Taking animals in art as an example to study Agamben's animalization theory of humans

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Abstract:
This paper delineates the subject of animals in art from multiple perspectives. This article mainly responds to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's theory of the animalization of human beings and the temporarily undefined threshold between humans and animals. He believes that neither refers to animals nor does it refer to human life when it is nothingness, it tends towards a value concept. At this point, the concept of art, which is still in limbo for Agamben, is actually seizing the place of man in his metaphysical destiny.

Keywords: Agamben, Animals, Art, Inhuman
“…… art succeeds once again in transforming man’s inability to exit his historical status, perennially suspended in the inter-world between old and new, past and future, into the very space in which he can take the original measure of his dwelling in the present and recover each time the meaning of his action.” [1] The core of Agamben’s entire philosophy is that human beings imply that they are a person. Their existence can turn to Heidegger’s question of the meaning of human language, and Benjamin’s eschatological model of human salvation. Interestingly, Benjamin believes that the world is "unsolved" and "irrecoverable." [2] That is, it does not require human salvation. Agamben used a sort of reflection to understand animals as special. It accounts as an alternative for resonance power, and puts animals and people together, thinks, asks, and discusses as a mirror. In the introduction of "The Open: Man And Animal," published in 2012, Agamben had already stated its purpose; how to be a man? We must subsequently first distinguish and relate to them, starting from the relationship between humans and non-humans, animals and humans. He referred to Hebrew scriptures to biological taxonomy to Heidegger, and finally returned to works of art. This implicitly predicted that the criticism of human beings and human consciousness seemed to provide a new form of existence in his philosophy.

1. The relationship between humans and animals

Presently, all conflicts in nature lie in the clash between human animality and humanity. This phenomenon gives rise to the need for humanity and animality as a practical issue rather than human rights values. Being a human being is a rational expression of the intrinsic appeal and ultimate concern of human existence.

Agamben has long believed that the definition of human nature has always been based on the analogy of animals. Human and animal have become the key to exploring the nature of humans. The distinction between humans and animals is not the one between humans and animals; it is actually humans. They are located between transcendental consciousness and secular animals. The human body is engraved with transcendental potential and animal immersion simultaneously. Therefore, the real distinction is the one between transcendence and animality in human beings. This distinction is not constant, and at different times, this distinction needs to be restructured.

Regardless of whether animals are regarded as human beings of their own kind or as alien, or the existence of non-human beings in theology, the existence of animals is often defined as one of the ways of human existence. Human beings rely on animals to perceive and understand. To define oneself, human nature depends on animal nature to define and distinguish. "If the animal other is discarded, 'human nature' will become a dark night of nothingness and a hollow signifier." Humans and animals have existed since the beginning of Socrates. In the field of vision of human beings are opposite hierarchical relationships, human beings and animals are the masters. According to Plato,
the human soul consists of humanity and animality. Humanity is relative to animality, a low-level existence in the human soul and must be suppressed by reason. Animals, as inferior beings, must obey human beings and be domesticated and enslaved by humans. Known as the "Father of Zoology", Aristotle delineated over 500 animals (including human) the physical characteristics and life habits of humans and analyzed the characteristics of "structure", "movement", and "generation" of animals. Through the observation and study of the vitality and mobility of different animal species, he believes that within the sequence of the entire animal kingdom, the hierarchical differences in the strengths of vitality and activity between the various species is actual. ("History of Animals" Volume 8 Chapter 1, 270), Therefore, the development of biology is progressive, that is, "various plants go towards animals, and all kinds of animals go towards humans" (Volume 2 Chapter 3 of "On Longevity and Shortness of Life"). Aristotle's concept of "Scala Nature" of organisms laid the foundation for Darwin's theory of evolution. Compared with Plato's antagonism and rupture between animals and humans, Aristotle delved into the continuity of animals and humans. However, he also emphasized the "hierarchical structure" between animals and humans. Animals act based on their instinct and perception, while humans act rationally. Therefore, compared with animals, humans account for a nobler and more superior existence. 17th century philosopher Descartes inherited Aristotle's doctrine of rational thinking, and highlighted Aristotle's concept of "natural progression" and "hierarchical structure" to the height of epistemology, using "I think, therefore I am" to establish people. He uses the term "soul and body" to distinguish between humans and animals. He believes that humans are "an intricate combination of body and soul" with language and thinking, and are the subject of cognition. Animals are like "machines" consisting of only a body and it has neither language nor soul. It is the object of cognition. To establish the subject status of human beings, Descartes incorporated animals as objects into the philosophical cognition system. Since then, it has established the relationship between the subject, the object and the self in the history of Western philosophy, putting the relationship at odds with the other.

Modern European philosophers reflected to various extents upon the deep-rooted dual relationship between humans and animals. Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Agamben, etc., have made philosophical and ethical responses to the animal other and the boundary between humans and animals based on their respective research interests thereby challenging species to varying degrees. Although Hegel's "Master-Slave Dialectics" in The Phenomenology of Mind (1807) paved the way to establishing an independent and dependent dialectical relationship between the self and the .There is no ambiguity beyond essentialism in animal boundaries. According to Hegel, human beings substantially differ from animals: "Man is an animal of thought" and the subject of self-consciousness, that is, "man can be aware of himself and realize the reality and dignity of human beings." It is "the level that cannot surpass the pure sense of self", and there is no self-consciousness. Later, Darwin scientifically demonstrated the evolutionary process of
species from low to high, from simple to complex in ‘On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection’ (1859), eliminating animals and humans from a biological point of view. The immense gap in nature between species provides natural scientific evidence to explain the origin and progression of species, and fundamentally shakes anthropocentrism.

In the twentieth century, Heidegger incorporated animal issues into his philosophical exploration of "the Essence of Dasein". Heidegger is well versed with Nietzsche's philosophical thoughts and specifically disputes Nietzsche's concepts of "will to power", "eternal reincarnation", "nihilism" and "metaphysics" ("Netzsche" Preface”). Heidegger was influenced by Nietzsche's "the biological basis of value". He used animal comparisons to illustrate "world" and "existence" in his work ("The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics") should be inspired by this. He distinguished if stones, animals, and humans "having world" as follows: [1], Stones (material objects) are worldless; [2],The animal is poor in the world ;[3],People are world-forming." Heidegger stated that the purpose of this distinction is to accurately define the essence of existence of these beings through the comparison of "animal nature of animals and human nature of humans....." Heidegger stated that, "Animal poverty does not only mean having nothing, less possession, or less than others, but deprivation." Compared with the stone that have "worldless" and “poor in world”. animal "poverty in the World" not only refers to animals "poor in world", but also refers to "deprivation of world", which means that animals are between stones and humans, both owning the world and not owning the world. Compared with humans, animals are "bound to the environment during the entire life process, imprisoned in a fixed field that cannot be extended or contracted." Then, the way of existence of animals as beings denied access to the human world. Therefore, animals are "deprivation of world" in this sense, and there is worldless.

Heidegger's exposition of the nature of animal existence reveals his attempts to analyze the relationship between animals and the world from a non-anthropocentrist perspective; however, he still garnered criticism. For instance, in his book "Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question" (1987), Derrida explores the existence of Heidegger's animals to reveal that they are trying to "avoid" the hierarchical division of humans and animals and the efforts of anthropocentrism while respecting the structural differences (human and animal).” But in his opinion, Heidegger's comparison of animals with stones and humans is bound to reintroduce him to the measure of the people he claims to get rid of. This still reflects anthropocentrism, or at least points to our problem.

The contradictory and incomplete nature of Heidegger’s animal thoughts embodies the two dominant animal research strategies that run through the ideological tradition of the European continent — anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. Heidegger's animal philosophy and criticism of metaphysical humanism have created conditions for future research on animal issues, and provided "a kind of ideological confrontation."
Agamben developed his own animal philosophy in the "ideological confrontation" with his predecessors. Matthew Calarco combined Agamben's animal thoughts in his article "Jamming the Anthropological Machine: Agamben". He pointed out that Agamben has been comprehensively scrutinizing animal issues. In his early works, Agamben was committed to criticizing the traditional philosophical discourse on the distinction between humans and animals, and criticizing the negative foundation of traditional metaphysics. It can be inferred that although Agamben devoted himself to criticizing the traditional philosophical discourse on the division of the boundary between humans and animals, he did not deny the existence of a clear boundary between humans and animals.

The anthropological process is based on a clear distinction between humans and animals. Animals are restricted by an anthropological process determining human identities by excluding animals. Agamben agrees with Heidegger’s criticism of Western metaphysical traditions. He believes that there is no hierarchical difference between animals and humans as they are fundamentally different. However, he also highlighted the limitations of Heidegger’s thought itself. He explored the difference between humans from a positive perspective. The foundation of human beings. In "The Open: Man and Animal", Agamben has traced the entire thought from ancient Greeks and Messianic thinkers, through the origins of modern scientific taxonomy and anthropology in the 18th century, to the dusk of humanism in the 20th century. He concluded that man's special status was produced and consolidated by the "anthropological mechanism" in Western thought. In ancient and modern versions, the anthropological mechanism allows the whole mechanism to function through the creation of an absolute difference between humans and animals. On the one hand, humans are superior to animals and the environment; on the other hand, compared with Heidegger's opening of human traits to a world, animal nature is fundamentally excluded.

The issue of the relationship between "human and animal" has long been an important debate in Western philosophy. Agamben described the water monster nymph through European mythology. The main issue he delved into was how to create "inhuman" within humans? In Greek mythology, a nymph goddess is in charge of the water element. It is very similar to the "mountain ghosts" described in "Sansin" in "The Songs of Chu". Sometimes it is regarded as a fairy, sometimes as a. It is depicted in the paintings of Frederick Leighton's "Arenaia, the Nymph of the Dargle", they are usually beautiful girls, good at singing and dancing, quiet and charming, often haunting mountains, forests, seas, fields and springs. In the water, they are immune from aging and disease, but they will eventually die. Agamben has also talked about this "nymph" elf who has dreamed of Warburg many times. He wrote in the book "Nymphs", "What defines those spirits, and the nymph in particular, is that, even if they resemble humans in every respect, they were not fathered by Adam; they belong to a second branch of creation: ‘they are more like men than like beasts, but are neither’. Nymphs are between humans and animals. And so they are man and people , die with the beasts, walk with the spirits, eat and drink with man. That is :like the beasts they die, so that nothing is left.[...] Their
flesh rots like other flesh. [...] Their customs and behavior are human, as it is their way of talking, with all virtues, better or coarser, more subtle and rougher. [...] In food they are like men, eat and enjoy the product of their labor, spin and weave their own clothing. They know how to make use of things, have wisdom to govern, justice to preserve and protect. For although they are beasts, they have all reason of man, except the soul. Therefore, they have not the judgment to serve God, to walk on his path, for they have not the soul. In fact, this kind of spirit as a hybrid of animality and humanity only exists in the narrative of mythology. The myth and legend of the nymph can be regarded as a metaphor for people.

In the modern context, the significance of Agamben's reshaping the nymph myth is to point out the possibility of the fusion of humanity and animality and expand it into a metaphor of "image". Mythology is to allow nymphs to make peace with humans to gain meaning, while art needs to seek its own symbols, language and expressions, which should all be amalgamated with humans.

The problem of defining the boundary (distinction and similarity) between animals and humans. This factor is used to determine the paradoxical existence of animals. The animal is open and unopened at the same time—or better, it is neither: it is open in a state of non-revelation. Agamben intervened in the concept of "the open", or what he called "gap", that is, seeking a time-space or interval to distinguish between humans and animals. "The Open" is one of the concepts that inherit and develop Heidegger's existence and world. Heidegger anticipated a certain animal and its environment: "We are occupied by objects, even if we are not completely lost in them, we are often immersed in them." Agamben believes that the human mechanism exists in both humans and animals. In terms of the human meaning produced by the choice between, we are still living in this era that is still marred by the predicament, and the fundamental gaze of man's true thoughts can form "the open", so that all beings can be liberated. The relationship between humans and animals, the world and the environment mark the boundary of an important field. The way people treat animals is the pre-set and reference, openness and closure between people, and is a prerequisite for human beings. Compared with Heidegger's the open of human characteristics to the world, Agamben believes that animality cannot be fundamentally excluded.
2. Animals in art

In the Ambrosian Library in Milan, Italy, a Hebrew copy of the Bible from the 13th century contains some very precious and rare illustrations. It depicts the four apocalyptic animals that the prophet saw in the vision recorded in the book of Ezekiel: rooster, eagle, bull and lion. In 29:4 of the Book of Baruch: "Behemoth will appear on the earth, and Leviathan will emerge in the sea: the two monsters created on the fifth day of creation will be left behind. Let the rest of the righteous then use it." [11] It can be seen from the image that the faces of righteous people painted by the painter are not human faces, but the heads of animals.

![Figure 01: A Hebrew copy of the Bible, come from Ambrosian Library in Milan, Italy](image)

These righteous people (four apocalyptic animals) with laurels on their heads, on the occasion of the arrival of the Messiah, devoted all their lives to the righteous people abiding by the Torah scriptures, eating the flesh and blood of the big fish Leviathan and the bull Behemoth at the banquet, without concern about whether the slaughter of these giant beasts is in line with the classics. In the Manichaeism’s text, each character corresponds to a part of the animal kingdom (bipedes, quadrupeds, birds, fish, reptiles), and also corresponds to the "five attributes" of the human body (bone, nerves, blood vessels, flesh, skin), the animal depiction of the characters directly is directly linked to the obscure relationship between the macroscopic whole of animals and the microscopic parts of humans. Also, in a paragraph of the Talmud, it is mentioned that Leviathan became the food at the Messianic banquet of the righteous. This paragraph appeared after a series of Haggadah content, which pointed to the arrangement of different relationships between animals and people. [12] What Agamben said. The manuscript here, the artist used the Messianic Feast of the righteous people on the Last Day, shows that the relationship between animals and humans will take a new form, and humans will also be in harmony with their animal nature in the extreme conditions of apocalypse. This is the reason why questions like "why use the head of the beast as the representative of humanity at the end of history?" often appears in Agamben's works. It is clear to the eye that he implicitly suggests that there will be a kind of "humanity" in his philosophy: a new image combined with "animality."
After the end of the story, man became an animal. He lived in abundance and complete security. He was satisfied through art, sex, and games (Kojeve's "Introduction to Hegel's Lectures"). In the post-historical stage, the three ways of combining human nature and animal nature, namely sex, games, and art, are no longer the things defining human nature. Art is a pathway between human and animal nature.

To borrow from Nietzsche's preface to his book "The Birth of Tragedy", "Art is the highest mission of mankind and a true metaphysical activity."[13] From the perspective of overcoming nihilism and redeeming chaos, after reflection, Agamben fully agreed with Nietzsche to name the fundamental feature of the will to power art. And the essence of humanity and the essence of universal generation overlap each other in it. Those who bear the "heaviest burden" of nature's salvation are those of art, and the artist has become the closest to the ideal state defined by Agamben. When the artist creates the themes related to humans and animals, it can be perceived as a metaphor for the gap and a mediator or bridge between the two worlds, which can eventually allocate humans and animals from their respective fields. Therefore, the potential of the artist can be described as a form of "overanimal" or "overman", which is a hypothetical creativity that wanders and creates on the edge of humans and animals. As the will to power, art implies the salvation of human beings. Therefore, the concept of distinction between humans and animals will also be challenged and will subsequently collapse.

Rembrandt's "Slaughtered Ox" apparently confirms the aforementioned stance. Art historian Susan Koslow used anatomical comparisons based on the 16th-century anatomy literature and proposed that the manifestation of animal bodies contains hidden arousal to the human body. Through the description of animal death, people have anxiety about their own death and eternal soul, as the physical similarity between humans and animals becomes more conspicuous once they are placed side by side on the dissection table.[14]

In "Slaughtered Ox" (1655), the sensory stimulation of this animal's body to humans can be seen. Although the artist's treatment of animal subjects is reminiscent of surgical operations, the use of painting media to describe animal bodies also has an
effective appeal, which seems to be calling out certain spiritual attributes of animal bodies. Rembrandt placed a large bloody dismembered bull in the center of the canvas. Its stomach was cut open and its internal organs were hollowed out, exposing ribs, joints, fat, and connective tissue. The most noticeable thing in the picture is the color of the beef which was soft brown. Because it has not been removed, it is still very fresh. When its meat is exposed to light and air, it will gradually oxidize, turning it from deep purple to bright reddish-brown. Rembrandt's description of the depletion of cattle meat symbolizes the gradual loss of vitality. The construction method on the canvas is reminiscent of the complex layered structure and supernatural property of living organisms. Light hits the skinned animal, and flesh and blood are displayed vividly. The use of this light emits a feeling of martyrdom, filling the cold and ruthless animal cells with solemnity. Straightforward, cruel and crude, leaving your eyes no choice. The wooden boards in the background and the color of the clothes of a woman with her head out are identical as those of the slaughtered animal: soft brown. Rembrandt accurately depicts the feelings of the viewer when he is hit by an unexpected image. What he draws is not the object itself, but the effect it produces.

Light and shadow act as metaphors of life and death, expressed in a novel form. Accompanied by the bull as a sign of death, the living human subject fades into the shadows. For these reasons, the treatment of animal perception in Rembrandt's works can also be interpreted as an anti-Descartes statement, that is, the uncertainty of the subject's position of human beings based on animals and their underlying souls.

As opposed to the predecessors, in the view of post-humanism, “we have never been humans”, that is to say, the human subject is always decentralized and generated together with external technology, animals and nature. We should actively accept this reality, but the expression of art is enough to see the predicament of animalization of human life, that is, human beings become animalized. Agamben does not belong to the typical post-humanist "animal research" field, because he primarily starts from the human life state to investigate the current widespread common life state. However, on the other hand, Agamben worriedly told us that humans have always been in danger of becoming animals which seems to be a more realistic and dangerous situation.

"If animals did not exist, then the nature of man would be even more incomprehensible." This is Agamben quoted George-Louis Buffon on the title page of "The Open: Man and Animal." Animals have always been an academic subject of significant interest to artists and philosophers. Whether they treat animals as human beings or aliens, the existence of animals is one way to define human beings' existence. Relying on animals to know and define oneself, and human nature depends on animal nature for accurate comparison.
When Agamben talked about La Durantaye's "This desperate situation gives me hope", he emphasized more than once, "I am an animal, even if I belong to a species that lives in unnatural conditions, and it seems to me at times that animals regard me with compassion. I am touched by this, and feel something akin to shame every time an animal look at me." [15] Humans and animals are physically separated from each other. Still, the images, fantasy, pictures, and symbolic use of animals are always presented in various forms in our vast subconscious mind: in galleries, museums, children’s books, in fashion symbols and the action propaganda of animal protectionism. In contemporary art, such as Damien Hirst, Beth Cavener Stichter, Angela Singer, etc., They use the animal as a carrier to convey the self-evident metaphysical destiny of mankind.

The most classic series of works by the famous contemporary artist Damien Hirst is to directly bring the carcasses of animals into the exhibition hall, for the audience to perceive the truth of life horror — death. His animal world is not a cartoon paradise. It directly uses animal life forms to create works around "what does death mean to living life".

As inferred from the picture, some of his works cut the shark from the middle, and the audience walks through the huge shark carcass. The shock of real-life and death substantially affects the audience; the huge glass box serves as a living body. The container, the inner shark reminds the viewer of the protective effect of glass, but its own fragility and potential danger are laid bare before the viewers and affect their nervous system. The artist uses animal corpses to map the cyclical process of all life and the fear in the depths of human nature and the resistance in the depths of the heart. Behind this dichotomy between animals and humans is the inter linkage between humans and animals. Animals have been hailed as an internal logic for modern Eastern and Western subjects to construct themselves as opposites.
As Plato stated, the impact of art on the soul has been substantial enough to shake the foundation of the city-state. "There is no image of death in art that has no meaning, regardless of whether this meaning is conveyed in a metaphorical concealed way or in a direct lyrical way." In the relationship between animals and humans, art is never interrupted. The form enters the obscure "subject" order, but it can still be seen that the "living body" is used as the research object. The subject and the object are intertwined in the "animal writing" to create complex faces, such as Agamben in "The Open: Man and Animals", it is believed that man has always been regarded as a mysterious combination of a natural, vital body and supernatural, social or sacred factors. However, the fate of human life in modern times is increasing; the more animalized, the more impoverished.

Therefore, the attempt to introduce other forms of life into visual art can be perceived as a form of understanding human beings and potentially changing the way humans view the world and themselves as a whole.

3. Conclusion

Agamben’s thesis of human animalization is a fundamental problem. It reveals the illusion of anthropocentrism. Mysterious and unknown animal instincts inhabit human beings, however Agamben is limited to politics. The non-historical thinking of philosophy cannot truly stop the "anthropological machine" and reach a consensus between humanity and animality. However, the potential expression of this reconciliation seems to linger in artistic expression. Agamben quoted Jean Paulhan’s ambiguity regarding the nature of artistic creation in "Les fleurs de Tarbes". He believed that artwork is not a mere collation of colors on a canvas. It always contains something other than its own material existence. Art is the most naive and innocent work, but it lays terror bare to its viewers. [16] This expresses the temporary unformed and undefined distinction between humans and animals, that is, the metaphysical concept proposed by Agamben that is still pending.

From this perspective, animal art is inevitably related to humans. Therefore, any attention to the distinction between humans and animals must not be regarded as a completely objective exploration. In all animal-related artistic creations, whether indirectly or indirectly, its goal is to promote the repositioning of mankind in the ecological community.
REFERENCES


[4] Ibid.


[8] Ibid.


