1. From Timofeeva to Powell

OXANA TIMOFEEVA: I was very inspired by your works while I was preparing for this paper. I think you are certainly questioning the divisions, the borders, and the distinctions between the individual and the multiple. For example, *The Memory of Sheep* gives a wonderful illustration of what I would call "the process of individualisation". Just like humans, the non-human animal acquires, step-by-step, certain properties, such as a face, a portrait, a name, a gaze, an individuality, a story, or history. It is as if the yellow ID tags in the sheep’s ears actually represented their breeds, names, families or whatever. This process starts from an anonymous multiplicity of the herd of animals – the flock. The division runs between the multiple and the singular, or the multiple and the individual. In this boundary, the question is not, "Do you differentiate between the one and the other?" but rather about the productive possibilities, epistemological potentialities of this division, where the most interesting things happen exactly at this border. When we look at the catalogue, blank papers are occasionally inserted in between the individuals, like a kind of pulsation. Individual sheep are removed from the anonymous flock in order to suddenly appear as singular individuals with their own faces and stories.
The same kind of productive boundary can be observed in another work of yours, _A Place Where Things Are_. However, if in the case of sheep we deal with the process of individualisation, here we find rather the inverse case of deindividuation. This is something what I call "an anonymous abstraction" of an insect. One can say that the insect is the highest point of animal anonymity. Let me refer to Kafka's _Metamorphosis_, where the protagonist (human individual) suddenly starts turning into an insect. First, he begins losing his individuality – his face, his body, his clothes, his home, his relatives, his name and language. This creature looks at the window and is fascinated by the space. His experience of being an insect is an experience of a very special kind of mimesis. Roger Caillois, a surrealist and a thinker, who wrote about insects, took notice of insects' fascination with space, basically being devoured by space and, related it to mimicry: these insects imitate, and they don't imitate something, but just imitate (mimesis without an object). In the _The Impossible Line_, again, the animal is exposed to the forces of abstraction and anonymity, but at the same time is paradoxically individualised. The line at which the chicken stares, in a way, passes through the chicken itself, a paradoxical internal difference between the chicken and the chicken itself.

The first question is: How do you differentiate between anonymity and individuality? The second question refers to _We Are Here_, which differs from the other three works. It is about the animal and the machine. Where and how do you place yourself between the animal and the machine, the mechanical and the organic? The cat in the video speaks with a mechanical voice, which is how I imagine the voice of the unconscious might sound. And then the articulation comes in.

LUCY POWELL: Thank you for your interesting questions. Your idea of the individual animal versus the mass touches on two discussions. One is the idea of the animal as metaphor, another is the idea of animal as scientific object of study. Epistemology works on a philosophical level and as science, and embraces both. I go in between the two because my interest started with the animal as metaphor and I've moved towards the science, but I'm working with representation. This situated me on an in-between ground, although I've got more and more interested in the science, and that has always influenced my point of view. The idea of the individual is often about point of view. There is an interesting scientific experiment about face recognition in babies. Babies are geared towards face recognition.

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The experiment showed the faces of a series of rhesus monkeys to small children, one monkey after the next, in a slideshow. The six-month-old infants were totally fascinated and watched the whole slideshow, while the older children quickly got bored because they thought they were seeing the same monkey time and again. The younger children, whose brains were better attuned to facial recognition, were able to distinguish individual characteristics, which I think is very interesting. It underlines that the idea of mass and individual is a point of view – it depends on your perception. Such things exist on all levels: among different ethnicities, between animals and human beings, among animals themselves, et cetera. Sheep can also distinguish between a certain number of humans. For _The Memory of Sheep_, I chose a particular breed of sheep which was very distinctive looking, at least to my eyes. Other breeds look more similar. I took about 400 pictures and had to isolate fifty different individuals. Honestly speaking, I had problems distinguishing between them, and sometimes I differentiated them just by the tag in their ears. Perceiving them as individuals was an interesting process, yet when I was photographing them, they were behaving as a herd. If I called something or stood up, then they'd all run off, and, so, in my mind I was thinking: "Why am I taking pictures of you as individuals and you're behaving like a herd?"

OT: We just recognise individuals in the multiplicity or in the crowd when we are part of it. If we see some other multiplicity, we tend to see it as the crowd rather than as a gathering of individuals. It looks more anonymous, and all parts of this other crowd tend to appear to have similar faces.

LP: What you just mentioned relates to selective attention. The dragonfly, for example, has excellent selective attention – something only primates were thought to have. This focus makes it an incredibly effective predator, much better than lions or tigers, for example. I have moved my interests away from the idea of the animal in general to very specific details, because science keeps revealing new animal abilities and the "boundaries" between animals and humans are continually dissolving.

MY: You use an artistic speculation between metaphor and science, or language and visual images. Can we say that it is "your" epistemological methodology to elaborate that we're usually caught up in either one or the other of them?
LP: Very different approaches are taken in the four works. This is my way of working and dealing with stuff that I’m reading and finding out. It’s evolving as I read and as science throws up new evidence. I would say that it’s my own research path. Regarding the second question; the voice was not mechanical, but my voice imitating a mechanical one. I got a computer voice to read the text over and over, and I internalised it. When I spoke it for the video, I had embodied the rhythm. I was playing with an idea of the machine and animal with the human voice in between; I was interested in seeing what happens when you throw them all together as a “we”.

2. From Powell to Timofeeva

LP: I would like to come back to metaphor. Do you consider the notion of the animal in other terms other than as metaphor? I met an historian of science, Etienne Benson, who said: “Sometimes with all the metaphors surrounding them, the animals themselves get lost.” The metaphor keeps you in the human realm, in the realm of projection, and the animal actually disappears.

OT: It’s a naïve scientific reciprocity. You get lost in metaphors, because the animal is nothing but metaphor and metaphoric constructs. Natural science also deals with metaphors. Look at the terminology in quantum physics, or in other sciences: particles, strings, flavour, topness, bottomness, beauty, or whatever metaphors are applied to nature. Science is full of metaphoric constructs, so I don’t mind working with metaphors rather than with the real animals, because the real is also a kind of metaphoric construct. Metaphors can be productive when applied to a social reality. Marx, for example, uses metaphors when he talks about humans, animals, and society.

A naïve reading of classical texts is an important element my work, because it gives us an alternative view. When you pick such a seemingly marginal figure as an animal, and from this animal perspective try to read what Hegel says about the system of knowledge, you can get an alternative view on history. My position is rather close to surrealist thinkers such as Roger Caillois or Georges Bataille, who worked at the boundary between art, science and theory, between philosophy and literature, between concept and metaphor.

MY: You pay particular attention to the way the metaphor of the animal is used in philosophy, and perceive a philosopher as an individual – a person situated in a specific time, location and condition – rather than a singular philosopher. Your new perception reveals the order embedded in the cultural context in order to reinterpret the philosophical thinking in the text. Is this a sort of methodological experiment to de-/reconstruct a traditional line of philosophy so as to create another point of view?

OT: Yes, it’s rather a methodological key to a certain door, to a certain system, or to a certain history of the development of philosophical thought in a strong connection with literature, arts and psychoanalysis. Every philosopher has another hidden, unconscious philosopher inside. Sometimes this inner philosopher says something completely opposite to what was said by the “official” one.

MY: I realise that interesting crossings between epistemology and ontology are taking place in this dialogue as well as in your book, *History of Animals*. In the first chapter, you say:

> For Aristotelian creatures, it does not require any particular effort to participate in this pause. They are just expected to do what they do naturally and at their specific place and in their specific manner. So the order they all maintain was not established by human beings, but humans measure it. We mind not that everyone in his own way already conforms to some general law and prohibition which seems all too human.

Measurement is a way to define ontological relationships. It is an act to create an order, so that measurement is synonymous with ordering. In your text, how do you distinguish these words, order and measure?

You previously referred to the notion of “a principle of life” by Gilbert Simondon. It all actually sounds like animism without using the term. The notion proposed reconsidering the boundary between machines, animal and human beings from the perspective of function. It denies a hierarchical structure in life, which shifts a view from epistemology – how we “see” the world – to ontology – how we should exist in the world within the network of nature. By taking a position of being in-between, you combine both views here. This seems to be close to an idea of animism without any specific cultural connotation.
This chapter of my book is partly dedicated to Aristotle and Aristotelian animals, and, in general, to the Greek cosmos. I refer to Simondon, who was also inspired by animals and wrote about them. He emphasised that in Aristotelian thought there is a principle of life as a common measure, as something shared by plants, animals, humans, gods, stars, all kinds of creatures. The ancient Greek universe in general is still inspired by animist belief in metempsychosis, the idea of a living soul passing from one body to another. In connection with Aristotle, I give one amazing example. In one chapter of his book *History of Animals*, Aristotle describes animal characters and tells the following story about a horse:

It is said that the king of the Scythians had a high quality mare, all of whose colts were good; the king wishing to breed from the best out of the mother, brought it to her to mate; but after she had been concealed under a wrap, it mounted her in ignorance; and when the mare’s face was uncovered after the mating at the sight of her the horse ran away and threw itself down the cliffs.

Imagine the horse that mates with its mother and commits suicide! Here the question of measurement and order comes in. The prohibition against incest is not only characteristic of ancient Greek culture, but also seen as universal, so that it is easily projected onto animals. If we have the prohibition, why don’t horses? The horse in this story could be called Oedipus-the-Horse. The problem here is not the anthropocentric view, but the order of things, the maintenance of the cosmos. In order to maintain a cosmic order, there must be a certain measurement. There must be the law, and someone who knows the law, who has the power, who has the capacity to interpret the law, or who says what is the law, what is good, et cetera. There must be also those who obey the law. If someone cannot manage to do that, the whole construction of the universe can collapse. If one element of the cosmic structure fails, everything can fail. Everything and everyone in this universe try to be good. But what is being good according to Aristotle? To be good is to keep the way of behaving as it is, or to follow those who know better, to do what they say I should do. Thus, the great cosmos functions, and everything works there in harmony. But this horse does something that makes this cosmic order collapsed, namely, it violates the law and the prohibition. The same happens with Oedipus. Measurement appears here as a way of knowing, interpreting, and observing the law.