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**Telefoam: species on the shores of Cixous and Derrida**

‘[…] are there more telephones or animals in the life and works of Hélène Cixous?

Answer: animals are telephones and sometimes the other way around, and they multiply, in the prolifauny of all their animal, human and divine metamorphoses.’

(Derrida, 2006: 102)

A glance at the catalogues of major British publishing houses reveals the task of translators trying to keep pace with Hélène Cixous’s prodigious output, even as numerous works that pre-date her introduction to the Anglophone world - through the gambit of such well known collections as Marks and De Courtivron’s *New French Feminisms,* are yet to appear in English. This hospitality, however, remains uneven in terms of how these feats of translation are understood. Something similar could perhaps be said of other intellectuals who also came to attention through the 1980’s Anglo-American quest for philosophical rather than sociological investigation into the ‘feminine’, such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, at least in terms of the sheer volume of their work and its relative dissemination in Anglophone and Francophone cultures. Early engagements often measured the so-called ‘French Feminists’ against established male figures, such as Jacques Lacan in particular, regarding how they rethought the erasure of the feminine in psychoanalysis and philosophy (Lacan is Moi’s central comparator). Yet attention across the humanities over the last decade to the question of the animal allows Cixous’s writing to emerge in another light and one that will centrally inform this essay. That said, there is perhaps a certain kind of repetition in the Anglophone reception of Cixous that symptomatizes the difficulty in reading work that defies genre: such was the anxiety over any form of essential feminine together with the second wave feminist insistence on culture over nature that Cixous’s ‘*écriture féminine’* was as troubling as it was exciting – even for readers committed to dispensing with a necessary equivalence between realism and feminist literature (Moi, 1987); with the question of the animal comes a new critical resistance to the betrayals of allegory for fear of again erasing animals in the interests of human concerns (the familiar ruse of the fable). Yet, listening to Cixous today, we can start to break away from the linguisticism of post-structuralism and reconceive of a poetics and a politics that no longer cleaves to the human alone.

**Telephoney**

Claire Colebrook’s otherwise positive review of a collection of work on feminism and French philosophy, singled out Cixous’s chapter for hostile, even scornful remarks in a way that indexes the erratic reception of her work (Colebrook, 2005). First attacking her style by implication, holding her chapter or “essay” at a distance with the pincers of scare-quotes, Colebrook then suggests that, at best, such a work could only be a parody of how misogyny might defame feminist endeavors. The work in question was ‘From My Menagerie to Philosophy’ (first published in French in 1996, in Cixous’s book *Messie*). Only one quotation from Cixous evidences what could draw such condemnation and it connects animals, telephones and the maternal: ‘The need to telephone has always existed because its vital to recall the mother. All mammals bear the trace of the first telephone cord’ (Cixous qtd in Colebrook, 2005: 220). Readers such as Colebrook usually bring a patient conceptual sophistication to thought – and one well-versed in both continental philosophy and literature (see Colebrook, 2005b), yet Cixous exasperates her and reading stalls. Cixous’s books cannot exactly be called ‘novels’ yet neither do they present philosophical exegesis in any traditional sense. Cixous explicitly rejects the story-telling pull of genre exerted by designations such as ‘the novel’ or ‘short story’, preferring to develop what she names a more ‘theatrical’ ‘recollection’ of ‘scenes’ (Cixous, 2011). Voices are channeled, voices are interrupted: we are not sure who is affirming what, whether there is a ‘first person’ or, if there is, to what extent this figure coincides with or exceeds the one who signs herself “Hélène Cixous”. That said, extracts –“chapters” – from her books often appear in academic journals and in works of critical writing such as Dorothea Olkowski’s *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy* (a book designed to further the influx of ‘French philosophy’ to American academia, under review by Colebrook). The present essay assumes that the title of the latter book gives an intimation of Cixous’s approach to writing, that is to say, it is more enactment than exegesis, more performative than argumentative. As Cixous herself writes ‘I do not command. I do not concept’ (Cixous, 1997: 144). As such this essay seeks to both contribute to a greater understanding of her work without solely and perhaps awkwardly relying on unpacking French into English and explaining her allusions, but also through complementing Cixousian poetics: ‘Telefoam’ emphasizes the sound of the text as its words might lap against your ears. Thus, this ‘telefoam line’ does not simply dial, or even skype, Cixous to connect with her thought more immediately. Rather it ushers a sibilant text that conjures the scene of the shore as sound waves double those of the sea, as nature and culture overlap.

Bringing animals and the technology of the telephone together might put one in mind of the animal-machines of Descartes, doomed to repetition, to mere reaction, categorically cut off from the capacity to respond and thus the supposed domain of the human (Descartes, 47-48). Throw in the maternal and women too are aligned with what is precisely unhistorical. This may be the familiar conclusion that Colebrook rightly finds offensive. Indeed, Elissa Marder has precisely elaborated the pernicious fantasies of the maternal haunting the telephone in light of Avital Ronell’s diagnosis (Marder, 2012). For Marder and Ronell, it is the dominant configuration of technology that works to constrain the feminine, which consequently only surfaces symptomatically. However the wager of ‘Telefoam’ is that there is the chance of something quite different being sounded in Cixous’s writing, something shared with Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of the Cartesian prescription of response *or* reaction (explicitly set out in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 2008, in ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, 2002, as well as his work more broadly). Rather than maintain human exceptionalism – and not least construed as that power which harnesses and instrumentalises technology, both Cixous and Derrida insist on an ongoing complexity vis-à-vis what counts as the living that necessarily interweaves the repetition of the mechanical - say the telephone – with what we call response and with what might be power. Not merely departing from placing the human at the center of things, in breaching such classical distinctions as response and reaction, living spontaneity and machinic repetition, Cixous and Derrida open the thought of a posthumanist ethics. In so doing they accentuate the wounds to human narcissism outlined by Freud: Earth is not the centre of the universe; we are not unique among species but related to other animals; we are not even masters of ourselves but are unseated by unconscious desire. Moreover they share the ‘cyborgian wound’ underlined by Donna Haraway, that is the non-separation of organic and synthetic (Haraway, 2008: 11-12). Framed as wounds by Freud – and ironically so by Haraway, as this essay unfolds, Cixous in particular is shown to find these conditions enabling.

In the two sentence quotation from Cixous evidenced by Colebrook we learn that there has always been a need to telephone and that this is connected to recalling the mother. Let us take this to vouch for an originary technicity *and* that the mother is not buried in the ground of nature but able to be recalled. These two cords, the now outmoded telephone and the umbilicus, are both beholden not to the fantasy of pure communication or communion, but to the possibilities of disconnection, of unexpected connection, the work of traces not signifiers. The use of the term ‘telephone’ in Cixous – dramatically unconfined to this one essay as the epigraph from Derrida playfully indicates – should not be taken as a naïve anachronism, in denial of the ubiquitous advance of mobile technology. Rather she insists on the materiality of the sound of the voice – the heartland of what metaphysics takes to be synonymous with presence. She marks the ‘*tele’* and remarks the ‘*phonē’*. The ostensible clarity of the voice is thickened by my play on the telefoam. It’s poetic license conjures ‘telephants’ and ‘telefauns’ in no matter how impossible, how unheard-of a bestiary (see Derrida, 2006: 102). Even if there is a kind of transmissibility between animal and telephonic figures as Derrida suggests, this bestiary cannot be confined to the Cartesian cage of the animal-machine. Along with these phonemic (‘faunemic’) poetics, Cixous also dramatically addresses Telephone as a kind of character since it has such frequency and such force in her ‘life writing’. Moreover, in some of the classification-defying texts that pass between Cixous and Derrida on their work, their own conversations by telephone come to light as generative sources of thinking (Cixous, 2007, Derrida, 2002b). All with an ear for sonorous suggestion, these three contexts are far from separate. As Eric Prenowitz – one of Cixous’s frequent translators - observes, her address ‘*O téléphone’* brings in the double sense afforded by its ‘near homonym’ ‘*parler au* *télephone’,* that is, both speaking on and speaking to the telephone (Prenowitz, 2008: 130).

Derrida has long-pressured the discrete tongue of the discipline of philosophy with its necessary infiltration by literature, as well as challenging the limits of the French language in which he is both at home and not at home (see Derrida, 1998). This has often produced texts that are difficult for translators to swallow since they challenge the purported universality of the concept and cultivate idiosyncrasy. In distinction to the idealist faith in the concept as simply being transported by language and passed along in the act of translation, Derrida insists on the materiality and the eccentricity of expression as inseparable from the production of what we call philosophy. Sharing his ‘Algeriance’ that is their common childhood as Jews in what was then French Algeria (Cixous, 1997b), but not becoming intellectual companions until both were living in Paris, Cixous names herself as ‘stand[ing] at the edge of North Africa. On its beach’ (Cixous, 1997c: 182). She takes in the views both inland and seaward as her genealogical memories fan out across Africa and into Europe. Improperly ‘European’, Cixous remarks on how her ‘unclean’ name remains ‘unpronounceable and unspellable’ in the French language, while only ‘rumor’ suggests that perhaps it is Arabic or Berber (Cixous, 1997b: 158). That said, she finds hospitality in this language – a ‘French passporosity’ – if not always in the French State, given the abandonment of the Jews in Vichy Algeria (155). ‘Arriving’ in French if not in France exactly, Cixous casts herself according to the present participle, desiring ‘arriv*ance*, movement, unfinishing in [her] life’ (170, italics original). This ‘passporosity’ indexes her emphasis on sounding the poetics of language as that which also shapes its theoretical ambitions. Cixous too exerts her translators.

Paying attention to the poetic articulation of her thought, this essay will further emphasise the ways in which Cixous doubles and even anticipates that now readily associated with Derrida, especially on the question of the animal, focusing on the distance-proximity of the telephone and the non-species specific nature of communication. Previously I have tracked the extreme proximity of their thought naming a ‘Cixousian feline uncanny stalk[ing]’ the better-known *Animal* of Derrida, through following Cixous’s text translated as ‘The Cat’s Arrival’ (Turner, 2010). First published in *Messie* in 1996, this cat predates the lecture delivery of Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am* at the colloquium on *L’Animal Autobiographique* at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1997. Yet current scholarship – including Cixous and Derrida’s writings *on* each other’s work – increasingly attends to the ways in which their thoughts have long interwoven (Turner, 2013; Cixous, 2007; Derrida, 2006). I set this essay on the telefoam, so to speak, for the sheer difficulty in telling for sure which side (*côte*) is which. If the assonance of talking on the telefoam signals waves washing against the shore (*la rive*), it thus opens onto Derrida’s ethics of infinite hospitality to the one who arrives (*l’arrivant*) without ever fully arriving in the present (see Derrida, 1993). With Cixous and Derrida I affirm a posthumanist ethics in which not only is the one who is welcomed not known in advance, but this other cannot be predicted to be human.

**Whomeland**

So, there must be a beach, a sea, a sky with all the paradoxes of the—impossible—limit, *nondemarcation* said Proust, this *topology of the incalculable* you say, so that a what can arrive. […] In a few pages the doggod Proteus will have sent reeling the question, What is a What? as well as the question, What is a dog?’ (Cixous, 2007: 392)

This ‘whomeland’ surfaces in Cixous’s dramatic discussion of Derrida’s protean prose (Cixous, 2007: 393). It is difficult to pronounce, immediately throwing a questioning ‘whom’ into the ostensibly self-evident home. Who me? This land becomes unhomely, how did we ever think it otherwise. In turning to the ‘whomeland’, Cixous is invoking the interview with Derrida called ‘Eating Well’, conducted by Jean Luc Nancy (Derrida, 1995), as well as echoing her own advocacy of the ‘uncountry’ as an undoing of borders (Cixous, 1993).

‘Eating Well’ first took place for a special issue of the journal *Topoi* (1988) under the thematic heading ‘Who Comes After the Subject?’. The governing frame of the title holds Derrida’s attention. While the topic of the subject is nominally in question, he finds it reinstalled in the maintenance of the ‘who’ and thus he refuses ‘to see the ‘who’ restricted to the grammar of what we call Western language, nor even limited by what we believe to be the very humanity of language’ (Derrida, 1995: 277). This matter of a ‘who’ or a ‘what’ is consequential indeed: managing what we eat as precisely a ‘what’ and not a ‘who’ is leashed to the symbolic effort to preserve humans from cannibalism. It is strongly implicated in what Derrida diagnoses as our failure to ‘sacrifice sacrifice’ (Derrida, 1995: 279). It goes to the heart of an ethics that implicitly addresses the human alone (thus claiming a consistency to what is called the human). Taking Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics that begin with the command ‘Thou shalt not kill’ as exemplary of the problem, Derrida does not ‘simply’ replace it with an unwieldy wider command such that ‘Thou shalt not kill the living in general’ but rather affirms that ‘One must eat well’ (Ibid.). The posthumanist ethics of eating well moves away from the human-centred logic that forbids murder while simultaneously condoning the loophole of a ‘non-criminal putting to death’ for those who fall out of the category of the ‘who’ and land in the sacrificial terrain of the ‘what’ (Derrida, 1995: 278). Yet this ethics also complicates our symbolic ingestion of others since it is enmeshed in the practice of eating as a ‘metonymy for introjection’ (282). Thus, a variation upon the uncanny haunts what it is to eat.

The most radical elements of ‘Eating Well’ - foreshadowed in Derrida’s earlier text ‘Fors’ in which the psychoanalytic writings of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok are explicitly engaged and implicitly critiqued - are perhaps in need of emphasis (see Derrida, 1986; Turner, 2014). When Derrida writes that *‘everything* that happens at the edge of the orifices (of orality, but also of the ear, the eye-and all the ‘senses’ in general) the metonymy of ‘eating well’ [*bien manger*] would always be the rule’ he is not only radically opening out the Levinasian ethics of the face (Derrida, 1995: 282). He is also challenging the psychoanalytic emphasis on the mouth as that which predicts the human by virtue of speech as the supposedly unique signature of communication from which non-human others remain barred, *and* troubling our effort to maintain a clean divide between actual and symbolic anthropophagy. If ‘one must eat’ not just to physiologically ingest nutrition but in order to psychically form a self but that this eating as metonymy of introjection is no longer singularly attached to the mouth, then other kinds of identification in excess of how we are habituated to think of human egos may ensue. Thus these peculiar edges metonymising introjection return us to unsure shores.

Inhabitants of the conceptual terrain onto which Derrida unleashed *The Animal That Therefore I Am* may have misheard his insistence on taking species other than humans seriously by construing it to be another form of identity politics that would extend theories of difference to include other animals. But rather than ‘simply’ break up the violent false singular of ‘the animal’ into a myriad of particular differences, each animal with their own distinct outline, or blend humans and animals into the same category entitled to the same rights, Derrida does something quite different in dialogue with the rest of his work. He invokes the limit, say the limit of the human, but really *any* limit, as that which suffers from limitrophy. Limits cannot remain constant, cannot rein in a property. He writes:

Let’s allow [limitrophy] to have both a general and a strict sense: what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit. […] Everything I’ll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding and dividing the line…’ (Derrida, 2008: 29)

Thickened and multiplied, the animal thus becomes an *animot*, obliging the sound of a plural (*animaux*) and written attention to the word (*mot*). Naming the limit as that which ‘grows’ together with refusing a ‘frontal’ or oppositional attack on the ‘philosophical or common sense’ shoring up our sense of self as human and uniquely so is foreshadowed in Derrida’s early writings (Ibid.). There, the shore and the limit are already entangled with the problem of the margins, the place from which and to which Derrida writes in *Margins of Philosophy* (Derrida, 1982, first published in French in 1972). There, he was already ‘eating the margins’, already addressing an inevitable ‘*limitrophic* violence’ and also alerting us to the telephonic stakes of offsetting the phallogocentric subject of reason (Derrida, 1982: xxv, italics original).

‘Tympan’, the opening chapter of *Margins,* dilates upon otographies that interlink technical and biological figures (the tympanums of both the printing press and the human ear). In retrospective light of the opening of the body - the edges of all the orifices - in ‘Eating Well,’ I have argued elsewhere that Derrida here advocates a kind of ‘hearing well’ and even that this arises through a telephone conversation with Cixous (Turner, 2013). The oblique stretch of the eardrum maximises vibrations. In vibrating, it effectively ‘grafts itself’ thereby ‘resist[ing] the concepts of machine or of nature, of break or of body, resist[ing] the metaphysics of castration’ (Derrida, 1982: xxviii). Reading the site of what was the head of the human subject of reason as thus inevitably open to the other without being able to determine that other in advance (without being able to maintain the margins), leads Derrida to the seashore. ‘Tympan’ inserts a long and otherwise unreferenced citation from Michel Leiris’s book *Scratches* (*Biffures*) into the typographically atypical slender right hand column tracking the whole length of Derrida’s ‘own’ tympanic text (the left hand column). The particular extract lets loose a series of spiraled forms from the intestines to snail shells to ‘the concha of the ear’ (Derrida, 1982: xii). Later in the chapter, on the left hand side this time, the concha comes back. Repeating the gesture of defying ‘the concepts of break or of body’ the spiral of the other tympanum invoked by Derrida is both ‘closed in on itself *and* open to the sea’s path’ (Derrida, 1982: xviii, n.9, my emphasis). Unlike a more familiar psychoanalytic subscription to the trouble of the ear as that organ which can never shut and is destined thus always to be cast as a hole with all the attendant anxieties that castration organizes (see Marder, 113), Derrida recasts this limit by playing upon the oblique, vibrating tympanum as open *and* closed, as a telefoam call. Unlike the dialectical tradition that would negate the other without remainder – but as the editors of this volume affirm – Derrida and Cixous’s posthumanist ethics maintain a deconstruction of relations between others, including technical and non-human others.

**Telephantasm**

Now I write. Which is to say that in my black interior softness the rapid footsteps of an arriving book print themselves.

(Cixous, 1997: 141)

It is not there in *Messie*, but as an epigraph to the translated text ‘From My Menagerie to Philosophy’ Cixous quotes Derrida from his text ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’, perhaps to give the readers of this collection a clue. The latter is the text in which poetry curls itself into a ball, hiding without being able to see the oncoming vehicle that might run it over: poetry in the form of a hedgehog (Derrida, 1995b). Cixous then opens her text with the remark that ‘[a]nimals are becoming more and more important in [her] books’ and immediately installs the ass accompanying Abraham on Mount Moriah as a communicative presence rather than ‘simply’ a dumb beast of burden (Cixous, 2000: 40). She conjures their conversation as one that takes place on the telephone (with a touch of Francophonic distance, this remains in French in the English translation) and plays on a homonym between proper and colloquial nouns common to English and French. This ass (*âne*) that is a donkey is shadowed by the colloquial English ass that is an idiot, in anticipation of what David Wills – the translator of *The Animal that Therefore I Am* - makes of Derrida’s use of ‘*bêtise’* rendered in English as an ‘asinanity’ (Derrida, 2008: 18).

Subsequently, there is a ludicrous scene, not dissimilar to an anxiety nightmare, of a meeting between university colleagues in which our narrator - animated through numerous animal figures – defends poetry as the only thing that really counts only to find herself requested to lecture on this very subject and thus, it is implied, anchor the term in some conceptual precision (Cixous, 2000: 46-47). It is here, in response to the question inescapably evocative of Derrida - what is poetry? - that Cixous connects the telephone and her cat, in resistance to the precision and the ideality of the concept. It is the way that they ‘resolved the question of the telephone’ (Ibid.). It is an elementary communication between two living entities. The mother is named, but she ‘may also be a son a husband a lover’ and in this case a cat (Ibid. 48). Addressing their differences in communicability, Cixous has the cat using her body, grazing against her legs as a telephone, to call in for reassurance (while implying distance within this ostensible proximity), while Cixous whistles her call in turn.

This brief communiqué between species resonates with Cixous’s related text, ‘Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey’ (1997, first published in French in 1996). In ‘Writing Blind’, traditional figures of illumination such as ‘broad daylight’, inhibit Cixous’s practice (1997: 139). She abandons the ostensible clarity of the eyes for the sake of ‘becom[ing] a thing with pricked up ears’ (Ibid. 139). With passion she seeks out a night, or the personified proper noun Night, and writing behind her eyelids where her own ‘*animots’* pass by (Ibid. 139-140). This night does not annihilate, it facilitates. In this night the touching communication of Cixous’s cat – ‘the cat whose cat I am’, that is to say the cat whose cat she is *following* – resumes, only to incrementally evoke a donkey, and one that is connected to the ‘telephone exchange’ (Ibid. 142). Subsequently she again invokes the donkey with Abraham and the conversation they, surely, must have had (again without mentioning Abraham’s son, Isaac, or the event of sacrifice commanded by God - the major cast and the major event usually in theological or ethical focus, though this is the event to which they proceed). Again her prose anticipates elements of Derrida’s thought. On the one hand, Cixous has it that one only says ‘foolish things [*bêtises]*’ to other human beings, implicitly acknowledging that this trope of animal stupidity has nothing to do with animals (English idioms that name human behavior as idiotic through recourse to animal figures include ‘to make a pig’s ear’ of something, or the speciesist and sexist insult ‘stupid cow’). On the other hand she implies that these foolish things are lies, and that with animals one would rather ‘ride straight to the essentials’ (Cixous, 1997: 143). Perhaps it starts to sound as if this repeats the tenacious opposition that Derrida traces from Descartes to Lacan, namely that the capacity to lie is another proper ability of the human (Derrida, 2008: 131). ‘Writing Blind’ even involves a compact play on ‘duncity’ easily evoking the ‘*dansité’* that Derrida homes in on when pointing to the two loopholes in Lacan’s plot that allow animals to pretend - but not ‘pretend to pretend’ as humans are supposed to do through the signature of the signifier – namely, seduction and combat (Derrida, 2008: 127-129). ‘*Dansité’* straddles English and French, ‘dancity’, density, and the colloquially English word dense, meaning like a dunce.

Yet the alternative passage to chatting with humans, or making a *bêtise,* is the donkey riding ‘right away’ [Ibid.] Write away: this is the movement to which Cixous submits. She may say she writes ‘on’ the donkey (like writing ‘on’ the telephone), yet this is under the aegis of ‘writing blind’ (143). This cannot be reduced to the habitual and trivial abuse of animal figures as human alibis. Her process and her book may seem inane, anarchic, or even criminal to the ‘policeforce reader’ that she anticipates, but Cixous ‘exercises the right to invention’ (150). In allowing such invention, she ‘search[es] for one land’ but ‘find[s] another’ (Ibid.). There is no prediction, no compass. Nicholas Royle even finds the force generated by the term ‘away’ to be a kind of signature of Cixous’s own deconstruction of presence, sufficiently pronounced to warrant titling his very essay on the topic ‘Away’ (Royle, 2007). Cixous’s only common ground is the art of the cut: ‘All living beings, mammal or vegetable, know that one must cut and trim to relaunch life. Nip the quick. Harm to help.’ (144). A few paragraphs later and the interplay of animals and the telephone is signaled.

Our telephone is our donkey stopped and placed on the table near my hand. […] it is our personal animal, the being called-telephone […] There is no more living more ordinary more divine more adorable-and-terrifying more familiar and less familiar than this instrument-that-allows-a-conversation between two distant people. (Cixous, 1997: 145).

**O telephone**

I was in the process of writing: But the telephone rings. And I wrote: and it’s you (I mean the telephone itself). It was then that the telephone rang, this one here, and it was you. It was you! And I burst into laughter. (I must say I was not waiting for you). And it was you and I say to you: o my love I was in the middle of writing: but the telephone rings. And you say to me: no way! – I swear! I say with fervor. And you say to me: but are you sure this happens outside, or is it in the text?

Here, I cannot continue. I do not know where outside happens or if the text is inside, inside outside or if the text is itself outside, or if outside is in the text. This is what happens when one writes what happens. (Cixous, 1997: 143)

In this epigraph, taken from ‘Writing Blind’, it is not simply a matter of speaking on the telephone but of the telephone itself speaking. Who speaks? This implicit but crucially organizing question should confirm point of view, anchor a subject – a human subject (indeed it is the question that Colebrook highlights, especially as point of view becomes dispersed into ‘talking assemblages’ by Gilles Deleuze [2005b: 226]). Here the question ‘who speaks?’ surprises the ostensible point of view of the narrator. There is no simple personification of technology. The telephone asks a ludic question as to where ‘this’ happens, adding extra pressure to the establishment of point of view. Which ‘this’ is in question? This conversation? This talking telephone that interrupts? Is ‘this’ anything at all? Riffing on the infamous refrain of ‘there is no outside-text’ (Derrida, 1976), Cixous identifies the ‘this’ as what happens when one writes. Writing is that which confounds sides, confounds the shore, confounds nature and culture or technicity in a posthumanist movement.

This moment in ‘Writing Blind’ bears resemblance to passages in ‘The Cat’s Arrival’ in which the cat speaks. Elementary critiques of representations of animals in literature might quickly zone in on such a familiar and easy ruse for subordinating animal figures to human interests. However Cixous is careful to remark on this remarkable speech (see also, Turner, 2010: 78). In the middle of the essay, the narrator elects to bathe Thea the cat, who has installed herself in the narrator’s heart and house despite protestations (Cixous, 2006: 32). Cleaning Thea, however is imagined as a denuding disaster in which her fur dissolves away completely necessitating that the narrator cover her with a towel. Amid the echo of shame as their bodies are made if not the same then similarly in need of the modesty of clothing, Thea reproaches the narrator for ‘passing the limit’ and names her transgression as the ‘exaggera[tion of] love’ (Ibid.) This speech thus reposes difference even in the guise of common communication. The first example is yet more striking since it is hot on the heels of the unfathomable titular event of the cat’s arrival. Unforeseen and unwelcomed, this essay begins with the narrator’s surprise that ‘the Event would be a cat’ (Ibid. 21). Attempting to refuse to accommodate a foundling cat for any second longer than necessary the narrator takes this cat - who will become Thea - to her cousins’ house and leaves her there. But the cat, with a newly torn ear, returns and not only returns but ‘came to thank the hostess for saving her from the hell into which she herself had thrown her’ (Ibid. 22). The alliteration and proximity between thanking and thinking in this section - Thea thanks the narrator, who wonders what way of thinking this might entail - demands to be read as deliberate (see Turner, 2010: 78). It presages the radical restaging of Martin Heidegger’s ‘What is called thinking’ in Derrida. Writing ‘[t]he animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there’, Derrida challenges us not to repeat the cant of a definitive distinction between the human and the animal (Derrida, 2008: 29). Thea thinks and thanks and these things redouble the surprise that she be there at all, challenging anthropocentrism not simply by refusing to project human qualities upon non-human species, but questioning whether we can properly identify the *anthropos* as such. Crossing all manner of thresholds before the narrator realizes that some form of guest might be approaching her, Thea’s sure-footed arrival signals all the elements of the ethics of an infinite hospitality common to Cixous and to Derrida.

The incredulous arrival of this cat is reiterated in ‘Writing Blind’ set a little more explicitly in the context of the ‘*always unexpected Messiah’* (Cixous, 1997: 150, italics original). There this cat is also bound up with the arrival of a book, likewise unexpected and unable to be booked into the present. There a chapter of a book is named as that which ‘could be called the imitation of the cat’ (151). In this comparison it is the chapter that imitates the cat not the other way around. It is even a ‘barely weaned’ cat that yet grows and instructs you (151). There this arriving book, like a cat, is an archiving entity that speaks to you.

**Autobiographical Animals**

Being able to suffer is no longer a power: it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. (Derrida, 2008: 28)

In 1997, during his address at the Cerisy-la-Salle colloquium on his work under the heading of *L’animal autobiographique*, Derrida tracks the way in which the philosophically embedded division between the one who calls himself ‘man’ and that which he calls ‘the animal’ is shored up by the conceit of ability. Habitually Cartesian ‘man’ locates himself as the one with the ability to speak, to lie, to respond, to mourn and all the rest, while the reactive animal has no such powers. Deconstructing this division, Derrida asks his audience whether they themselves can respond (Derrida, 2008: 8). It is a gesture that troubles the ‘autobiographical animal’ if one understands this to mean ‘the animal who has the *ability* to write their autobiography’ or animality supplemented by this ability. But it is a gesture familiar to readers of his work: writing of the death of Paul de Man, Derrida counter intuitively asked whether we have the *capacity* to mourn (Derrida, 1989: 31). How will we decide who or what to mourn, for how long, in what manner and how will we know when the work of mourning is complete? Capacity or ability as the proper of an intending subject is precisely what is put into question. In the case of animals Derrida rather writes of the ability to suffer as a ‘possibility without power’ in which ‘[m]ortality resides’. (Derrida, 2008: 28). Moreover this vulnerable finitude is a condition shared between humans and other animals.

In 1998 - the next year, speaking again at Cerisy but this time in honour of Cixous (*Hélène Cixous: Croisées d’une oeuvre*), Derrida shows the intimacy of his reading of her work. While the previous section, ‘O telephone,’ has proffered some of the ways in which Cixous unsettles the point of view of who or what it is that speaks, at this colloquium Derrida gives his most extended and nuanced reading of her work. Amongst and as much as bringing attention to the animals and the telephones, Derrida gives emphasis to a particular notion of ‘might [*puisse*]’ in Cixous, asserting that ‘[e]verywhere she *assays* a mighty power of the “might” [Derrida, 2006: 70, 107, italics original). This delicate emphasis has not gone unnoticed. Ginette Michaud, in reference to Peggy Kamuf’s writing on both Cixous and Derrida, links the ‘thought of ‘*puissance*” that Derrida invokes vis-à-vis Cixous with the force that he emphasizes in such well-known texts as ‘Force and Signification’ (Michaud, 2006: 91). Thus this is a force that breaks open context, breaks open signification, prevents it from ever remaining definitive: it is not a power given over to the hands of an individual to wield. Indeed Kamuf characterizes this power as a ‘powerless power’ in light of Cixous’s use of the subjunctive (Michaud, 92). Cixous herself uses the modification ‘*Toute-puissance-autre’*, translated as ‘other-omnipotence’ (see Michaud, 92). While Michaud does not understand this might in light of the ‘possibility without power’ in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the line of ‘Telefoam’ connects the two. Perhaps Derrida himself more explicitly troubles the present indicative: to what, to where, to when does ‘the animal that therefore I am’ refer, when *Je suis* (I am) can be equally heard as *Je suis* (I am following), as is constantly the case in that text? Yet his insistence on the transformation of ability when construed as the ability to suffer speaks to Cixous’s transformation of power into might in the subjunctive mood of that which is yet to occur. He even suggests that the English language assists the discernment of this transition given the homographic overlap of ‘might’ as possibility and ‘might’ as strength (Derrida, 2006: 45). If this *puissance* were to be graspable in the present it would vanish into the ether. This might is no possession; it can only be improper. The right, or the law of this might is ‘autoimmune’: it turns on itself (Derrida, 2006: 108). As such it goes hand in hand with the poisonous risk that is autobiography – always infecting and affecting the self with the other (Derrida, 2008: 47).

Calling for countersignature, talking on the telephone always appeals to the other. Constitutively ‘writing blind,’ the telephone, like a psychoanalytic session, eschews the face-to-face encounter. The transported senses touched on in this paper such as speaking of a donkey or a cat on or as a telephone, take communication out of the immediacy of the present. Moreover, these ‘*animalséances’* do not only recollect the past or address trauma in psychoanalytic fashion but also open future connections and thus furnish surprise (Derrida, 2008: 4). During a telephone conversation between Cixous and Nicholas Royle, staged for his postgraduate community at the University of Sussex, she asks after some unexpected sounds on the line. Royle says that it is a seagull. Laughing she replies ‘can you imagine that I get her call!’ (Cixous, 2011). However unlikely that Cixous be countersigned by a seagull, in this event she sides with the shores once more.

Siding with the shores, treading in each other’s footsteps, our traces always able to be erased, these are the shores that we share.

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