



Educating in Animality: The Face of the Other in Non-human Animals

Educare nell'animalità: Il volto dell'Altro nell'animale non umano

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DOUBLE BLIND PEER REVIEW

ABSTRACT

This contribution's perspective is biocentric, on the inalienable right of every animal (without the adjectives human/non-human) to be recognized as an individual. Moving from a synthetic research/state of art presentation on the animal – human relationship reshaping, the reflection articulates in three points: 1. the non-human animal host concept; 2. the non-human individuality concept; 3. the opportunity to educate about the porous boundaries between different animalities and interspecies hospitality: educating in animality is a duty, precisely because we have not lived in a world that has taught us to view it except in terms of human advantage. These advantages, moreover, are not neglected here: dialogue with the animal host is valued as a catalyst for dispositional transfer, both in the construction of individual personality and in the realization of social personality constructs.

La prospettiva di questo contributo è biocentrica e si fonda sul diritto inalienabile di ogni animale (senza l'aggettivazione umano/non umano) a essere riconosciuto come individuo. Muovendo da una sintesi della ricerca e dello stato dell'arte sulla ridefinizione della relazione animale–umano, la riflessione si articola in tre punti: 1) il concetto di ospite animale non umano; 2) il concetto di individualità non umana; 3) la possibilità di educare alle frontiere porose tra diverse animalità e all'ospitalità interspecifica. Educare all'animalità è un dovere, proprio perché siamo cresciuti in un mondo che ci ha insegnato a guardarla soltanto in funzione di vantaggi umani. Questi vantaggi, peraltro, non vengono qui negati: il dialogo con l'animale-ospite è valorizzato come catalizzatore di trasferimenti disposizionali, sia nella costruzione della personalità individuale, sia nella realizzazione di costrutti di personalità sociale.

KEYWORDS

Inter-animality, Interspecies hospitality, Cognitive mediation, Transfer, Bio-centered education
Inter-animaltà, Ospitalità interspecifica, Mediazione cognitiva, Trasferimento, Educazione biocentrata

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1. Introduction

Interspecies dialogue and non-human animals' access to the ethical and political community are among the most pressing issues of contemporary society. Animal Studies are not limited to the disciplines of politics or ethics (Animal Ethics), or ethology and biological sciences (Animal Cognition), or even philosophy (Animal Ontology): every discipline entwined with diversity is involved in the research field aiming to explore new ways of conceiving the relationship between humans and animals (Andreozzi et al., 2013). The reactivity level on this issue is high: enthusiasm, or, on the other hand, embarrassment resulting from the difficulty of reconsidering and reestablishing a humanity taken for granted and assigned once and for all. To leave the engagement with the non-human world, already endowed by the Stoics with a sensitive soul and the capacity for mental representation, constitutes a voluntary knowledge rebuff, even of the human animal.

2. The rationale for animality education

In the Animal Studies field, it was reiterated that no difference between human and non-human animals authorizes the construction of their relationship according to a logic of domination and prevalence of the exclusive and arrogant interests of a

"miserable et chetive creature [...], exposée aux offences de toutes choses [qui] s'égale à Dieu, qu'il s'attribue les conditions divines, qu'il se trie soy mesme et separe de la presse des autres creatures, taille les parts aux animaux ses confreres et compaignons, et leur distribue telle portion de facultez et de forces que bon luy semble " (Montaigne, 1965, p. 450–452).¹

The premise of Animal Studies has not yet changed representations shared for a long time by the human community, supported by the *"registre que la philosophie a tenu deux mille ans [...]: les dieux n'ont agi, n'ont parlé que pour l'homme; elle ne leur attribue autre consultation et autre vacation"* (Montaigne, 1965, p. 533). We can't deny that a shift in sensibility is brewing, thanks precisely to research in biology, cognitive ethology, paleoanthropology, zoosemiotics, and, not least, reflections of contemporary philosophers, particularly in France. A genuine earthquake, shaking a humanity compromised in its axes of reference, suspended between the search for identity and co-identity, individuality and con-dividuality, committed to find directions of meaning among new conceptual and practical orders in which it must still learn to navigate (Remotti, 2021, p. 70).

I believe appropriate to assess the three intercon-

nected and consequential directions guiding this sensibility shift, while aware of the likely repercussions of the principles now considered established by the scientific community.

First direction: the question of cognitive activities and animal consciousness; the second: the construction of cultural worlds to non-human animals; the third: the ontological pluralism that characterizes the vital reality in which species evolve together, interacting in a complex manner, among themselves and with their *environment-worlds*.

2.1 Cognitive activities of the non-human animal

For the cognitive presence or absence activity in animals, a growing awareness emerged as it is no longer acceptable to continue interpreting the heterogeneity of life according to paradigms analogous to humans. Solid scientific evidence found that numerous species (including many invertebrates) holds both the underlying neurobiological elements and the manifestations of complex intentional behaviors. "It is entirely appropriate to interpret these remarkable displays of learning, memory, planning, problem-solving, self-awareness, and other such capacities as evidence of consciousness in cases where the same behavior, if found in a human or other mammal, would be well explained by conscious processing" (Andrews, et al., 2024).

The debate mingled since its inception with the controversy over language, as Derrida (2006) reiterated with his coinage *ani-mot*, playing on the identical pronunciation of the French plural ending of the term "animal [*ani-maux*]" and "word [*mot*]".

While we still aren't sure what our human consciousness is, research on intelligence and consciousness of non-human animals (always connected to research on their capacity for communication/expression) agreed that possessing one's own forms of consciousness means being able to have subjective experiences.

Subjectivity has traditionally been associated with the exclusive presence of speech in the human animal: recognizing non-human subjectivity required a complex process of critical reflection on the source *logos* of anthropocentrism.

In this context, when we speak of anthropocentrism, we are not referring to the anthropocentrism for which Montaigne wrote: *"les yeux humains ne peuvent apercevoir les choses que par les formes de leur cognoissance"* (Montaigne, 1965, p. 535). We are referring instead to *anthropocentric prejudice*, structuring *species privilege* based on holding qualities arbitrarily identified by humans, or on their greater/lesser degree of possession.

From the perspective of anthropocentric prejudice, therefore, linguistic-verbal specificity constitutes the scientifically based pretext to justify human superiority: even when it is not disputed that the linguistic dimension belongs to all animals, the linguistic abilities of non-human animals are granted an exclusively practical, sensorial nature: we speak of a reduced language. Cognitive faculties are always inferior to the evolutionary pinnacle, which remains humans.

The first instance emphasizes, in fact, even when

¹ All excerpts from Montaigne are quoted from *The Montaigne Project* digital edition (University of Chicago), which aligns the Villey-Saulnier transcription of the *Essais* with the corresponding page images of the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*. Orthography and punctuation in the present article reproduce those of Villey-Saulnier.

areas of continuity are admitted, the linguistic reason that allows humans to detach themselves from bestiality, with which they share only affective language. It recognizes that animal language opens to reality, but not beyond its own instincts, while in humans it opens to freedom. Even when recognized as a fully-fledged sign, capable of relying on relationships of similarity or causality, expressive functions (intrasubjective/intersubjective) and appellative, animal language remains *opaque* compared to human propositional and designative one, which instead allows access to symbolic dimension and reality representation, the perception of one's own Self as corporeality (proprioception), and mirroring process, signification, self-awareness. The non-humans inability to participate in this dimension would preclude self-awareness.

Studies on gesture, in particular on gesture as the language origin in the ethological, biological and cognitive fields allowed contemporary philosophical thought to make inroads, in a more incisive way than the sporadic Western thinkers of the past, into the "*presomption [...] maladie naturelle et originelle*" (Montaigne, 1965, p. 452) of the human being. Forms of communicative intelligence in animals were legitimized: the movement of a large number of animals is *gesture*, that is, a *sign* produced by cognitive processes not purely associative, but structured in a unitary manner depending on space, situations, the animal's role in the group, the group's position in the context.

Many species display complex languages, which appear to support nonlinear processes of cognitive mediation in the interpretation process. *Variability* (the extension of a signal's meaning to situations that are not the signal's referents) and *deception* (the ability to dissociate a signal from its content) are known in some species; signals use conventional and arbitrary pairings of content and expression, which is a semiotic characteristic and demonstrates the cognitive ability to abstract concepts from reality, forming classes of meaning that serve one's needs.

Semiosis thus spans human and animal worlds, while maintaining human language uniqueness and richness: the analysis of the multiplicity and multiformity of the manifestations observed leads to the conclusion that each species displays intelligence and language that are adaptive to the context and selected for its best possible survival. To have consciousness, "it does not require sophisticated capacities such as human-like language or reason. Phenomenal consciousness is raw feeling—immediate felt experience, be it sensory or emotional—and this is something that may well be shared between humans and many other animals. Of course, human-like linguistic and rational capabilities may allow some humans to have forms of experience that other animals lack (e.g. a linguistic "inner monologue"). Likewise, many other animals may have forms of experience that we lack" (Andrews et al., 2024).

A part of the research, then, moved along an axis (see § 3) already a *piece de resistance*, of Montaigne:

"Et s'il est ainsi que luy seul, de tous les animaux, ait cette liberté de l'imagination et ce deresglement de pensées, luy representant ce qui est, ce qui n'est pas, et ce qu'il veut, le

faux? et le veritable, c'est un avantage qui luy est bien cher vendu et duquel il a bien peu à se glorifier, car de là naist la source principale des maux qui le pressent: peché, maladie, irresolution, trouble, desespoir" (Montaigne, 1965, p. 460).

If the refined symbolic resource allowing humans to change the world is compared with the non-human's *mastery of action*, this comparison does not necessarily come at the expense of the latter.

Speech conquest, rather than a privilege, takes on the contours of an alienating laceration that marks the path of identity construction with its rigidity (Lacan, 1966). It is no coincidence that Derrida (2006) dedicates the entire third chapter of his *The Animal That Therefore I Am* to Lacan. Speech, a separateness device and a vehicle of human transcendence, on one hand generates inability to inhabit the immanence of the world, in a body always condemned to tension toward elsewhere; on the other hand, it forced exchanges with the otherness (worlds and people) through which experience unfolds into a *closed* conception of thought, precisely logocentric. A closure well expressed by the conception that denied consciousness and knowledge to the animal as 'non-naming', and that concentrated its confidence in being able to exercise control over reality in its name.

2.2 Animals also build worlds

If non-human animals partake of the symbolic faculty, then we may consider them as beings evolving along the interface between nature and culture. Considering non-human languages as complex structures legitimizes studying their evolutionary history as social and cultural practices: their semantics and syntax must be considered in relation to the physical and cognitive environment they are embedded in, and where their functioning was perfected.

Extending the concept of culture to non-human world frees us from the perspective of a relationship marked by subtraction rather than evolutionary connection, and highlights the relational-processual dimension in which living beings, natural space, and culture are implicated. The human animal's own unique technological predisposition can be defined as a basic condition constituting its natural dimension, from whose indissoluble bond it cannot ignore in order to evolve simultaneously as a social and biological being: culture is a way of being nature, and does not eliminate the biological roots of living beings. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, "*c'est l'humanité qui fonde l'animal comme animal, l'animalité qui fonde l'homme comme homme*"; throughout the evolutionary process "*l'animal comme variante de l'humanité et [...] l'humanité comme variante de l'animalité*" (1995, p. 277, n. 39) they are united according to a lateral and non-hierarchical relational principle, which distinguishes them as similar and different, continuous and discontinuous, incarnations of a "*natura vivente [che] non è l'opposto della cultura, bensì il luogo in cui la cultura diviene possibile*" (Maier, 2020, pp. 130–131).

In the nature/culture binomial debate, this non-

hierarchical relational principle was reiterated by Derrida (1967), who, with respect to the connection between the use of *tools* and the demiurgic spirit of the human, configures the world no longer as a set of signs but as a set of *traces*. By human and non-human participating in the constitution of a system in which both the *imprint* of the animal and the *text* of the human are *traces*, “*l’umanità smette di essere una ‘teologia negativa’ in relazione all’animalità*” (Caffo, 2014, p. 17), and the construction of cultural worlds is no longer a special endowment of the human capacity for symbolization. “*Celles qui n’ont point de voix, ne laissent pas d’avoir pratique et communication mutuelle, de laquelle c’est notre défaut que nous ne soyons participans*” (Montaigne, 1965, p. 468).

2.3 Individual qualification

In the animal subjectivity’s emergence project, von Uexküll’s idea of *organic subjectivity* plays a decisive role, as interpreted by Plessner: wherever life thrives, there lays subjectivity. The fact that biology denies the existence of a single world, measurable and objective according to the parameters of the human, legitimizes the interpretation of vital reality through ontological pluralism: “*la fantasia creativa, la giocosa quantità delle forme schernisce qualunque tentativo di evoluzione che avanzi in modo uniforme e culmini nell’uomo*” (Plessner, 2008, p. 28). Rather than an interpretive model, the human being becomes a contingency among multiple contingencies, all involved in a series of niche-building processes in which interspecies interactions and interactions with *environment-worlds* modify living beings at the level of phenotypic plasticity: both phenotypic and genotypic modifications linked human and non-human animals through a dialogic relationship over the millennia.

Relationship between human and animal intelligence and possible elements of continuity/discontinuity that characterize them can no longer be analysed in terms of presence/absence, excellence/gap, but in terms of *characteristics*. Verbal-linguistic capacity itself is not an expression of the *specialty* (vertical and hierarchical concept) of the human, but of its *specificity* (horizontal concept).

This differentiated qualification perspective opens up to the *singularity* of the animal: unlike a working machine, animals lives may restructure themselves along an evolutionary axis not constrained by a program, and therefore open to different identity formations (Merleau-Ponty, 1995).

This ability establishes their right as bearers of different specificities and points of view (not all behaviours assumed by animals are innate, nor identical among members of the same species). This means having margins of discretion and emancipation, *responding* consciously rather than *reacting* according to fixed behavioural patterns, being able to make decisions and resolve situations: species’ vocations and cognitive aptitudes are called upon to respond to specific and different problems depending on the life experiences through which an animal relates and knows itself (Tomasello & Call, 1997, pp. 4–10), for example, highlight the presence of cognitive adaptations even in non-human animals, in which flexibility comes into

play. Flexibility is the adaptive capacity that guides the subject’s active control/judgment in interactions with other organisms and the environment in relation to a goal, and which, consequently, allows the selection and implementation of a multiplicity of strategies, from the simplest to the most complex.

Each individual animal, then, will have a subjectivity of its own: capable of giving meaning to its own past, of freely living the present, and of projecting itself into the future (Marchesini, 2014, pp. 129–131).

The ontological difference between humans and other animals falters; the *animal question*, shifted to the plane of ontological pluralism, opens up infinite possibilities for evolution and rewriting the world.

In this context, Derrida’s reflection on the active, *individual gaze* of his cat (in ideal dialogue with the equally famous question that Montaigne posed in the essay cited above: “*Quand je me joue à ma chatte, qui sait si elle passe son temps de moy plus que je ne fay d’elle*”, Montaigne, 1965, p. 452) it significantly accelerated a whole body of thought that, behind the two cats, moved with consequences that were not only theoretical, but also ethical, legal, political, emancipatory, urging the implementation of new criteria of thought and life marked by radical responsibility.

3. The active gaze, a condition for hospitality

Given animal subjectivity as an essential paradigm (any living being is a subject, even if it cannot define its subjectivity, and has the right to be recognized in its singularity), can the non-human animal, by virtue of its inherent ability to choose, plan, and finalize its own existence, be defined as a *person*? Can it attain the status of a moral subject?

Not unrelated to recent neuroscientific research on mirroring, Derrida’s reflection on the cat’s *individual gaze* establishes the point of no return regarding these questions: sharing a gaze presupposes the existence of a common language that enables a process of recognition and hybridization in which, however, the differences on which the singularity of each subject is founded are guaranteed and preserved.

The existential dimension and categories of reference of the human are redesigned by overturning anthropocentric hierarchies. The feline gaze, capable of sharing (and judgment?), mocks the legitimacy of the human being to constitute himself as a subject capable of knowing the essence of the world, exposing the weakness of what until recently made him proud: the peculiar linguistic-verbal mediation capacity (Cimatti, 2013, p. 100; § 2.1), rather than a sign of supremacy, appears in its fragmenting and equivocal dimension, only apparently victorious (Derrida, 2006, p. 39, p. 47; Dalmaso, 2006, p. 9; see Chemero, 2009).

If it is true that “the Other is he who sees me” (Pagliardini, 2016, p. 242), if it is true that self-knowledge is nourished by the relationship between subjects, the non-human animal, when it asserts itself as *the Other* because it is able to see, returns to participate in the identity-building space of human consciousness: the *gaze-Face* is the prerequisite for finally assuming the decisive status of *host*, which in Levinas is central exclusively for the human.

The confrontation with animal otherness shifts to

a completely different plane from that of law, or utility (the animal that “serves”), or vicariousness (the animal “in place of”: of the child, of the partner, etc.; Marchesini, 2015, p. 187, p. 179).

It is well known that the paradigm of hospitality is a radical and absolute relational and cognitive paradigm, preceding language and conceptualization, characterized by unconditional welcome, by the gift of oneself without expectations of reciprocity, by the suspension of all judgment without claims of control (Lévinàs, 2010; Derrida, 1995, 2006).

More than any other, the host-animal embodies the otherness that challenges us and calls us to responsibility: an otherness that to the highest degree precedes, exceeds, assails, and troubles human presumptions, it exposes us to the singularity of the animal, to the difficulty of finding unequivocal characteristics that distinguish it from humans, and represents the challenge of the impossible *par excellence* (Resta, 2016).

A truly *disorienting dilemma*, it questions the human subject boundaries and constitutes its exemplary limit: escaping representation and understanding, it questions the human subject's identity and relationship with the world.

It opens the way to a new ethics, where relationships are founded not on principles of metaphysical-transcendent fraternity, but on the principles of *embodied singularity* and *unfounded friendship* (Derrida, 1994). Once every comparative or allegorical temptation was exhausted, and the obsession with defining the boundaries between human and animal lost its relevance, reflection on the interdependence between human and non-human animality forces us to reckon with a diversity, whatever it may be, that concerns us; and is the silent *guardian* of our animality.

Interspecies hospitality perfects the concept of *inter-animality*, according to which the human and non-human dimensions have been profoundly interconnected since the time of primordial indivisibility, through secret codes that have never been broken and that never cease to sing incessantly (Merleau-Ponty, 1995).

The heterogeneous multitude of silent gazes demanding space and voice in this new sense is not indistinct, nor understood in a collective or abstract sense. It refers to an unrepeatable singularity. Swept away every vestige of the condescending attitudes of a self-centred human, the animal does not ask for compassion, nor concessions, nor permission: its presence imposes itself, opening the way to the unexpected.

At the same time, however, it calls for the exercise of an ethical conscience and for new arrangements of reality that can no longer be postponed with respect to an inhumanity that we fear is possible in an ever-closer future (the prospects of AI, questions about cyborg consciousness, etc.), but which is in fact already present in the models of functionality, profit, and commodification with which human beings relate to others, whether they are human animals like themselves, or non-human animals.

4. To educate in animality

The animal issue touches upon pedagogy pillars, a discipline always engaged in constructing human subjectivity and sociality process, in what appears to be the urgent need for a radical, constructive, not merely deconstructive, re-foundational process, seeking meaning for our existence in the world and new directions for coexistence among living beings.

The paradigm of the animal gaze makes anthropogenesis inadmissible as a process of emancipation from the status of non-human animal, just as a process of ontogenesis that ignores the gaze of others is inadmissible. It also delves deeply into relationships of power and dominance, inclusion and exclusion, no trifling concepts for education.

The full animals' inclusion in the educational context is encouraged by studies on relationships between human identity construction, thought processes, and language acquisition, areas that have always been connected to models and contexts of educational research. We know that the active system, linked to sensorimotor skills, the iconic system, visual and auditory perceptions, and the symbolic system, linguistic abilities, are associated representational modalities: knowledge of the world develops through representation only in conjunction with action in the world. Therefore, languages other than verbal language have been increasingly valued in the educational context, and the body's potential in constructing the forms of reality and knowledge has been emphasized.

Suggestions of a human individuality not based on language and never separated from the naturalness of living things (Cimatti, 2013, pp. vi-vii; Rasini, 2015, p. 204) are consequential. Varela's *enactive approach*, for example, suggests the practice of the *'mind without Self'* as a way out of the Cartesian anxiety generating the crisis of contemporary thought: the lack of the Self, rather than being experienced as a loss (Varela et al., 1991), offers space for a meditative dimension in which experience and knowledge are identified.

A truly subversive challenge in a field like pedagogy, where, however, emphasizing other languages does not mean devaluing the integrative, representative, and at the same time divergent function that verbal thought plays in gaining awareness of internal and external reality. The task of representing and organizing the world's complexity is performed by the entire set of languages, all of which are fundamental to the formation and expression of personality within shared communication. However, the recognition of how much the linguistic peculiarity of the human animal contributed in terms of cognition, flexibility, planning, increased levels of cohesion, organization, and collaborative capacity within social groups remains confirmed.

Following what has been said so far, *education in animality* positions itself as an education that values, through the emphasis on the shared gaze, both the other dimension of the non-human animal and the presence of the animal dimension that lives within us in an inextricable intersection.

The wonder restored by the 'Wordless-Speeches' to our familiar and ordinary worlds sheds new light on the world through learning experiences that connect us to one another on a cognitive, practical, and affective level, shattering the mirror of human narcissism. They constitute a heuristic practice capable of producing cognitive-emotional epiphanies of one's life experience, of one's individual and social identity, where multiplicity is not a pathological disintegration, but the constitution of a multifaceted (and multi-species?) self to which coexistence and continuity must be restored.

4.1 Transfer and education in animality

First of all, to think in terms of *transfer* when discussing animality education means agreeing to make room for interpreters and activities different from the usual and expected ones, embracing creative and divergent development possibilities. This motivates the recontextualization of experiences and models not only in the horizontal dimension (known activities and strategies carried out in a new context), but above all in the vertical dimension, as in the development of original schemes and new actions when tasks must be performed in new contexts with new actors. The third level of learning is encouraged, to which Bateson attributed an anomalous nature compared to the gifts of the human species: the level at which inconsistencies, gaps, contrasts, and contradictions of reality are accommodated in an abstract, multidimensional, and multi-perspective *place*, which is precisely the place where the capacity for transfer is built (Baldacci, 2010).

The objective is not directly concerned with the transfer of notions or knowledge processes, but with participation in a context of relationality, including physical interaction, in which subjects can assume the role of experts, and knowledge and competence become an integral part of their way of being and acting. This involves *dispositional transfer* (classified in the literature as a *transfer of motivation and orientation*), which involves the learning of intelligent behaviours and the approach to knowledge, characterized by flexibility and reflection, essential for third-level learning. Social practices, material objects, and systems of human and animal symbolic representation are at the forefront, which enhance participation in situations and the active performance of tasks/exercises.

Transfer, like any cognitive acquisition, is linked to motivation, which is influenced by both affective and socio-relational factors that contribute to building symbolic space. It can be achieved more easily and consistently when learning is structured around meaningful and engaging content, presented through experiential modalities.

Interspecies dialogue is not just a different way of understanding the educational context, where we learn to transfer the patterns of participation processes from one situation to another: it is a new environment for new thinking, which does not function through oppositions, rigid differentiations, or separations, but through integration, inclusion, and overlap. Both knowledge and awareness are important: in-depth knowledge of animal contexts, languages, and cultures intersect and support the skills that can

be acquired through experiential training, enabling us to operate directly, creating shared narratives that are trans-specific, dynamic, and non-stereotyped. These narratives can produce transferable thinking skills, such as awareness, abstraction, and self-regulatory meta-skills, and can positively impact psychosocial personality constructs such as self-efficacy, attributional style, and locus of control, which determine the ability to plan and self-directedly in an autonomous and conscious manner.

It goes without saying that, when it comes to formal training programs, adequate time and a less restrictive pace are required, along with a variety of environments and contexts, and uncrowded class sizes.

It must also be kept in mind that to enhance transfer as a cognitive strategy, teaching activities should be planned and structured within a consistent curriculum that spans all subject areas, and not isolated within the curriculum of one subject or another. To induce substantial changes in affective and cognitive habits, especially in contexts characterized by increasing complexity, it is essential that the training process be capable of proposing and producing cross-fertilization: this is what happens in multilingual settings when, in integrative language curricula, languages are not taught separately, but rather in a way that fosters awareness of their interconnections.

Dialogue with animals has excellent transformative potential: the other-specific becomes the cognitive mediator for maturation in the numerous variables that contribute to the formation of individual and social identity: definition of one's self, both directly and externally; sense of self-efficacy; resilience to frustration; social relationality; emotional competence and active motivational propensity towards the outside world; awareness of belonging; capacity-readiness for reaction structured by literacy in different languages; reliability of the self through the cohesion of all its internal components; flexibility of behaviors along the lines of both adaptability-interpretation-ability to modify the context, and the assumption of responsibility.

4.2 Operationalization of the animal-host concept

The animal-subject-individual concept opens new spaces for reconsidering modes and protagonists of the educational event. It questions our thoughts and actions by placing them outside the realm of absolute truth, forcing us to confront our own perceptions of what life is and its values, in constant exercise of cognitive decentralization.

It is precisely the animal's recognized guest status that strengthens a pedagogical utopia capable of *humility*, positioned on decentralizations, committed to lowering the *immune defenses* against the stranger of any kind, focused on the continuous re-inscriptions of reality. *Education in animality* is exemplary in valuing discontinuities, divergences, the plurality of interpretations, ruptures, and changes.

It is no coincidence that the cultural debate has begun to concern the intersections between animal exploitation, gender oppression, and racism/speciesism (see among others Timeto, 2024): all fields of in-

vestigation that can be grouped under the umbrella of the oppression/suppression of otherness.

Within the context of diverse languages (each with its own specific codes and procedures), and of our shared *embodied beings*, in which minds, bodies, environment, and culture are connected at different levels, embracing the relationship with the animal teaches us to come to terms with the boundary represented by the other, opens us to the multiplicity of differences and the discovery of consonances, and allows us to explore the diverse variations and intertwining(s) through which our existence unfolds, in aspects related to the construction of both the individual and social self. Regarding the opportunities for constructing the individual self, the hospitable relationship with the non-human animal is an authentic co-construction of biographical possibilities that enriches our experience, deepens our emotions, and restores a different sense of zest for life. Learning that there are so many different ways to construct and manage one's being in the world allows us to shape broader and more complex identities.

In the world outside of ourselves that compromises us, the relationship with the other animal calls us to recognize ourselves in our similarities and differences and to reclaim our sensoriality; it allows each of us to see another self, different in time, gestures, and behaviour, and to take on the turmoil this entails, putting its distressing elements on hold. The hospitable relationship with animals teaches us to turn our gaze toward fulfilling objects of love. Educating in animality is an ethical prerequisite for working on constructive impulses born from love and gratitude, strengthening the personality. This is a love that does not smack of rhetorical do-goodism: mobilizing feelings of love allows us to balance the destructive impulses of human beings (Klein, 1969, p. 82), provided that the capacity to love coincides with deliberate attention. It is a type of love that can be learned (Coltart, 2017, p. 119), and is the prerequisite for the ultimate goal of the educational path, that is, for a full and dignified, responsible and generative life.

The lack of judgment that animals reserve for humans with whom they interact affects the construction of both the individual and social self. Those who feel judged withdraw from challenges; those who feel supported, however, develop a willingness to persevere. A dialogue environment marked by respect (unconditionally exercised by the animal) and capable of providing *honest* feedback, both on failures and on the merits of actions undertaken, trains us to recognize our own limitations but also our own value, providing a highly motivating environment where social-emotional skills, emotion regulation, and conflict management are learned more successfully. This environment contributes to recognizing and training the physical dimension, and to educating and strengthening empathy. It helps develop imagination, exploratory curiosity, caring attitudes, expressiveness, and nonverbal communication; It fully responds to the increasingly pressing need to re-establish our educational models in a corporeal and empathic-affective direction, and to provide a *sensible* foundation for our individual and social worlds.

Dialogue with animals offers the opportunity for social identity construction to fully open ourselves to

the existential measure in which we embrace the characteristics of others, in their singularity, for what is similar and different. Also in their right to deny themselves to us. It allows us to understand that others, whether similar or absolutely different, also feel, experience emotions, and desire. These desires may or may not align with our own: a training in acceptance and rejection. Indeed, fully opening ourselves to the multiplicity of non-human existences in which it may be more difficult or less immediate to reflect ourselves teaches us to negotiate the forms of relationship with an otherness that must nevertheless be welcomed and nurtured with organizational skill and responsibility. This will allow us to position ourselves in a new, divergent way to the dysfunctions of the relational system to which we risk becoming accustomed in our daily experience.

In dialogue with the animal-host, cognitive and affective habits and dispositions take shape, allowing us to glimpse avenues of escape from individuality, a "*poisoned word*" (Remotti, 2010), in order to learn to inhabit relationships and narratives of reciprocity: the animal otherness, in dialogue as equals, capable of existing in the world on its own and not for our consumption, does not accept half measures or convenient balancing acts. It does not permit abuse, but neither does it allow use.

This type of dialogue is penalized by the same affective-cognitive habits on which it can operate, leading to the capacity for decentralization, acceptance, recognition, and valorisation of diversity for what it is, and not how we would like it to be or what we find convenient. A vicious circle, in short. Which brings us back in the *Conclusions* to talk about the educational effort of actively teaching ourselves to the other, be it a human or non-human animal, and seeing their own face, not only as a species, but as a unique individual bearer of value '*in and of itself*'.

5. Conclusions

Any educational discussion is accompanied by questions: "What kind of human being do we think of? Who do we want them to become? How do we intend to act?"

The discussions have shown that a sense of hospitality between humans and non-humans is essential both for defining who we are, for the effects on the world we inhabit, and for laying the foundations for what we can choose to build (or avoid experiencing). Animalism is therefore contemporary with both and pedagogy (closely linked to ethics since its inception):

"L'etica animale altro non è che l'etica tout court: perché non si tratta di fare distinzioni tra uomini e animali ma di comprendere quali criteri sono indispensabili per tenere in considerazione qualcuno che è coinvolto dallo spettro delle nostre azioni" (Caffo & Sonzogni, 2016, p. 269).

Having collapsed the classification between human and non-human animals, the fixed point is the now established fact that we and they are individuals, with personal histories, tastes and expectations, and

that “*il nostro essere speciali è un costrutto sociale, figlio di stereotipi che vanno sfatati*” (Caffo & Sonzogni, 2016, p. 269).

The possible answers to the three questions will therefore still revolve around the cornerstone of the discussion: the full inclusion of non-human animals within the concept of host, with all the *unexpected* consequences.

5.1 Regarding the “How?” question

Precisely recognizing animals as hosts protects educational action from underlying utilitarian tendencies of reification disguised as valorisation. Human beings remain at the forefront, whether we appreciate the shared characteristics (maternal love and the pleasure of play in mammals), whether we take advantage of the interaction with the non-human world to understand the human animal, or whether we value the transference potential of interspecies dialogue, perhaps for education in decentralization and acceptance.

It's also true that we are not abstract intellects: among the mechanisms we deploy in relating to others, we may empathize, that is, to attribute mental states to others and grasp their emotional ones (Pollo, 2016, pp. 81-84), but *species preference* is also a strong defining characteristic.

The rhythm shift required by the intransigence of the concept of host, however, accepts no compromises and overturns the canons by which we usually *accommodate* our impulses of sympathy, recognition, and sharing: in animality education, we learn to recognize and deconstruct species preference and to implement the cognitive aspects of empathy (so as not to be overwhelmed by it). Both skills are useful in dealing with the seduction exerted by stereotypes, and transferable to any context where stereotyping is tempted to be a simplifying strategy.

It is the substantial change of pace that Marchesini (2016a; 2016b) calls for the transition from an animal-tool that is ‘useful/good for’ to a ‘desiring’ animal (Derrida, 2006), and which in educational practices in informal contexts makes us hope, for example, that so-called ‘sanctuaries’, where animals often live rescued from conditions of waste and oppression, will spread rather than educational farms. The term *educational farm* echoes

1. As adjective: the sense of usefulness, and therefore, if not of abuse, of the use of the non-human animal.
2. As noun: the memory of a management model that belongs to the recent patriarchal past, often marked by exploitation and oppression.

Animal-assisted therapy and activities should also be rejected with deliberate distrust: despite their apparent promise of animal welfare, their primary purpose remains focused on human benefit.

These distinctions do not diminish the importance of educational activities that involve conscious obser-

vation, participation, and the sharing of experiences. These could be combined with the study of research findings in biology, ethology, and animal semiosis in formal education, starting from the earliest years, since the breadth and depth of the knowledge acquired demands its application. New perspectives are also opening up for all disciplines, embracing the role of animals as protagonists, allowing for fruitful and unconventional interactions among them.

5.2 As for: Who is the human being we are thinking of?

The answer remains guided by the concept of the guest, which is bidirectional and correlated with the dimension, connoted by responsibility, of the *ontopoiesis* of the human being, whose cornerstone remains co-construction with another subject who is simultaneously external and internal, in which one is always reflected in the striving toward a *fullness* that feeds on continuous desire and exchange.

5.3 Who do we want them to become?

Consequently, the answer to the question “Who do we want them to become?” acknowledges the need for educational programs not to pursue performance and not to give room to aggressive competition aimed at the annihilation and devaluation of the other, and to be capable of training in the multiplicity (and also the corporeality) of reality and all languages, working on the generativity of experience.

Education in animality is education in supreme difference: it constitutes a testing ground that *naturally* leads to working *in* and *for* a way of being in the world made of contaminations and transgressions, alliances and transformations as constants of life, where we are not left behind but cared for, where everyone's stories build bonds and generate change, and where every voice is recognized for its transformative power.

Although contamination and border crossings are the axes along which educational research has focused in recent years, a persistent vocation for discipline and control means that educational practices struggle to break free from approaches that organize living beings into categories, whether those approaches operate on the level of an identity ethics that flattens specificity and diversity, or those that strive to problematize them according to the ethics of difference. It is difficult to break away from the antinomic logic of “con-form/dif-ferent”, which penalizes anything that is not suitable, “adequate to”, thus running the risk of contributing to conditions of subjugation and exploitation, and justifying historical structures of domination. Of the living human, let alone the non-human, which, especially in formal education, is not even taken into consideration.

Equally imprudent is the comparison with that part of philosophy which suggests that the same absence of words which allows the animal to “*aderire al mondo senza residui, [di] essere il mondo di cui partecipa*” can cause the human being to actually return “*nel-*

l'universo da cui siamo usciti tramite il concetto" (Cimatti, 2013, p. 154; § 3): a 'disorientation' which, after the damage caused by the logos, promises new possible existential dimensions (§ 4).

For a discipline like pedagogy, fulfilling a request to intervene in the everyday world, the invitation extended by the speechless-animal to collapse theory and practice seems arduous, and the silence mode that directly questions the 'real' by withdrawing from it is undoubtedly contradictory. However, thinking of the animal's speechlessness as a welcoming horizon of meaning does not so much lead to the consideration that "there is no language to which the world corresponds", but rather to abandoning the notion of the 'I' and of language to which we are accustomed. Enabling silence means shifting the axis of reference from language to practices, returning from the era of representation to that of reality, from the 'narrative of species' to its possibilities for action, because "*il silenzio è ciò che azzerava la divisione tra bios e zoé come opposizione tra vite specializzate e nude vite*" (Caffo, 2017, p. 224).

This vision does not frame the loss of fantasy and prefiguration, typical of human onto-poiesis and educational action. *Non-speaking-animality* does not require us to renounce humanity (Wolfe, 2009): rather, it constitutes an invitation to re-enter it by *practicing* it with the acquired awareness that the word, however much it desires to hold things by bringing them to itself, "*qualsiasi oggetto voglia afferrare, [...] ne resta orfana*" (Adorni, 2015, pp. 31, 43). In this way, dialogue between species and the condition-exercise of hospitality are realized in a set of practices in which bodies and the possibilities for action truly matter, and in which reflection on the word, rather than an arbitrary order of reality, a device for misunderstanding and oppression, becomes the tool for no longer removing the animal that we are, but for looking at ourselves, different as we are, among other different animals, and welcoming every radical diversity.

A final note from the results of a very recent study on visual perception, which suggests that the brain does not simply receive images from the world, but actively constructs them, according to patterns that reflect the environment in which it has been immersed and interacted (Rogers, 2025). Even our visual perception, traditionally considered a reliable genotypic makeup, "learns" depending on how it is shaped by exposure to certain structures: we see not only *what* we have learned to see, but also *in the way* we have learned to see it. If this is true for one of the senses, sight, which is the primary element with which we construct our experience of the world, then it confirms even more that the way we think, remember, and judge can be significantly transformed by what we experience and what we are taught.

The way we see the world is a learned way: not only are we permeable to the cultural environment, to the education we experience, but the cultural environment, the type of education, shapes our very naturalness.

As far as we are concerned, then, the obviousness of certain models, perpetuated by the belief that "it's

always been done this way," is no longer viable: educating people about interspecific hospitality, and about the porous boundaries between different animalities, is a duty precisely because we have not lived in a world that taught us to see it except in terms of human advantage (advantages that remain in the educational field and must also be emphasized). The terms are instead those of the inalienable right of every animal (without the adjective human/non-human) to recognizability, to singularity. Also, to the gratitude that is due to them: for their participation in the active construction of our worlds, but above all for the simple fact of "*being there*."

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