De/constructing the Human: Self, Identity and Other

MA Contemporary Dialogues: Photography
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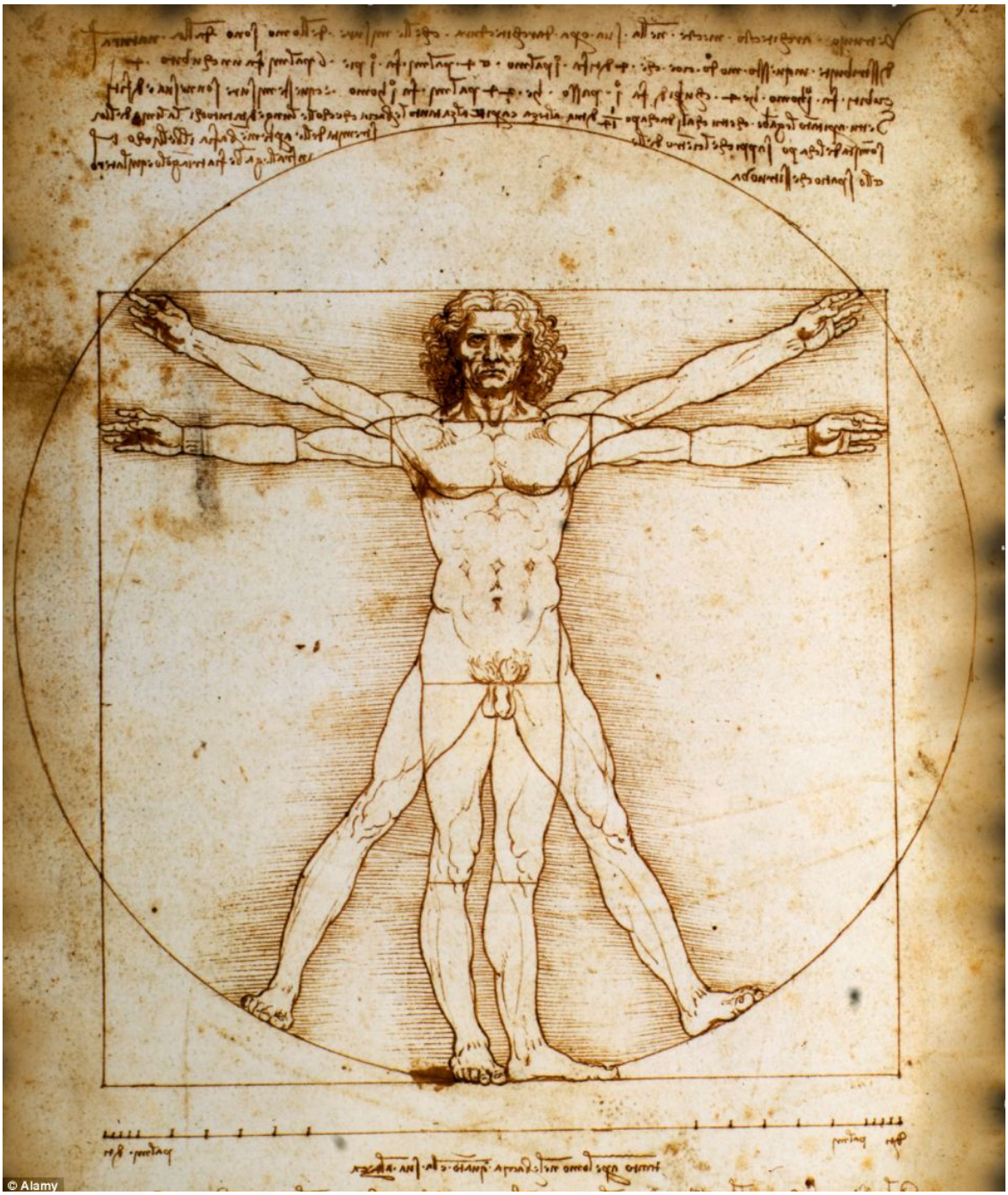
NONHUMAN ANIMAL

Introduction



Original: Da Vinci's pen and ink sketch is a careful study of the anatomy of man based on the ideal human proportions described by Ancient Roman scholar Vitruvius

Mihi quaestio factus sum ('I have become a question to myself', Augustine: confessions X. XXXIII)

In my essay, I argue that the distinction between human and animal is not the most productive strategy for dealing with the animal question. To define a human means, on the one hand, to show how he, being a life form, does not differ from other life forms, on the other hand, to reveal how he is different from the life forms around him and what makes him special as a human being. '…and on the other that human beings are merely an animal species governed by laws of nature or history.' (Arendt, 1958, p.(xi)) In her book *The Human Condition*, Arendt analyses the condition of modern humanity, the author evaluates a person in terms of his actions. The problem raised in the book is the weakening of the human factor and political freedom. Today we are faced with a paradox that shows that as technological progress increases human power, we have less and less means, to control the consequences of our actions. The world, of course, continues to exist, we remain mortal, earthly beings, but the ability to rely solely on the things we create becomes not an aid, but an increasing obstacle to understanding ourselves. The problem of the topic of the work will help to reveal human existentialism, with its fears, the complexes of an inferior person, experiencing internal and external issues of identity and being. By finding out what a human is, we can receive answers that are relevant to our century and ultimately answer the biggest question - what is the meaning of being a human?

'Human animals unconscious of their capacities and responsibilities are not well fitted to take charge of earth-threatening powers.' (Arendt, 1958) Marxism dissolved human inwardness in economic relations, poststructuralism and deconstruction in intertext, and the philosophy of ordinary language in the practices of everyday language. 'After having been so long alienated from his true self, man would at last through the grace of the iron laws of history enter into his earthly paradise, where all live together in perfect freedom and community.' (Marx and Engels, 1848., p. xxix) These currents of philosophy are characterized by externalism, which seeks to rewrite interiority in terms of exteriority, and anti-individualism, which seeks to dissolve the individual into impersonal and collective forces and events. When thinking about a human, the theme of interiority is a cornerstone, because the autonomous interiority of a human, which constantly ironizes, rejects the clichés and stereotypes of the external world and does not succumb to them, is the main characteristic of a human. People are born in a certain area of the world, come into a specific linguistic and cultural tradition, and must learn

to see this native context in a human light ‘Yet the shadow belongs to the light as the evil belongs to the good, and *vice versa.’* (Jung, 1933, p 41)

According to Darwin, the emergence of man as a social entity fundamentally changed the development of natural processes. In order to establish himself in nature, man joined a single system, which operates according to the general laws of evolution. The fact that man occupies a special place in nature determines the constant relevance of the relationship between man and nature. (Darwin, 1839)

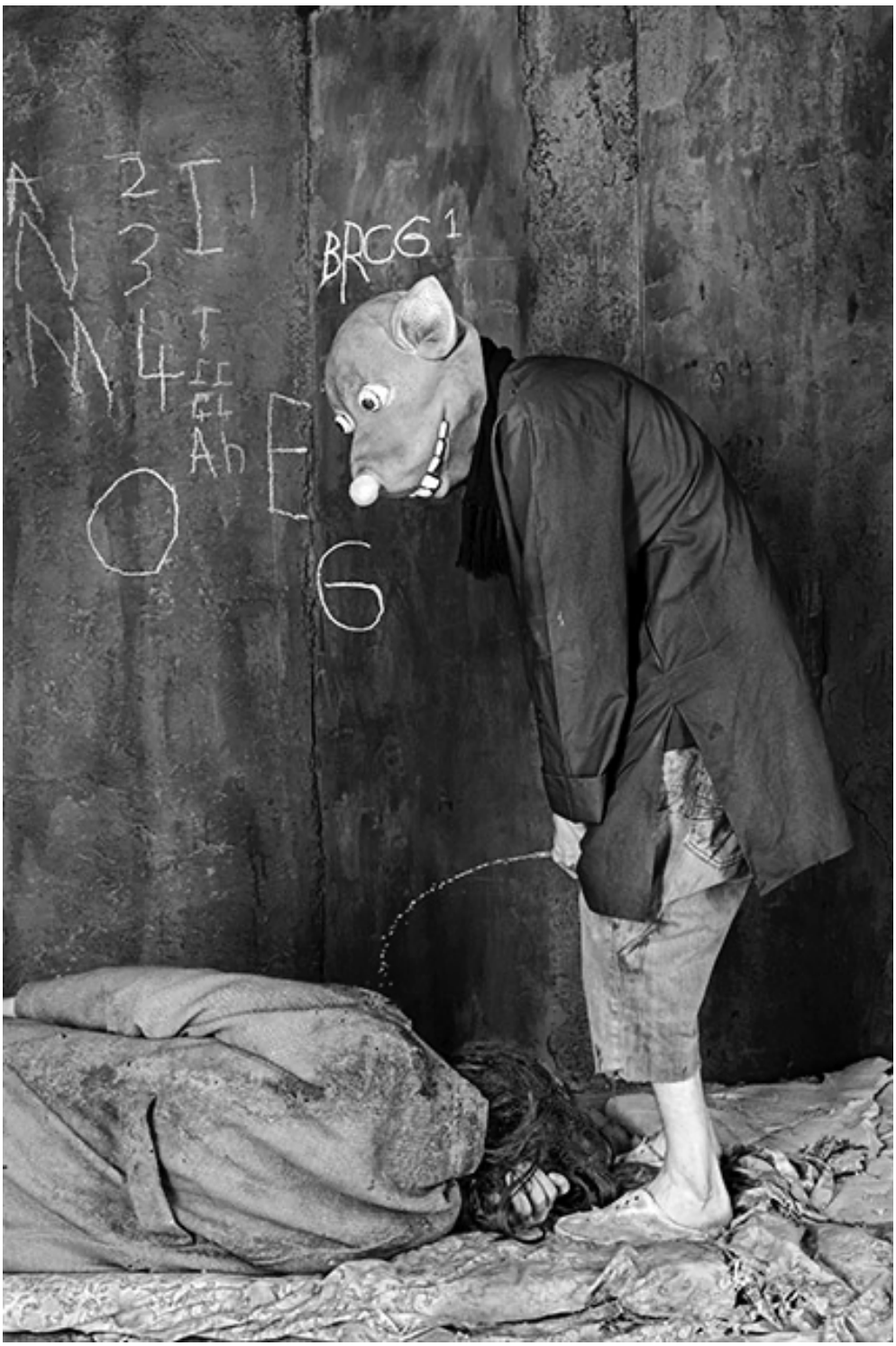
Looking at the development of man as a creative object in art, literature, and theater, he has always been, and probably will be, the most loved creative character.

And so, since ages, human representation has remained as if an inexhaustible source of creativity until these days, postmodernism. Only the possibilities and styles of expression differed, but the theme of man as an existential individual remains relevant even today. Writer Dempsey in her book *Styles, Schools and Movements: The Essential Encyclopaedic Guide to Modern Art* (1963*)* states that man is alone in the world, and there are no primary moral or religious systems that he can rely on and be guided by. On the one hand, he is forced to realize his loneliness, the meaninglessness and absurdity of existence; on the other hand, he is free to stand out and reinvent himself with every action he takes. The world of modern man is monochrome, one-color. It is totally immanent - in search of light, goals, emotional colours and life motivation, a person is forced to rummage within himself to illuminate with his presence the things that are next to us as the only friends and guardians of our existence. At the beginning of modernism, a person discovers the remnants of spirituality in himself, as if he hears the voice of a suffering soul, in the sunset of modernism, the remnants of the subconscious and instincts break out of him.

Human-Animal. Lower Instincts

‘Change the economic base and you will change human beings.’ (Marx)

From an evolutionary point of view, animals are significantly earlier than man, in the subconscious, their forms represent the archaic, extremely natural, instinctive sphere of the human psyche. Animal symbolism is very interesting - the same symbol embraces contradictory meanings, several layers: personal, cultural, biological, spiritual, metaphysical. It is this symbolic plane of human-animal relations that unfolds in Ballen’s mostly disturbing photography. The subjects in his work are dark and intriguing, human-animals with the lower instincts and in places forgotten by God. There is no clear line between animal and human. People often in his work look animalistic in their posture and facial expressions. Looking at Ballen's works, wants to ask - are they really people or more animals? ‘In some of my photographs, I tried to link human behaviour with animal behaviour. So sometimes you see that […] animals are in some ways reflecting the state of being of humanity as much as his or her own state of being,’ he says. (Liang, 2022)



Ballen, *Peeing*, 2020

His work takes us to a mythical dimension. If you look at his work deeper and deeper, you can feel like if you awake from a dream for some odd reason, you will get confused by what the reality is? In Ballen's photograph the concept 'a human is a value' does not exist at all. The place where he worked - South Africa – can be a cruel, death-bearing place. There is a lot of irony in his work, which protects a person from horror, sensuality, helps not to fall into despair. However, when difficult circumstances arise and breaks both physically and morally, the question arises, is it really possible to remain a human being in inhumane conditions? As Ballen said 'There is a profound irony in that, despite half a century of political privilege here in the physical heart of white South Africa, even in a system created to ensure their survival, are archetypes of alienation and immobility, victims of both political forces and personal circumstances defending themselves against economic deprivation and psychological anguish in a hostile and unyielding environment.' (Ballen, 2006)

For some, comparing an animal with a human is dangerous because it denigrates a person, for others it is unacceptable because it is a totalization of human reality '…the crossing of borders' between man and animal.' (Derrida, 2008, p 3)

A final criterion concerns the ethical implications of animal theory. Theories should either radically contradict conventional moral norms or explain why the theory reaches such counterintuitive views.

'Finally, the stakes of a deconstruction of the philosophical tradition that has maltreated animals in this way concerns more than just animals. Far from bringing about a simple reversal of perspective and, for example, restoring to ''the animal'' in general everything that the tradition has always deprived it of; far from substituting for the classical opposition the confusion of a no less deceptive failure to differentiate, such a deconstruction patiently multiplies the differences, bringing to our attention the fragility and porosity of the supposed frontiers of the ''proper'' upon which we have presumed for so long to found the traditional opposition between ''man'' and ''animal.'' In so doing, however much it may disturb all those assurances concerning the ''animality'' of the animal ''in general,'' it is no less disturbing for any assurance concerning the ''humanity'' of the human.' (Derrida, 2008, p x)

This is how we once again satisfy that answering an animal's question is as difficult as hearing the animal's answer ‘You can speak to an animal, to the cat said to be real inasmuch as it is an animal, but it doesn’t reply, not really, not ever, that is what Alice concludes.’ (Derrida, 2008, p 8)

In relation to the animal, this structure takes on a different form and performs a different function. In speaking of an animal, the philosopher is not speaking of an object, but of another with whom he converses about things—happiness, essences, reality, etc. But what general meaning is possible when referring to an animal? There cannot be a general significance here, because it cannot be confirmed. Therefore, while maintaining the structure of addressing and directing things towards things, it becomes much more important that the animal does not respond. It can testify to a general orientation towards the things of the world, but it cannot indicate something in general and confirm it. In this way, the animal ‘challenges’ the human point of view without confirming it. Of course, the challenge is very specific. It bears witness to otherness, but man must challenge the possibility of perception himself ‘In other words, the animal resembles the human and enters into relation with the Other …’ (Derrida, 2008, p 120)

‘The Other as previous site of the pure subject of the signifier holds the master position, even before coming into existence, to use He- gel’s term against him, as absolute Master. For what is omitted in the platitude of modern information theory is the fact that one can speak of a code only if it is already the code of the Other, and that is something quite different from what is in question in the message, since it is from this code that the subject is constituted, which means that it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message that he emits.’ (Derrida, 2008, p 120)

The Guardian, Roger Ballen: '*Welcome to the Outland'*, 2015

The thought that one day it will be good helps a person to survive the trials of fate, that the unity of people can defeat the system of destruction, which has no moral norms or human values. 'If we go more deeply into the meaning of this concept, it seems to us that certain psychic contents or images are derived from a material environment to which our bodies also belong, while others, which are in no way less real, seem to come from a mental source which appears to be very different from the physical environment.' (Jung, 1933, 194)

Not only killings and physical suffering force a person to balance between being a human or an animal. Life without spiritual support, among self-absorbed people, becomes a problematic test of humanity 'In speaking, therefore, of the spiritual problem of modern man we can at most state a question-and we should perhaps put this statement in different terms if we had but the faintest inkling of the answer.' (Jung, 1933, p 196) Ballen's documentary video *'Outland'* illustrates this perfectly. Here the question of existence arises, what is the meaning of life? Undermining conditions turn a human into an animal rather than a human being. Human behaviour is called animalistic when defensive or sexual instincts are aggressive. In Ballen's work, everything that has meaning in normal life and is valuable to an ordinary person loses its essence. In one of his interview, Ballen states 'The animal has all sort of

metaphoric meanings to it, you can't divorce yourself from the animal, we come from the animals.' (Day, 2019)

In summary, we can say that Man is such a living being that perceives himself through the difference from all other animals, and - it may seem quite paradoxical - man is such an animal 'the animal I am (following),' (Derrida, 2008, p 74) that identifies himself through the fact that he is not an animal 'The animal that I am not, the animal that in my very essence I am not…' (Derrida, 2008, p 74)

The relationship between human being and not being an animal is problematic, complicated, ambiguous. It is not easy to consider, because it is, on the one hand, partly natural - the human species is different from other mammals, and, on the other hand, it is something that is constantly being constructed it is like 'The shoe that fits one person pinches another; there is no recipe for living that suits all cases. Each of us carries his own life-form -an indeterminable form which cannot be superseded by any other.' (Jung, 1933, p 61)

Animal I Am

Cate, *Marcus Coates: A Quest For Visions – Contemporary Art & The Church*, 2012

The paradox of modern life is that the system, supposedly devoted to human individuality and well-being, really greatly reduces the significance of the individual person, diminishes him, because the person gets lost in the self-serving labyrinths of systems and institutions, becomes alien and unnecessary to them 'The Age of Spiritual Machines is no mere list of predictions but a prophetic blueprint for the future.' (Kurzweil, 1999, p 2)

The nature of man as a living being is not compatible with the ever-accelerating rhythm of life. What's more, technical tools began to displace direct human communication and physical movement 'We will begin to have relationships with automated personalities and use them as teachers, companions, and lovers.' (Kurzweil, 1999, p 2) This is a problem that has matured in its way - people's alienation has increased, people themselves are becoming more technical, and their world of emotions and feelings is becoming poorer. But that's not all: people become objects of manipulation, and their inclinations to consume rather than create are fueled indefinitely. In general, in the era of one-sided achievements, a person seems to lose himself. Technology, a system of machines and mechanisms begins to dominate the world.
The words 'masses', and 'society' alone are very difficult to define. In today's context, the interaction of 'masses', and 'society' encourages us to raise questions that we could associate with the problem of - as it was called not so long ago - the problem of 'consumer society' and a new - or at least considered a new - vision of man and human culture. (Kurzweil, 1999)

'…arises outside the domain of local group life…The mass that behaves…is made up of detached individuals. These individuals, to be true, have their own local attachments, share in convivial association, belong to primary groups, live and act to a great extent in accordance with conventional patterns, but [only] insofar as they belong to a mass, is it as alienated individuals in a new area of life not [adequately] covered by local group tradition.' (Blumer, 1935, p. 118)

Maybe these difficulties basically arise from the fact that different levels are often confused? And these, by the way, are confused because they forget what is the purpose of a person and his soul. Despite the bright economic, scientific and technical achievements, the person is increasingly moving away from his own nature, many people experience an existential sense of meaninglessness.
'This kind of moral realism means neither a metaphysical value realism of eternally fixed values nor a scientific provability of values. Rather, inescapability is most important, as it expresses the fact that

our personal and collective identities are inevitably aligned with certain (but changeable) goods.' (Reckling, 2001, p 159)

A natural question arises, how does a person who only cares about his outside cope with life crises that sooner or later (willingly or unwillingly) affect a person's inner, spiritual world and shake his entire existence, for example, various disasters, illness or spiritual crises case. In order to find spiritual balance, modern man must return to his primordial self.

'Importantly, as they interpret their world by active evaluations, human beings create and change meanings and values.' (Reckling, 2001, p 157)

In research for the answer, we can look at Coates' '*Journey To The Lower World*'.

Coates, Journey to the Lower World, 2004

‘What Coates' performance lacks in seriously earnest self-indulgence it makes up for in charm and disarming humour. Both Beuys' and Coates' acts of native-peoples cultural appropriation might be somewhat ethically problematic - yet, the latter seems to say, let's at least not pretend to be going about it in the ‘right' way.’ (Andrews, 2009)

Coates using his skills as shaman to become an animal to enter to spirit world to talk to animal’s spirits.

‘Since human beings as self-interpreting animals articulate and interpret the world in an evaluating language, every analysis in the science of man has to be aware of this; it has to take seriously the evaluating self- interpretations. An analysis which leaves the frame of meanings given by evaluating self-interpretations neglects the context of cultural significances which are important for a certain culture’ (Reckling, 2001, p 158)

In his interview Coates states that this information is very useful for community for healing or to solve everyday problems. Like one of the issue, ‘recent influx of prostitutes from Nigeria and West Africa’ (Radio Shaman, 2006)
More and more performance artists connect their activities with various social factors such as politics, economy or religion. Again, it is taken to return to the beginning - the animalistic perception of the world, when the artist is influenced by the conscious goal of metamorphosis, which arises from the perceived human incompleteness. One of the oldest animistic beliefs is shamanism and that the Coates performances are based on.

‘Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than ‘‘The Animal’’ or ‘‘Animal Life’’ there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely (since to say ‘‘the living’’ is already to say too much or not enough), a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death.’ (Derrida, 2008, p 31)

The threads of the animal gaze, the animal environment, and the abyss between man and animal intertwine in Derrida's thinking. Derrida is most interested in the problems of thinking that draws a difference (‘the Animal’ and not ‘animals’). Although Derrida's text is poetic, it is nonetheless the text of an analysing and deconstructing philosopher. His discourse is a mixture of poetic description and philosophical criticism. As Derrida states, the discourses of the aforementioned philosophers are characterized by the fact that when drawing the difference between man and animal, the word ‘animal’ is used in the singular and very abstractly.

‘*Animal* is a word that men have given themselves the right to give.’ (Derrida, 2008, p 32)

When he is standing in front of people dressed like an animal, he is internally trying to be this animal. During his performance, he experiences what it feels like to be that animal. On the other hand, we can say ‘…man is completely human only when he is playing.’ (Jung, 1933, p 66) Coates is an animal not through mimicry but by believing he is an animal by making movements and sounds. ‘Coates act is absurd though earnest in its self-mocking hazard at leaving the confines of human locomotion. By operating from an inhuman point of view, Coates does not assume a fixed and unchanging role.’ (Andrews, 2009)

Conclusion

Human without roots, without a history, cannot understand who he really is. According to Jung, the ideology of modernism, which rejected God, tried to create a new society and man through technological progress, rationalism and a new social order. In Ballen's work we see the results of this - a lonely person who has lost his identity, fighting for his existence, we see alienated social relations, in which man is only a stranger to another, trying to occupy a foreign space of being:

'The civilized man of today shows these archaic processes as well, and not merely in the form of sporadic "throw – backs" from the level of modern social life. On the contrary, every civilized human being, whatever his conscious development, is still an archaic man at the deeper levels of his psyche. Just as the human body connects us with the mammals and displays numerous relics or earlier evolutionary stages going back even to the reptilian age, so the human psyche is likewise a product of evolution which, when followed up to its origins, shows countless archaic traits.' (Jung, 1933, p 126)

Having put himself in the center in the era of education and having used his potential mental and technical creative possibilities to the maximum in the age of progress, man, when he turned to himself, found only a hollow image of a robot or as Jung said 'blood· sucking ghosts' trying to conquer the universe for the reason that of which we are punished with natural cataclysms and ecological crises.

The human drudgery rushes forward,

Like bad blood

In the circulatory system

And we disappear on exits

And roads to our self-importance

(Dickinson, 2022)

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, before the great thinkers of the world have yet invented a new term to describe the period we are living in, we are still talking about the phenomenon of postmodernism, against the background of which the spirituality of modern man is spreading, albeit with difficulty. Man becomes as narrowly 'practical' as irrational animals '…between nonhuman types of animal.' (Derrida, 2008, p 99)

One who is aware of the present is undoubtedly lonely. 'Modern' man is lonely at all times, because with each step he takes toward higher and greater consciousness, nonetheless he moves away from primordial himself 'The modern man has lost all the metaphysical certain- ties of his mediaeval brother, and set up in their place the ideals of material security, general welfare and humaneness.' (Jung, 1933, p 204) One who is aware of the present is undoubtedly lonely '" Today" stands between "yesterday" and "tomorrow," and forms a link between past and future; it has no other meaning.' (Jung, 1933, p 199)

The current system of human rights reflects several centuries of philosophical and legal ideas. Throughout the evolution of human rights, the three most important aspects of human rights have been developed - human integrity, freedom and equality, respect for the dignity of every human being. Treating a human being as an animal - let alone a 'more perfect' - species, '…human knowledge has greater autonomy than animal knowledge in relation to the field of force of desire.' (Derrida, 2008, p 122) any human characteristics become distinctive among animal species, but not between animal and non-animal. This means that the discourse of 'animality-humanity' to the extent that it relies on the unexpressed species identity of the considered objects, denies the very dichotomy of human and non-human (or animal and non-animal). As humans being we always testing boundaries between man and animal as Coates uses his body to test these borders '…that is the confines of man, to ''the crossing of borders'' between man and animal.' (Derrida, 2008, p 3)

The search for differences, implying fragmentary differences, implicitly establishes a substantive sameness, a certain ontological leveling, which in turn deprives the effort to separate man from animal. Thus, any recognitions of human difference from animals serve as evidence of an even deeper human animality 'From the point of view of this human structure, no law or right is currently recognized as pertaining to animality in general, including present-day primates.' (Derrida, 2008, p 99). Today, there is often a rush to erase morality from everyday human experiences and relationships. We can see that morality does not disappear, but only changes its manifestations.

The nature of man as a living being is not compatible with the ever-accelerating rhythm of life. We can say that Nature made man a man because it did not make him an animal 'I am that I am' (Derrida, 2008, p 17) In this formulation, we see the conditions for a person's cultural life, his freedom. This allows the anthropoid to choose another way of life 'The animal is not a rational being, since it is deprived of the ''I think'' that is the condition for understanding and reason. In that way, deprived for the same reason of liberty and autonomy, it cannot become the subject of rights or duties, given the correlation between right and obligation that is proper to the subject as a free person.' (Derrida 2008, p 99). And this allows a person to discover himself, to create his own artificial environment.

So, what conclusions can be drawn about the distinction between human and animal? We can return to the fact that when a philosopher talks about an animal, he is essentially talking about a human being.

The difference that arose between man and nature is only an expression of the inability to fulfill the principle of existence and the necessity to find another form of being.

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