of animals of clean blood is a metonymy of the creation of a people that is "of clean blood" in so far as it is separated from other peoples.<sup>5</sup>

Now, since eating can be seen as a metonymy, it follows that food must be somehow associated with signification, language. In his reading of the Old Testament, Soler has observed that creatures that do not stick to one element, the inedible beasts, "are unclean because they are unthinkable" (57). For something to be thinkable it must be signifiable, and when something is signifiable it seems to become edible. Soler's observation calls for an association between God and the unclean beasts, because God is also unthinkable, un-signifiable; his name in the Hebrew Scriptures, YHWH (Yahweh), is a name that cannot be pronounced. In this sense, the eating of God would be forbidden for Jewish people, as opposed to Christians who eat God in the Eucharist (Jesus is *homoousian*, "of the same substance" as God, according to the Nicene Creed). The association between the edible and the signifiable in the Old Testament is also manifested when God puts words in Ezekiel's mouth. In eating these words, Ezekiel eats the signifiable, the meaningful (Ezek. 3.1–4).<sup>6</sup>

The correlation between food and signification acquires a different form in the New Testament; what is eaten is not necessarily the meaningful, but its consumption becomes a means to meaning. In her reading of the New Testament, Julia Kristeva cites two tales of multiplication of food (Mark 6.38ff. and 8.4ff.), arguing that, along with his concern to feed a large number of people, "Jesus does not cease calling upon understanding to decipher the



meaning of his action” (117). According to Kristeva, the significance of the food-related miracles for Jesus is their opening of the passage to meaning. This element that is mutual to humanity, animality and divinity – food – thus appears to either coincide with or lead to signification, enabling, in this way, and on this additional level, the designation or definition of these categories and, therefore, their signifiable differentiation.

### sex is secretly food

According to Mark Forsyth, “Freud said that everything was secretly sexual, but etymologists know that sex is secretly food”; *mating* with somebody was originally sharing *meat* with them, Forsyth explains, and meat is etymologically any kind of food (30). Even though Freud does not acknowledge this etymological link, his descriptions of the constitution of human sexuality are drenched in food references.

Food is at the origin of the development of human sexuality for Freud. Eating, he argues, is “the first and most vital activity” of the infant; it provides the first “pleasurable sensation” by satisfying the need for nourishment (*Three Essays* 181–82). Simultaneously, eating arouses the need for sensual pleasure by activating the lips as an erotogenic zone. In this initial stage, when “sexual activity has not yet been separated from the ingestion of food,” Freud explains that “the sexual *aim* consists in the incorporation of the object” (198).

These two instincts are then separated and directed towards different objects – the nutritional instinct towards milk and the sexual towards the breast. The latter has to be subsequently transferred to another sensual object. Initially, Freud says, the child “prefers a part of his own skin,” the thumb for example (182). This autoerotic phase ends with the transference of this object from the child’s own body to an external sensuous object. These transferences, at the origin of which food is found, mark the constitution of “normal” human sexuality in Freudian psychoanalysis.

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Freud’s theorisation on this series of transferences implies that there is another sort of transference going on, one that doubles the series he describes. If food activates the sexual instinct of the infant, then this instinct must already be present in a not-yet-activated state. This not-yet-activated state, it follows, must also have an object; an un-palpable, un-definable, fantastical one. It is precisely this object that characterises the Freudian understanding of a specifically human sexuality.

Food appears to be the first metaphor or symbol of this fantastical object of desire – it is its first metaphorical actualisation, its first symbolic representation. In this light, it seems that when food gets transferred to (or, is substituted by) the breast and the subsequent objects, these objects function as metaphors or symbols of the first metaphor, the first symbol (food) of the fantastical object.

Food thus seems to initiate the creation of a series of metaphorical substitutes. As we shall see shortly with the help of two other psychoanalysts, language can be claimed to be developed on the basis of such a substitution. In this sense, the need for food (mutual to both humanity and animality), by making possible the passage to language, leads to the differentiation of the human from the animal.

Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok make this implication clearer. They argue that when the mother’s breast (as a source of food) withdraws from the child’s mouth, the mouth’s emptiness necessitates finding “ways of requesting its presence”; initially it is “cries and sobs,” then “calling,” and finally “language” (127). The authors suggest that the language which comes to mark the birth of human subjectivity is developed for the sole purpose of requesting food, and this substitution of food with words gradually becomes satisfying in itself. “The early satisfactions of the mouth, as yet filled with the maternal object,” they write, “are partially and gradually replaced by the satisfactions of a mouth now empty of that object but filled with words pertaining to the subject” (*ibid.*).

This development, Abraham and Torok continue, can be reverted in cases of traumatic loss. In fantasies of incorporation, for example, the

mouth, failing to be filled with words that would express (and thus acknowledge) the loss, “reverts to being the food-craving mouth it was prior to the acquisition of speech” (128). In such fantasies, then, words are internalised (almost eaten) instead of being externalised through expression. They become literal, though this is not “a matter of reverting to the literal meaning of words” but of turning them into non-signifying objects, robbing them of “their very capacity for figurative representation,” which amounts to destroying them (132).

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud describes rituals of actual incorporation following William Robertson’s work. Various tribes, Freud says, ritually share meals so that a “common substance” is transferred to the members of the tribe through the food they eat, producing, in this way, their kinship (134–35). The most important meal-sharing ritual is the “sacrificial feast” in which the totem animal (which was “originally identical with the gods”) is killed, dissected, and devoured by the members of the tribe (136). Sharing food joins the members of the tribe (thereby distinguishing them from other tribes) and, in eating the totem animal/god, they are joined with, or become “of the same substance” as, animals/gods (135).

The Eucharist in Christianity resembles this “sacrificial feast,” in which the totem animal/god is eaten and the eater is joined with it. Further, in Judaism, as in the rituals that Freud describes, the distinction of the Hebrew race from other races is preserved through the food they eat. If, as I suggested above, the eating of God would be forbidden in Judaism (like the eating of the un-thinkable animals), then the “sacrificial feast” would be a transgression of this prohibition. It is precisely on such a transgression that Freud focuses. He uses the killing and the devouring of the totem animal/god as an outline to create a “story” about the “originary” murder of the father. Two brothers, Freud’s story goes, kill and devour their father; in eating him, they identify with him and acquire a portion of his strength. This murder and devouring is, for Freud, the origin of the

contradictory feelings of guilt and love towards the father (143).<sup>7</sup> Freud then uses the material he presents us with in *Totem and Taboo* to reinforce his Oedipus complex theory. The importance of food, from a psychoanalytic perspective, clearly remains, for Freud, essentially limited to the subject of sexuality and to the individual’s early life.

Anna O.’s case, however, presses for the ascription of a lasting psychoanalytic significance to food, especially in relation to language. This case fascinated Freud, who would later work on Joseph Breuer’s descriptions of his patient’s condition to develop his understanding of hysteria and its cure. Both Breuer and Freud failed to make a connection between speaking and eating, even though the two activities were obviously linked in Anna’s case.

During her illness, we are told, Anna refused food and her capacity to speak gradually deteriorated. Breuer managed to cure her by getting her to talk; she told him a story per day. If he could not see her on one day, she told him two stories when she next saw him to make up for the lost day. Breuer thus realised that no stories should be “‘stuck’ inside her” (*Studies* 32). When Anna started getting the stories out, it is noted, in passing, that she started eating. A pattern can be detected here: so long as words were not “stuck” in the body, food was allowed in.

We are led to believe that Anna’s acceptance of food signified her gradual recovery. At the end of his narration, Breuer explains Anna’s eating disorder by locating it in a past traumatic experience, which might have indeed been the case. However, the fact that neither Breuer nor Freud (who re-assessed Anna’s case later on) paid enough attention to how eating functioned during Anna’s illness left an aspect of this illness unexplained. For a period of time Anna started speaking in English (and other foreign languages) rather than German, without realising it. Even when she was given German texts to read out she produced extempore translations. It is noted, in passing again, that during this period Anna refused taking nourishment completely (26–27). Had Breuer or Freud noticed the pattern between words

and food, they might have used it to explain Anna's speech disorder.<sup>8</sup> If food, by being transferred inside the body, allowed the words to come out, functioning as some sort of mediating factor, then when Anna refused this particular mediation, another one was required for the words to come out: (unconscious) translation. In so far as in Anna's case we can detect a passage from food to words, then this case provides evidence that such a passage is not manifested exclusively during the individual's early life, as is suggested in *Three Essays on Sexuality*.

If Freud's theory on the development of human sexuality implies that food ultimately leads to the acquisition of language, and if Abraham and Torok suggest that language is a result of the need for food, then Anna's case shows the implications that a "putting aside" of food would have. To refuse food, the point of convergence of humanity and animality/divinity (a convergence laid bare in *Totem and Taboo*), is to refuse language, the means to their definition. In so far as the language of signification is a defining characteristic of the human, then to "put aside" food is to block the passage to signification, definition, differentiation.

### the animal is simply taken by the food

Is the need for food (a need mutual to humans and animals) a manifestation of a wider point of convergence between humanity and animality? How might we describe this mutuality that constitutes the possibility of their differentiation in broader terms? Heidegger's work helps us approach answers to these questions.

In *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger contemplates a bee's "driveness in the search for food" (241). A bee "finds a drop of honey in a clover blossom," he writes; it "sucks [it] up" and "flies away" when the honey runs out, which makes him wonder whether the bee recognises that "the honey is no longer present" or, for that matter, "the presence of honey in the first place" (ibid.). For the

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answer, Heidegger resorts to a hypothesis advanced after an experiment in which "a bee was placed before a little bowl filled with so much honey that the bee was unable to suck" it all at once (242). If the bee's abdomen is removed from its body while it is sucking, the hypothesis goes, the bee would "carry on regardless," not realising that it has taken more honey than its abdomen would have been able to contain (ibid.). Based on this, Heidegger concludes that "the bee is simply taken by the food," which "excludes the possibility of any recognition of presence. It is precisely being taken by its food that prevents the animal from taking up a position over and against this food" (ibid.).

In *Fundamental Concepts* the animal's immersion in its food stands for its immersion in its environment. Focusing on food, to which both humans and animals have a relation, Heidegger reveals a broader mutual element between humanity and animality: both humans and animals stand in relation to the world. What characterises the animal's relation to its world is its total immersion in it – its "openness" (248). It is precisely its particular openness, Heidegger says, that prevents the animal from recognising its environment and the elements that populate it "as beings" (ibid.). This inability to connect to beings or things *as such* that Heidegger attributes to the animal leads him to the conclusion that the animal's "openness" is "a peculiar captivation" (243); this is why the animal cannot take up a "position over and against [its] food" or any other element of its world (242).<sup>9</sup>

If the point of convergence between humanity and animality is, in broader terms, their relation to or openness in the world, then in what ways, the question arises, is man's openness different from the animal's?

In *Fundamental Concepts* the animal's openness is manifested in its eating whereas man's openness is manifested in the experience of boredom.<sup>10</sup> Man is, Heidegger explains, presented with possibilities (like reading or going for a walk) that he would have normally actualised; in boredom, though, he does not let himself "go with whatever [possibility] offers

itself" (137). For Heidegger, boredom "manifest[s]" that which "could and was to be granted to Dasein" (140). Humans, unlike animals, can see the possibilities they would have normally actualised and can refrain from doing so. As a result of this capacity to refrain we humans can be "*relieved of our everyday personality*" and "*elevated beyond*" the particular circumstances that envelop us at a specific place and time (137).

What "sustains Dasein's potentiality" is the capacity to refrain from always being "taken by" possibilities that present themselves in the environment (144). This is precisely, Heidegger argues, "*the originary making-possible of Dasein as such*," what "lends [Dasein] possibility" (143). This, then, is what characterises the human's openness in the world: humans can see "the open"; they recognise the presence of possibilities which they sometimes choose not to actualise – they are not, in other words, helplessly immersed in the world, like animals are.

Openness, then, is in conjunction with potentiality in Heidegger's work. Man's potentiality, as Heidegger presents it, is a negative potentiality since it consists in not actualising potentials. In insisting that the animal's immersion in its environment is a "captivation," Heidegger implies that its openness is more of a "closedness" since potentials are actualised without either recognition or choice (243). As Derrida observes, the animal's "openness is without openness" for Heidegger ("Eating Well" 111). However, it seems that we can, instead, view the human's openness as a "closedness" in the sense of an "enclosing" or "caging" of potentials, in so far as it consists in recognising possibilities and refraining from actualising them.

What Heidegger presents as the animal's immersion in its food (and, by extension, its immersion in its environment) coincides, to an extent, with what Deleuze calls "pure immanence" ("Immanence" 360/27). This "pure immanence," Deleuze explains, does not mean "immanence to" something else (ibid.). If this were the case, then a recognition "of something as something" would be presupposed, and such

a recognition, Heidegger insists, is impossible for the animal (*Fundamental Concepts* 246–48). As we have seen, the animal's total immersion in its world prevents it from recognising beings and things as such, as far as Heidegger is concerned.

Deleuze's "immanent life," which thus seems to coincide with Heidegger's conception of the animal's total immersion in its environment, is a life of "pure potential [*pure puissance*]" ("Immanence" 361/30; translation modified). In this sense, the animal's openness is an immersion in pure potentiality, whereas the human's openness is characterised by a caging of potentiality. Humans come to acquire *the* human life (which distinguishes them from animals) through caging what Deleuze calls "*a life [une vie]*" – a "singular" and therefore mutual life (irreducible to human existence) understood as pure immanence, pure potentiality (ibid.).<sup>11</sup>

The point of convergence between human and animal existence is, then, potentiality and this is where the two categories spring from. The condition of their possibility (the possibility of their distinction) is potentiality itself, a potentiality that has to be caged so that the human is born.

## hungering for words

In Nietzsche's oeuvre, this caging of potentiality that marks the birth of the human assumes the form of a solidification of metaphoricity. I would argue that, in Nietzsche's philosophy, it is this solidification that leads to the creation of words, which come to characterise human existence, thereby separating it from animal existence.

For Nietzsche the literal is indistinguishable from the metaphorical. "[T]he *German spirit*," apparently, "comes from distressed intestines"; it is a case of "indigestion" caused by the "overcooked meat, [the] greasy mealy vegetables [and the] pastries degenerating into paperweights" that comprise the German cuisine (*Ecce Homo* 20). The "*German palate*," Nietzsche says, finds "everything to its taste"; any unfitting combination is appetising (82). From this, he concludes that the *German spirit's* "prejudices

emanate from the bowels,” because it “nourishe[s] itself on opposites and gulps down ‘faith’ as well as scientificity, ‘Christian morality’ as well as anti-Semitism” (20, 82). This is, perhaps, a critique unleashed against one particular German spirit, the Hegelian, which devours contradictory beliefs resulting in what Nietzsche views as an unfitting and harmful synthesis.

Malcolm Pasley views Nietzsche’s treatment of food, which is indistinguishably literal (for the body) and metaphorical (for the spirit/mind), as an example of his “insidious habit” of “taking metaphors literally” (141). However, I would argue that it is the insistence in separating the two that Nietzsche wants to criticize as an insidious habit.

As we have seen, both Plato and Hegel move from food to philosophy, from the concrete to the abstract, from the literal to the metaphorical. Such a movement from the one to the other presupposes the separation of two. Similarly, in Abraham and Torok’s theory, as well as in the New Testament, a passage is traced from food to words/signification, and in Freudian psychoanalysis food is presented as that which initiates the creation of metaphors, thereby opening the passage to language. In these cases the metaphorical (which is in conjunction with language) is separated from the literal (food, the body). Even though speaking and eating are presented as cognate – indeed, both activities originate in the mouth – they are subsequently separated, a separation that almost creates two different mouths: the eating mouth and the speaking mouth. Deleuze spots this separation, this creation of two mouths, when he observes that the sound of the “mouth which speaks” is “no longer the noise of a body [or, a mouth] which eats”; the speaking mouth is separated from the eating mouth in order for the human subject that expresses itself in language to be manifested (*Logic* 181).

In the Old Testament, this separation between speaking and eating collapses – words are put into the mouth and are eaten. Derrida also seems to be bringing the two together in arguing that all the senses are metonymies of the eating mouth (“Eating Well” 114). What

the mouth eats as the other is what is tasted and touched as the other, what the nose smells, the eye sees, and the ear hears as the other and, indeed, what we speak of, what we signify as the other. The eating mouth, then, coincides with the speaking mouth. Nietzsche, along with the Old Testament before him and Derrida after him, reveals that the metaphorical (the signifiable, language) is the literal (food).

For Nietzsche, metaphors are as solid as food; they are solidifications of the indefinite, the abstract. Let us consider, for example, a claim he makes in an earlier essay: “the concept,” which is as “bony [and] foursquare” as “a die,” is “the *residue of a metaphor*” (“Truth and Lies” 118). To decipher this claim we must first distinguish between two different understandings of metaphor that seem to emerge from Nietzsche’s writings. The *metaphorical* is different from *metaphor*; the former is the “residue,” or the solidification, of the latter. The metaphorical, which for Nietzsche coincides with the literal (etymologically: “of the letter” and thus words, language), is the result of an abandoning of the “primitive world of metaphor” (119).

I will be referring to this “primitive world of metaphor” as “metaphoricity” to avoid confusion. The fluid realm of metaphoricity, where anything can potentially and infinitely stand for anything else (but where no metaphors have been established), can be seen as a manifestation of potentiality. To create words (letters, the literal and thus the metaphorical since they coincide) is to solidify the fluidity of metaphoricity. A word, Nietzsche says, “arbitrarily discard[s] the individual differences” of the countless things or beings it signifies, which “are never equal” (117). Words, then, give concrete forms to the things or beings they designate. It is in this sense that the concept (as a product of language) is “foursquare,” a fixed shape, like a die (118).

The Nietzschean man is characterised by this solidification of metaphoricity, this caging of potentiality that leads to the creation of words that differentiate him from animals. For Nietzsche, the passage to humanness is not the

result of an “opening up” from something material (like food) to something more abstract (like philosophy) as is the case in Plato and Hegel. Rather, it is a passage that assumes the form of a “closing,” a narrowing down, a solidification of the fluid, the indefinite, the abstract to something concrete, literal: the letter, words.

If Nietzsche views the separation of the literal from the metaphorical as an “insidious habit,” then it is perhaps because the metaphorical (words, language) comes to be associated with an abstractness that supposedly liberates from, and elevates above the bodily. Indeed, Heidegger presents the disengagement from the material circumstances that envelop man as an “elevation.” Nietzsche, on the contrary, presents the passage to humanness not as a liberation but as a migration from the freedom of fluidity to something solid and, therefore, confining. He elsewhere describes the human through a parallel with “water animals,” who became “land animals,” that is, they walked on the solid ground and turned this into their environment (*Genealogy* 66). Like them, man swam from the water towards land and inhabited it; he moved from metaphoricity to language and thus began to speak.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside Nietzsche’s presentation of language as a confining encasement of metaphoricity is Guyer’s understanding of speaking as that which creates a solid figure, the face, which articulates a limiting, fundamentally anthropocentric ethics. As a denotation of fragility, the face for Levinas is what forbids us to kill, a prohibition that applies only to faces created by speaking mouths, Guyer observes (“Buccality” 79). Animals are left faceless in so far as their mouths are not speaking mouths and are, therefore, excluded from an ethics that would protect them as it protects humans.<sup>13</sup> Guyer rejects the face, proposing its substitution with a mouth prior to speech. Following Jean-Luc Nancy’s work, she defines this mouth as “*bucca*,” explaining that it is different from “a mouth that belongs to someone, to a subject who speaks”; it is, rather, “the mouth that belongs to no one, the mouth that becomes a mouth in the opening of a one who – opened, disfigured – has no

face” (90). A “defacing of ethics ordered by faces” (80), and an articulation of “an ethical law ordered by the mouth [*bucca*]” (78), would allow us to enter a fairer, a more open and respectful relationship with animals. The “closing” effected by the face would be reverted by the “opening” of the mouth.

If the passage to land that Nietzsche describes creates the human face through the creation of words, then this face can be seen as a result of the solidification of metaphoricity. This solidification, the creation of the metaphorical (thus the literal, letters, words) is, for Nietzsche, “the fundamental human drive” (“Truth and Lies” 121). Humans, then, are characterised by their drive to create the metaphorical, their hunger is a hunger for words and, ultimately, for the human face. If, in Heidegger, man’s characteristic potentiality is manifested in boredom, in Nietzsche it is manifested in this hunger for words, a hunger to solidify metaphoricity (understood as potentiality). In a crucial sentence, Nietzsche claims that “hunger is no proof that the food that would satisfy it exists,” but, rather, that “it desires the food” (*Human* 70). In this sense, the human’s hunger for words, for the all-too-human face, does not prove that this face exists but that it is desired and, therefore, originally lacked.

### digesting: by way of conclusion

The human face can only be originally absent, lacked, in so far as humanness and animality are cognate. At their origin (the point of their convergence) there are no characteristics that would distinguish them. (This would imply a pre-existing, pre-defined human and a pre-existing, pre-defined animal, parts of one merging with the other.) The point bears some elaboration in relation to language. As probably the most primary human characteristic, language would seem to emerge from such an originary point of convergence. Therefore, the human does not develop language; language and man are produced alongside and in the same way. “[T]he origin of language and the origin of man [are] one and the same.”

Agamben cites Heymann Steinthal, who makes the above claim, arguing that it is a failure to realise this that renders the functions of the anthropological machine “aporetic” (*Open* 37). “[P]recisely because the human is already presupposed” when definitions are sought, the “outside” can only ever be the exclusion of an inside already conceived of as animalistic (*ibid.*). It is in this sense that the definitions of humanness and animality that this machine produces are aporetic.

While Agamben locates the machine’s functions as well as what makes them aporetic (the presupposition of the human), what I attempted to discover here is what enables these functions in the first place, what sets the machine in motion, if you will – namely, the human and animal’s mutuality. The treatment of food in Western thought reveals, contrary to what is generally assumed, that it is their point of convergence (as manifested in their mutual need for, and consumption of, food) that has been utilised as a means to their conceptual differentiation, to the production of their definitions (albeit aporetic). It is within this mutuality, this point of convergence conceived of as potentiality, that the “addition/extraction” or “inclusion/exclusion” processes are initiated. In fact, the theorisation of a “closing” of potentiality that is detectable in Heidegger’s work might just be interpreted as the originary *exclusion*; in so far as potentials are not actualised, they are, in a sense, excluded. This exclusion is, simultaneously, the originary *addition*, the addition of the capacity to exclude, to refrain from actualising potentials.

At this final point, I want to clarify that my aim here has not been to assess the validity of the definitions of humanness and animality I have been engaging with, but to bring to the forefront the “structure” (in the Deleuzian sense) that seems to underlie the production of these definitions. Now, in positing the human and animal’s mutuality as the “differentiator” of this structure, I have not attempted to render problematic the conceptual distinctions of humanness and animality that emerge from it – an overwhelming number of thinkers have

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already taken this to task, with varying degrees of success. Rather, what I hope to have achieved is to have placed a certain emphasis on the importance of shifting our attention both from the specific qualities that are devised in order to conceptually differentiate human and animal, and from the patterns or schemata that characterise the devising of these qualities – the functions of the anthropological machine – in order to focus on what enables them in the first place – namely, mutuality. Since the common need for, and consumption of, food is an exemplification of mutuality, it might be that, by focusing on this, a new form of ethics (as regards human and animal relationships) can be reached, an ethics based on “buccality,” on a mouth “in which eating-speaking-breathing-spitting” are “undifferentiated,” as Guyer has it (“Buccality” 90).

However, such a return to this mouth prior to speech and subjectivity would seem to signal some sort of pathology (a regression to a previous stage of development in psychoanalytic terms) and is, to my mind, politically dangerous. The importance of focusing on this mutuality, I would argue, lies not so much in trying to devise a specific form of ethics from it but in alerting us to its utilisation to certain ends. If in the examples of Western thought I have dealt with above this mutuality has been utilised in order to conceptually differentiate humanness and animality, then what are the political implications of this? When Nietzsche parallels humans with those water animals that had to make their passage to land, he tells us that the state imposes “frightening fortifications” to “protect itself against the old [...] freedom” (*Genealogy* 66). This freedom of the water, of fluidity, might be the freedom of potentiality which has, in this analysis, been associated with mutuality. What other manifestations of such utilisations of mutuality can we detect in today’s so-called global world? (The very term “globalisation” is already associated with mutuality, a mutuality that is, of course, manipulated or “closed off” in certain cases.) And which are the “frightening fortifications” that are implicated in such manipulations of

mutuality in the economic-political systems we operate under? Though these questions are beyond the scope of this essay, they highlight the necessity of lingering further on the utilisations of the mutuality of humanity and animality and their varying manifestations in other realms.



## notes

I would like to thank Joel Evans, Arthur Bradley, John Schad, and my anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

1 Lévi-Strauss might have objected to this positing of food as a “scandal,” for he associates cooked food with culture and raw with nature. He acknowledges complications, though. In roasted food, for example, the outside is cooked and the inside is raw; therefore, it combines elements of both categories (“Culinary Triangle” 30). This brief observation suffices to show that food does not easily conform to oppositions such as culture/nature or humanity/animality.

2 In *Timaeus* “the part of the soul which desires meats and drinks” is “like a wild animal which was chained up with[in] man” (64).

3 This is from Derrida’s unpublished seminar series “Rhétorique du Cannibalisme” (University of California, Irvine, 1990). The references are from David Farrell Krell’s account of the seminars, which is based on the notes that Derrida had prepared for the course (“All You Can’t Eat” 147, 136).

4 Marx, on the contrary, focuses on man’s hunger, arguing that it reveals him to be a “limited creature, like animals and plants” (*Early Writings* 390). Hunger is the point of convergence of human, animal and plant existence, and it functions as the condition that makes possible their distinction. The “production of the means to satisfy [various] needs,” hunger primarily, since “life involves before everything else eating and drinking,” is the “first historical act,” which marks the birth of human existence (*German Ideology* 48). If “material activity” is “the language of real life,” as Marx and Engels say (47), then the satisfaction of the need for food is the first word of this language.

5 If the animals’ clean blood reflects the clean blood of the chosen people, then the necessity to drain it before the flesh is consumed could be viewed as a measure to prevent figurative cannibalism. To this extent, Guyer’s “ethics of cannibalism” is applicable in this instance.

6 Deleuze would probably have interpreted Ezeiel’s eating of words as a manifestation of “the primary order of schizophrenia.” According to Deleuze, in this order the “pure” expressed of words” is mingled with “the body’s olfactory, gustatory, or digestive affects” (*Logic* 91).

7 This is reminiscent of Melanie Klein’s description of the dissection and incorporation of the mother, or the mother’s breast, and the contradictory feelings towards her/it. The breast is split into “the good breast” (which “is gratifying”) and “the bad breast” (which causes frustration when it withdraws from the infant’s mouth). Feelings of love and hate are projected on the respective breasts (and, by extension, on the mother) which are, “by introjection,” established inside the infant’s body (199–200). For a revision of Klein’s theory see Deleuze (*Logic* esp. 186–95).

8 For more cases that seem to verify the pattern “food in—words out” (and vice versa) see Freud’s *Early Psycho-analytic Publications* (esp. 32–33), and *Studies on Hysteria* (esp. 211–12).

9 Heidegger seems to agree with Georges Bataille who claims that “[b]etween the animal that is eaten and the one that eats, there is no relation of subordination like that connecting an object, a thing, to man”; thus, “every animal is *in the world like water in water*,” totally immersed in it (18–19). For Bataille, however, this immediacy to or immanence in the world is not limitedness or captivation, but harmony.

10 As Levinas has famously observed, “Dasein in Heidegger is never hungry” (134).

11 Heidegger’s concept of potentiality is, nevertheless, Aristotelian: an actualised potential is no longer a potential. A boy, for example, has the potential to become a man; once he becomes a man, the potential is negated in actualisation. Therefore, not actualising a potential is preserving it as a potential. However, such a teleological understanding is at odds with the very concept of potentiality; if something is already mapped out then it cannot count as “truly” potential. A “true”



potential cannot be recognised or contemplated. The Deleuzian potentiality, as opposed to the Heideggerian, coincides with actuality (actualisation of potentials without recognition); to recognise and choose not to actualise a potential is to cancel it as “truly” potential.

12 In this sense, the immersion of animals in potentiality (or metaphoricity) would mean that they are plunged in a pure language, a language prior to signification. This is what Agamben means when he claims that “[a]nimals are not in fact denied language; on the contrary they are always and totally language” (*Infancy* 59).

13 Carol J. Adams argues that the word “meat” is a “mass term,” which denies the situated life of the specific animal that is to be consumed (115). This is an example of animal facelessness, which allows the humans to apply to animals ever-changing faces; a cow, for example, is viewed as a milk-machine and then converted into meat.

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