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In Circles: Performance. Philosophy. Animals. Equality

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Ⅰ. Prelude

Over the last five years, I have found myself circling around four key concepts: Performance. Philosophy. Animals. And Equality. And I have found myself thinking in and with circles.

It began with the various references to circles we can find in the philosophy of Henri Bergson - in his idea of the field of attention as the distance between the two points of a compass (Bergson 2014); in his imagining of an expansive centrifugal movement that might turn a closed society into an open one (Bergson 2002); and in the role he gives to embodied practice to 'break the circle' of the given in which rationality or only an intellectualised notion of what counts as thought traps us (Bergson 1911).

I found the circle again in the so-called 'non-philosophy' of Francois Laruelle (2011) – in his critique of the vicious circles and circular arguments of standard philosophies of art - including dance.

But I also found the circle of anthropocentrism. I found the circle at the circus - a circle that calls upon us to consider all that goes on behind the scenes in order to produce performing animals anthropocentrically. I began to consider

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what role performance could play in displacing the human from the centre of values through a process of animalisation.

Consider philosophy an expanding circle.
Consider performance an expanding circle.
The etymology of the English word centre (n.) – comes from the Latin centrum, originally the fixed point of the two points of a drafting compass, and from the Greek kentron meaning "sharp point, goad, sting of a wasp".
The centre is a middle point of a circle: the point around which something revolves. But the centre is also pointed and sharp – that which goads moving bodies in a particular direction.
The goad is a traditional farming implement: a spiked stick used to spur or guide livestock; for instance, to round up cattle. The elephant goad or bullhook, is a tool employed in the training of elephants. It consists of a metal hook attached to a handle.
The Greeks, we are told, used the phrase "kicking against the goad" as a proverb to teach us of the foolishness of resistance against a powerful authority: those who place themselves at the centre.

The underlying ontology that informs all this work can be summed up in the words of Octavia Butler: *All that you touch. You Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth Is Change.* (To which we might add the footnote that truth itself changes) (Butler 1993: 3). How to think alongside dance or movement as change - understood via Bergson (amongst others) as alteration or qualitative becoming (rather than spatial transition); how to think alongside the world as movement, as change; how to dance the thought of change as a changing thought…? These are my recurring questions. The questions that keep circling back to me and through me.

In this text, I will rehearse a thinking that dances the relations between performance, philosophy, animals and equality according to the figure of the *circle.* To think with dance and dance with thought in relation to nonhuman animals

and the question of equality – understood as an ontological, epistemological, aesthetic, political and ethical question.

Equality (and inequality) is a matter of how to think the fundamental nature of and relations between dance, thought, and interspecies being as our so-called 'objects' of enquiry. Especially within philosophies of immanence – there is an appeal to the equality of the Real, to an evenness or levelling of what is beyond hierarchized binaries between mind and body; matter and spirit; this world and some transcendent realm. Equality is a question for knowledge itself: the critique of authority and the pursuit of equality within knowledge-production; and to the hierarchies between ways of knowing. Equality is an issue for arts and more widely for aesthetic experience: who is making art for whom and from what point of view, whose aesthetic interests are taken into account and how is experience ordered to centre and give priority to some over others. Equality is linked to paying attention, to how attention is distributed and how it can be practiced in more or less exclusive and expansive ways. And of course, equality is a fundamental subject for politics and ethics.

Let's do this dance together. Step by step. Step 1: from the application of philosophy to the Real, to the emergence of philosophy from it. Step 2: from the application of philosophy to performance, to the practice of a performance philosophy. Step 3: from the judgment of animal capabilities according to human standards for what counts as 'proper' performance and philosophy to 'animal performance philosophy' as the animalization of performance and philosophy. Step 4: from the application of a universalized notion of the standard human to denigrate both human and nonhuman animals to a solidarity based on attending to the shared logic of speciesism, racism and ableism. Step 5: Towards radical equality as a performative praxis of thought.

And yet, we cannot move towards equality 'step by step'. We cannot move towards equality step by step because there can be no step-by-step guide to what

it means to practice it in a given context. ‘Openness is a necessarily vague formulation that requires continual creativity to fill out its content in any one situation; one should see it as a moving position with no essence’ (Mullarkey 2012: 70). And we cannot move towards equality step by step, because it’s all or nothing. As Etienne Balibar says:

> Equality in fact cannot be limited. Once some X’s (“men”) are not equal, the predicate of equality can no longer be applied to anyone, for all those to whom it is supposed to be applicable are in fact “superior”, “dominant”, “privileged”, etc. Enjoyment of the equality of rights cannot spread step by step, beginning with two individuals and gradually extending to all: it must immediately concern the universality of individuals…This explains… the antinomy of equality and society for, even when it is not defined in “cultural”. “national”, or “historical” terms, a society is necessarily a society, defined by some particularity, by some exclusion, if only by a name (Balibar 2016: np).

Equality will always remain exclusive if it moves step by step – expanding the circle of equality or ethical consideration to previously ostracized groups. Such a dance of thought also fails to understand the actuality of intersectional identities and interdependence. And for sure we will not reach radical equality with reasoning or intellectual exertion.

As John Mullarkey suggests: ‘We can only understand equality through a performative thought, a movement or vital action rather than an intellectualist representation of it’ (Mullarkey 2012: 63). To which I might add: We do not need a philosophy of radical equality, we need to practice radical equality as a performance philosophy. Or again, the only way we can develop our understanding of radical equality is through its performative praxis. This is not going to be easy or simple. We are going to make mistakes, we are going to fall flat on our faces. Perhaps, following choreographer Amanda Piña, we should not call this a performance but a *rehearsal* (Piña 2017)[1].

So, there can be circles we want to dance as well as those we want to escape. But for the most part here our focus will be on the movements and practices that break or escape circles – whether in terms of methods that allow us to break out of the circularities of traditional philosophical analysis; or the practices that break open the circle of the "we" who are equal as always constituted through exclusion. In contrast, what we are speculatively choreographing – alongside Bergson and performance - is a movement of opening to openness (Mullarkey 2012: 69)[2]. In this particular rehearsal of work-in-progress thinking, my concern is with intersectional, interspecies performative praxis as a means to break out of the circularity of thought when it is reduced to a universalizing, anthropocentric and ableist intellectualism with the white, male, non-disabled subject of reason as the centre of values.

My larger project is concerned with how the relationships between performance and philosophy, humans and nonhuman animals are performatively enacted and with how we can move towards what we might describe as a 'radical equality in thought' rather than remaining trapped in the circularity of a philosophy *of* performance, an anthropocentric model of performance, and a universalizing approach to animal performance philosophy.

This text is in three parts.

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1) See the long term artistic research project of Amanda Piña, Endangered Human Movements, including formats such as School of the Jaguar in which Piña talks about the need to 'rehearse the possibility of an ecology of knowledge'. The idea of rehearsal invites difficulty and failure into knowledge practices as a matter of ongoing experimentation rather than fixed methods. See https://nadaproductions.at/projects/endangered-human-movements/school-of-the-jaguar

2) If this work emerges from a practice of thinking alongside performance and animals, it has also been fundamentally shaped and lived as a practice of thinking alongside my husband, the philosopher John Ó Maoilearca (including earlier publications under the name John Mullarkey). I want to thank him once more here for reading, commenting on and talking about this and all of my writing together.

Ⅱ. Part I. Performance Philosophy

1. Think with dance, dance thought: breaking the circle of the application paradigm

There is a long tradition of European philosophy – that includes Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze and François Laruelle, for example – that is critical of the circularity of philosophical analysis as a method. By this is meant the manner in which standard philosophy applies pre-existing philosophical conceptions to the Real of other practices (eg what is real, what is appearance, what is one, what is many, and even what is thought and what is philosophy itself), *rather than attending to the emergence of new ideas from those practices.* Philosophy turns in a circle in which it 'discovers' its own apriori assumptions. Bergson's alternative is a non-representational understanding of thought as that which belongs to the Real, rather than that which produces a fixed picture of it (Bergson 1911). The same goes for philosophy's relation to art, including dance. For Laruelle, for example, art is 'thought *circularly*' in standard philosophical aesthetics (Laruelle 2011: 142). In contrast, he states that the aim of own non-aesthetics is to think art 'outside every vicious circle' (Laruelle 2012: 4), according to a radical extension of art to philosophy: 'the moment when thought in its turn becomes a form of art' (ibid., 2) and there is 'the reciprocal determination of art and philosophy' (ibid., 1).

Breaking the circle of the application paradigm is not only a need from the side of philosophy but also a need from the side of dance in its long-standing pursuit for recognition of itself as a field of knowledge development. "*Think with dance*" is an important epistemological imperative. It speaks to dance practice as a site of multiple forms of thinking - somatic, choreographic, improvisational, social, theatrical - not only as the object of thought for other disciplines. In arts

contexts (or at least those I am familiar with), it is largely uncontroversial to suggest that arts practices are forms of 'thought' and/or ways of 'knowing'. Thanks in part to the institutional acceptance of the practice as research or artistic research paradigm in many national contexts, the idea that 'research' questions can be investigated and findings shared in and as performance alongside more traditional forms of investigation and publication is well established. Of course, long before the term 'practice as research' (and related concepts) became widely taken up, artists themselves already knew that what they were doing was thinking through performance.

And yet, the idea that performance thinks or that one can think through performance remains 'radical' in other contexts, including in many philosophical ones. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (2014) for instance sense the requirement to explicitly assert that: 'The practice that is philosophy has no exclusive claim to thought or the composition of concepts. Like every practice, its only claim is to its own techniques. For us, the techniques of philosophy are writing techniques' (Manning and Massumi 2014: vii). On the one hand, of course, and given the problems of disciplinary inequality in the application paradigm, it is a highly welcome gesture to hear philosophers emphatically note that their goal is not to 'tell art how to think, or to tell dance how to understand itself' (ibid., viii) – as so many other philosophies of art have done, intentionally or not.

When we say think with dance, the "with" (or what we might also call a "thinking alongside") is an acknowledgement of and act of resistance to the hierarchical power relations that have historically structured encounters between dance and philosophy. For example, Bojana Cvejić (2015) and others (Kunst 2003; Clark, 2011) have been highly critical of the methodological issues in the treatment of dance by European philosophers such as Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière. In both cases, Cvejić suggests, 'dance is relegated to a metaphor or, even worse, to an ahistorical conduit for a general ontology' (Cvejić 2015: 18).

In contrast, she calls for a "*dance-philosophy*", understood as 'a kind of thought which arises within the material practice of dancing' (ibid.). Unlike standard philosophical approaches to dance – as exemplified by Badiou and Ranciere – a dance-philosophy would be one in which '[...] the epistemic hierarchy is reversed: the stake is no longer in what philosophy could do for dance, but how an experimental, radically pragmatic orientation in dance offers a practical framework for theorizing perception, concept-formation and other philosophical issues' (ibid.). The growing institutional acceptance of artistic research provides support for this reversal. But it remains the case that the normative concept of thought (and cogent notions of 'intelligence') at the centre of the value systems that produce educational and cultural systems continue to be predominantly framed in disembodied and intellectualist terms and with an emphasis on written and verbal expression.

At the same time, of course, it is clear that dance thinks in as many different ways as there are relational bodies; and that the value assigned to the thinking of different dancing bodies is by no means equal. Performance philosophy should not fall into the trap of replacing the hierarchy between dance and philosophy with a universalizing gesture which flattens out the plurality of how different dancing bodies think and disregards the structural conditions that shape what it is to think with dance (including with animals), for whom. Choreographer mayfield brooks' approach of *Improvising While Black* (IWB) – for example - came from brooks' 'personal experience of being racially profiled when driving while black' in California (brooks 2016: 33). For brooks, blackness 'is a question. It lives in a question'; 'people think they know what it is but we really don't' (34). And *Improvising While Black* – as a 'dance improvisation experiment' - is a way to explore that question.

In turn, for Performance Philosophy - an international transdisciplinary field of research and practice - the cogent imperative to "*Dance thought*" is equally

important[3]. This speaks to thought as a domain of a plurality of practices - embodied, attentional, emotional, material, nonhuman - not only as the exertion of human intellectual or cognitive capacities. It also comes to have a particular pertinence in the context of my own approach to performance philosophy which follows the logic that a "thinking with dance" (or movement) must itself be practiced as a dancing or mobile thought in order not to fall into performative contradiction - or at least to side-step it. A dance-philosophy must itself dance. As Massumi and Manning put it in their advice to potential dance-philosophers: "Don't just write *about* dance. As William Forsythe says, dance that thought around. Dance that choreographic thought around in philosophy's act of writing" (Manning and Massumi 2014: viii). This is not (just) about philosophy taking on the form of dance, but the need for any act of thinking alongside the world as movement, as change, to itself remain a changing thought, not one that settles into a fixed identity.

Ⅲ. Part Ⅱ. Animalizing Performance Philosophy

1. Think with interspecies performance, perform interspecies thought: breaking the circle of anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism also operates according to a circular logic. Originally meaning the regard of human beings as "the central fact of creation", anthropocentrism indicates a system that places the human at the centre of values. Anthropocentrism

3) Performance Philosophy is also the name of an international network of researchers, practitioners, scholars and activists engaged in investigating new forms and formats of thinking, philosophizing, performing and doing, in, and beyond, the academic, aesthetic and artistic spheres. Founded in 2012, its core activities are a biennial conference, an open access journal and a book series. You can find out more about the Performance Philosophy network on its website https://www.performancephilosophy.org/

enacts a concept of 'the human' as separate from and superior to animals and other nonhuman entities which is used to justify their performative determination as 'resources' for human use. In terms of equality, for example, the circle of anthropocentrism means that the human perspective is the only operative consideration in determining the political or ethical value of an action or practice. Since at least the early 20th century Western philosophers like Peter Singer (1975) have been advocating for alternative biocentric (life-centred) ethical models seeking to affirm the value and significance of all forms of life – human and nonhuman[4] - although, as we shall see, in ways that are often underpinned by ableism.

In relation to performance philosophy, as Vinciane Despret (2016) has discussed, we need to encounter animals as strangers once more, by unlearning all the assumptions we have about them (Despret 2016: 161). *What would animals say if we asked the right questions?* She asks. And my interest is in the extent to which performance (specifically interspecies performance) and performance philosophy (specifically an animal or interspecies performance philosophy) might be a site to rehearse that practice of non-circular questioning. This makes sense to me because I think that anthropocentrism – what we might even consider "structural anthropocentrism" – is not just an "idea", but something that gets under our skin and – according to this performativity – is therefore something that can be both reiterated and resisted through bodily practices.

Putting aside his ableism (which we will address later), Singer's model of the expanding circle of morality (1981) has been criticised within animal studies insofar as it can be seen as only including nonhuman animals to the extent that

4) Biocentrism can also be compared to ecocentrism which extends this concept of inherent value to 'non-living' entities in the natural world not only to 'living things'. I cannot explore this further here, but clearly there is much to be said about how this discourse might intersect with both indigenous philosophies and non-indigenous, 'new' materialist perspectives which work with an expansive category of 'life' and the 'living' that extends to entities such as rocks, mountains, earth, water and so on.

they can be proven to have capacities 'like us'. Some animals can step into the circle of moral consideration −- and some animals more closely to the centre than others − but only when they measure up to normative human standards. Here is the vicious circle again. Nonhuman animals are trapped in a circle, where the centre of power is not displaced and normative human values continue to determine how the value of life is measured. The alternative ethical dance we must imagine is a movement where the circle expands according to a movement of qualitative transformation not mere spatial extension. This is not about extending ethics to animals but an animalization of ethics. My question is to what extent interspecies performance might operate as a resistant site for an embodied unlearning of structural anthropocentrism that enables the enactment of this new ethical dance.

Consider equality an expanding circle.
Consider equality a centrifugal movement.

As performance arising from or occurring between different species, 'interspecies performance' is a category of performance that includes animals, plants, or microorganisms (Knowles 2013; Chaudhuri 2014). It is standardly assumed to mean 'performances that involve actual animals doing things alongside human performers' and the act of bringing 'real, living, nonhuman animals onstage' (Chaudhuri 2014: 6), but can also be understood from a wider definition to include performances that are 'records of and reflection on the relationships − real and imagined − between human and nonhuman animals' (ibid). In my own work − which focuses on animals − I follow Una Chaudhuri's emphasis on the ethical and epistemological dimensions of interspecies performance: on the capacity of this form of performance to confront us with the anthropocentric assumptions of what we think we know about animals and the potential for performance to have a positive ethical impact in relation to the real lives of actual

animals. It is also indebted to the work of Ric Knowles whose background in intercultural theatre enables him to carry forward an invitation to attend to how interspecies performance too operates in the context of unequal power dynamics and carries the risks of exploitation, exoticization, and Othering in human-nonhuman encounters (Knowles 2013).

Here, I want to propose that interspecies performance is a way of *animalizing* performance in three main ways. Firstly, encounters with animals can transform our very concept of performance – our fundamental ideas of what performance is. Encounters with the difference of animal bodies transform normative humanist ideas of performance: space, time, actors, audience, senses and communication. As Florence Fitzgerald-Allsopp and I suggest in the Introduction to our forthcoming book *Interspecies Performance*:

> Performance time mutates to exceed human lifespans; to emerge beyond the thresholds of human perception and acknowledging nonhuman attention spans; to operate at more-than-human time-signatures and alongside nonhuman rhythms… Interspecies performance expands aesthetics and the role of the senses: developing the existing challenges to the legacy of ocularcentrism in contemporary practice, bringing a new urgency and motivation to investigate the performative potentials of smell, touch, taste, sound, proprioception. Contemporary interspecies performance leads artists to encounter whole new registers of sensation and communication through nonhuman animal life: from chemical communication with pheromones to echolocation … Encounters with animal bodies - like the gelatinous imperceptibility of jellyfish - draw attention to the relativity of human perception and the challenge to imagine performance that takes place on the thresholds of appearance for a human audience (Cull Ó Maoilearca and Fitzgerald-Allsopp, forthcoming: np).

This works both ways. Given that *how* human and animals can meet is shaped by the contexts in which those meetings take place, animalizing the aesthetics and spatial-temporal qualities of performance can enable new interspecies encounters.

A second way that interspecies work animalizes performance is in the process of making performance for animals – where we see how concepts of spectatorship and audience are also set in motion by interspecies practices. *Who is sitting around the edge of the circus ring and who is in the centre performing for whom and how?* According to a reversal of roles, animals that are usually constituted as objects of the human gaze, including for the purposes of entertainment, are acknowledged and addressed as subjects of their own perspective or point of view: neglected spectators of aesthetic events. But rather than just operating according to a movement of reversal or 'trading places', which can still function anthropocentrically, more 'polite' questions (in Despret's terms) might be to ask: what kinds of performance are interesting for different animals – given their differing embodiments, and how do we know what 'interest' looks like?

A third way that interspecies work animalizes performance is in and through the transformation of the human performer: human artists exploring their (differential) continuity and connection with nonhuman animals through various modalities of becoming-animal and hybridization. Choreographic "composition in imitation" (*Every house has a door*) plays a role here not in the sense of pretending to be an animal or copying what the animal looks like according to a fixed image, but imitation as a way to transform how you embody time and space, building on the Deleuzian-Spinozist idea that a body is not defined by fixed characteristics but by what it can do (in relation to other bodies): its powers of sensation and perception, its distinctive powers to change and be changed by what it touches[5].

5) The concept of "composition in imitation" comes from the practice of Chicago-based company Every house has a door. In their interspecies performance work, *Broken Aquarium* (2022) for example, performers engaged in animalization through a process of creative response in relation to directives and sources, provided by director Lin Hixson, including video of animal movement. See the company website, available at: https://www.everyhousehasadoor.org/performances/upcoming/broken-aquarium

Figure 1. Criptonite Slow Animals slothwin

Ⅳ. Part Ⅲ. Animal Performance Philosophy, Intersectionally

1. Criptonite's Slow Animals: thinking with slowness and crawling

So, I have been using this expression 'animalizing performance' to describe how performance might be transformed by animals. But, of course, animalization can also have many other connotations – including as a tool of oppression in both historical and contemporary contexts. Animalization is not only linked dismantling anthropocentrism but to dehumanization in the context of racism, colonialism and ableism in multiple different cultural, historical and contemporary sites. Negatively comparing certain groups of people to animals has been used

as a justification for inequality, discrimination, oppression, violence and death. As black feminist thinker Syl Ko observes, for instance: 'the human-animal divide is the ideological bedrock underlying the framework of white supremacy. The negative notion of "the animal" is the anchor of this system' (Ko 2017: 26). Likewise in the context of interspecies performance, as mayfield brooks explains: their thinking with dance and animals while black happens in the context of the painful history of racialization as a process of dehumanization. 'Because we have this very painful history in this country, and when we think about the Middle Passage, which is the enslaved journey of ancestral Africans to America, and about colonialism, which is a global issue—there's a painful situation. Here, black people are hardly ever seen as human, starting with slavery —that's been our historical reality' (brooks 2016: 34).

And yet, intersectional approaches to animal equality insist that the pursuit of liberation for human groups who have been animalized in the form of racialization and/or ableism for example, need not involve reaffirming a negative notion of the animal. As Sunaura Taylor puts it: "There has been an urgent need among dehumanized populations (including disabled people) to challenge animalization and claim humanity. As urgent and understandable as these challenges are, it is important to ask how we can reconcile the brutal reality of human animalization with the concurrent need to challenge the devaluing of animals and even acknowledge our own animality" (Taylor 2017: 20). For Taylor and other intersectional thinkers, there is also much to be gained from attending to the shared logics of ableism and speciesism: 'Animals and disabled people have been compared and conflated in various cultural and historical contexts… I am suggesting not that nonhuman animals and disabled humans are uniquely similar, but rather that we must begin to examine the systems that degrade and devalue both animals and disabled people – systems which are built upon, amongst other things, ableist paradigms of language and cognitive capacity' (ibid.).

Intersectional, interspecies performance practice is one place where this reconciliation of both the oppressive and liberating dynamics of animalization is happening – including in the work of a company called, Criptonite. Founded in 2020 by Zurich-based artists Edwin Ramirez and Nina Mühlemann, Criptonite is a crip-queer theatre project that centres access and disability. Not all their work engages with animality, but in *Interspecies Performance*, we feature an important recent performance work of theirs called *Slow Animals* (2020) which thinks the intersections of animal and disability justice with dance. Performed for audiences online during Covid, access is embraced as an aesthetic of the work – including audio description for blind and visually impaired audiences and the durational quality of live performers waiting for processes of description to 'catch up' with onstage action. According to a playful kind of 'TV chat show' or cabaret format, Ramirez and Mühlemann move between joyfully exchanging their identification as disabled people with different slow animals and indicating the function of dark humour as a survival strategy in a violently ableist world. Combined with performances of pop songs, choreographies and contributions from guest dancers, the whole piece unfolds according to a 'crip time' which involves the audience watching and waiting while sets are changed, props are moved and the performers move themselves around the stage, with and without their wheelchairs.

As Ramirez and Mühlemann note: "In history, disability has often occupied the liminal space between the human and monstrous and animalistic. [But] What does it mean to give into that cross-species affinity, and to explore mutual ways of being and moving in space?" (Criptonite 2020). *Slow Animals* (2020) uses dance to think the performativity of humanness with reference to verticality and productivity; simultaneously cripping and animalizing performance through acts of slowness and crawling. "As two disabled people who crawled on the floor much beyond the toddler stage, and who are not invested in verticality, Ramirez and Mühlemann say that they are "painfully aware from lived experience that

many of the aspects of what makes a human are based on white supremacist and ableist assumptions" (Criptonite in Cull Ó Maoilearca and Fitzgerald-Allsopp, forthcoming). In the performance, Criptonite interweave how normative notions of humanness are performatively reinforced and resisted in relation to disabled bodies – circling between sharing their sense of affinity and kinship with slow crawling animals (from the gila monster to snails and two-toed sloths) and telling painful personal stories from their lived experiences of ableism.

> *They say: Gila monsters belong to a small group of venomous lizards. In 1992, a protein was discovered in the Gila monster's toxic saliva that can be used to manage type 2 diabetes. What suffering have you endured for the benefit of their "discovery"? Dear Gila Monsters: first they called you a threat to their bodies, now they want to use you as a medical resource.*

Figure 2. Criptonite Slow Animals gilamonster

About thirty minutes into the performance, Nina and Edwin are lying down on glittery and golden cushions facing the audience when Nina observes that their wheelchairs are now far away – at the back of the stage. Nina offers to go and get them, while Edwin says that they would like to sing a song for them and

the audience. Smiling and swaying joyfully, Edwin breaks into a karaoke rendition of Wham's 1984 song *Careless Whisper* – with slightly adjusted lyrics:

I feel so unsure
As I take your hand and lead you to the dance floor
As the music dies, something in your eyes
Calls to mind a silver screen
And all its sad good-byes
I'm never gonna dance again
Crippy feet have got no rhythm
Though it's easy to pretend
I know you're not a fool
I should've known better than to cheat a friend
And waste the chance that I'd been given
So I'm never gonna dance again
The way I danced with you, oh…

As Edwin sings, we see Nina begin to crawl across the front of the stage – at first sideways-on, where we can see how they hold the weight of their body with their arms and draws their (fake) leather-trousered legs across the floor. As the Wham version of the song fades out and a new instrumental version fades in, Nina rotates their body to crawl backwards – now confronting the audience with their gaze, before the performativity of the gesture shifts once again as they begin to lip-synch to a punk cover of the song by The Gossip. Like the song and its cover versions, the performative multiplicity of the act of crawling passes before our eyes in a matter of minutes: objectified, submissive, sexualized, resistant, animalizing. Crawling moving between its enactment as a stigmatized source of shame – the ableist and specieist perception of crawling as an inherently 'undignified' movement - and an empowering practice of liberation. Of course, this evaluation of crawling depends on who is doing what to whom. For example, the show later indicates different contexts of what crawling does in the contrast between

an example of sexist power dynamic where a man demeans a woman by making her crawl to him with Nina's own crawling to George Michael as an act of resistance to the ableist tendency to refuse to see queer disabled bodies as sexy.

Nina quickly lifts themselves off the floor and into their wheelchair before delivering Edwin theirs. Continuing with her punk lip-synching, Nina moves around the stage and begins to mess things up – swinging bits of hanging set and knocking over props before getting out of their wheelchair and starting the crawling gesture once again, this time full of the "angry-dyke energy" they want to take from the music. "How was it for you to crawl on stage?", Edwin asks when the song ends and Nina has returned to their position lying on the cushions. An image of a seal appears on the screen behind them. Nina replies:

> For a long time crawling was my main way of moving around. I had crutches and I got a wheelchair when I was 6 or 7. But at home I would always crawl around as a kid. To me it was something very natural. The easiest way to move around. And I just gradually realised the connotations that we have with crawling, for example through the behaviour of my family. For example, my parents were uncomfortable with me crawling around when we had visitors. And now I'm doing that in front of our audience, ha! (Criptonite 2020)

Figure 3. Criptonite Slow Animals Nina crawling

In the final moments of this act of the show, Criptonite then go on to address how verticality has been used to produce the category of the properly human in ways that have historically excluded and devalued nonhuman animals and disabled people. Specifically, Nina and Edwin narrate an experience of going to the theatre together to see a piece 'where the performer asked what it is that defines humans… and the person behind responded with "verticality"'. Of course, crawling has been used as a specific gesture within disability activism to seek recognition for the humanity of disabled people and to secure rights accordingly – most famously in 'The Capitol Crawl' in Washington DC in 1990 when disability activists crawled up the steps to pressure congress to pass the 'Americans with Disabilities Act'. The protest is widely framed as using crawling with the intention of illustrating struggle and one of the participants in the protest, Paulette Patterson told reporters at the time: "I want my civil rights. I want to be treated like a human being" (Patterson in Rembis 2019, np). As Mühlemann notes, 'the crawling, also the capitol crawl, is interesting because we (mobility impaired people) often resort to it because a lack of alternatives, and so the barriers are "dehumanizing" us to the point where we HAVE TO crawl' (Mühlemann 2023, n.p.). At the same – according to a logic of 'and, and' rather than either/or - Criptonite's work indicates the multiplicity of crawling as situated in a performative field of power dynamics where intersecting frameworks of ableism and speciesism (as well as colonialism and heteronormativity) operate. Crawling as dehumanizing last resort AND crawling remembered as a 'natural' childhood form of movement prior to the projection of shame AND crawling as an animalizing of the performer, an empathic thinking with movement close to the floor alongside tortoises, seals, snails.

Criptonite are influenced by the work of the US-based painter, writer and activist Sunaura Taylor – particularly her book *Beasts of Burden* (2017), which "makes a compelling case that disability justice and animal rights are intertwined" (Criptonite in Cull Ó Maoilearca and Fitzgerald-Allsopp forthcoming). In her

important book, Taylor argues that:

> We need to crip animal ethics, incorporating a disability politics into the way we think about animals… Justifications for human domination over animals almost always rely on comparing human and animal abilities and traits. We humans are the species with language, with rationality, with complex emotions, with two legs and opposable thumbs. Animals lack these traits and abilities and therefore exist outside of our moral responsibility, which means we can dominate and use them. But isn't it ableist to devalue animals because of what abilities they do or do not have? Such arguments depend upon assumptions of abled human embodiment as well as neurotypical human intelligence… The fact that one of the most ubiquitous arguments people use in support of our continued exploitation of nonhumans is that animals are incapable of a myriad of cognitive processes that humans beings engage in shows the extent to which speciesism uses ableist logics to function (Taylor 2017: 58).

When we talk about the circle of anthropocentrism, we need to ask: *who* is the human that is at the centre? The focus on the human/animal divide can neglect differences and inequalities among humans including in terms of their differing relationships to the performative categories of 'human' and 'animal'. To be human is clearly not simply to belong to a fixed species category. As countless feminist, queer, Black, disability and animal studies thinkers have long since pointed out, humanness is an idea that is constantly being performatively produced – imposed on bodies, according to logics and power relations whereby some are considered more 'human' than others or as not human at all. Take Sylvia Wynter's famous discussion of how the acronymic category 'N.H.I: No Humans Involved', used by public officials of the judicial system, operated as justification for police brutality and the murder of young Black men in inner city Los Angeles in the 1990s, marking out racialized "minorities" as less equal than white Americans, and 'peoples of African and of Afro-mixed descent… [as]

the least equal of all' (Wynter 1994: 1, emphasis original).

In turn, unless we take an intersectional approach to interspecies performance philosophy, the risk is that the argument against anthropocentrism becomes universalizing. Thinkers like the Ko sisters and Taylor, point toward how the human at the centre of anthropocentrism is not a universal "human", but a particular idea of human coded as white, male, rational, non-disabled and/or disembodied subject. Both nonhuman animals and different humans are measured according to a normative human standard or standardized notion of what it means to be 'properly' human in a given context. Social justice literature on how shared logics that place the "white, male subject of Reason" at the centre of values [as the universal human] operate to justify nonhuman animal oppression, ableism and racism. These thinkers are by no means suggesting that racism, speciesism and ableism are crudely "the same"; rather they are emphasising the extent to which they are entangled with and interrelated to one another. The intersectional view emphasises oppressions and liberations as inextricably connected: oppressive values of white supremacy, anthropocentrism and ableism affect all bodies (albeit differently), shaping the lives of both humans and nonhuman animals.

Peter Singer's work on animal ethics has not only been criticised for the anthropocentric reasons I mentioned earlier. He is also a deeply controversial figure in the disability rights movement, including for those working at the intersection of disability and animal rights like Taylor. As Taylor cites, Singer has made numerous offensive statements that devalue the quality of disabled people's lives – not questioning the value of their lives per se, or their right to life, but nevertheless making unevidenced assumptions about the scale and scope for enjoyment and suffering in disabled lives (which points toward the politics of the pleasure aesthetic of Criptonite's practice). But for many, the fundamental issue is that Singer's discussion of disability seems to be underpinned by the medical model in which disability is automatically assumed to be 'negative,

a biological drawback that needs intervention and should be avoided' (Taylor 2017: 129). This stands in contrast to the social model of disability operative in disability justice contexts which emphasises the ways in which it is ableist society which disables certain bodies. It also stands in contrast to the positive *value* of disability − and the lived experience of disability - as a source of difference and creativity: including as insight into and embodiment alternative modes of being founded on relationality, interdependence and care. As Taylor puts it, as well as the painful experience of living in an ableist world, disability is also valued as 'the beautiful potential of living alternative ways of moving through space and of being in time' (ibid.,136) − as enacted by Criptonite's *Slow Animals. Dancing thought otherwise. Thinking dance otherwise.*

Of course, Singer remains a significant figure in the history of the pursuit of animal equality and, as Taylor also discusses, his influential grounding of equality in sentience rather than intelligence had the potential to be 'remarkably anti-ableist' as well as anti-speciesist (Taylor 2017: 128). In Singer's approach to animal equality, the focus is not on rights but on the concept of equal consideration of interests. As he puts it: 'The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment, it requires equal consideration. Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights' (Singer 1975 / 2009: 2). He then argues that equal consideration must be based on sentience rather than cognitive capacity − where sentience alone is considered as the condition for having interests. In turn, Singer insists that we expand the circle of moral consideration to include nonhuman animals rather than continuing to discriminate against them in speciesist ways. But as Taylor and others have noted, inequality reappears as Singer introduces a new circle around the cross-species concept of 'personhood' defined in terms of the 'possession of traits like the capacity to feel and reason, self-awareness and autonomy, and the ability to imagine a future' (Best 2013 quoted in Taylor 2017: 126). According

to this argument, there are nonhuman animals, like the great apes, that can be counted as ‘persons’ and humans that are non-persons or lack full personhood – such as ‘infants and some … intellectually disabled people’ (Taylor 2017: 128).

For Taylor, the capacities that Singer uses to draw boundaries around the circle of personhood are ‘embedded in ableist, neurotypical, and speciesist frameworks’ that fail to attend to alternative, ethically relevant traits ‘rooted in sensuality, in aesthetics, or in alternative temporalities’ (ibid.,132). That is, this conception of personhood places a singular, universalized concept of time at the centre of values that needs to be multiplied and pluralised by both notions of ‘animal time’ and ‘crip time’. As Taylor summarises: ‘Singer suggests that the more cognitively complex a being is, measured by its understanding of death and its sense of itself through time, the more value that being will place on keeping itself alive’ (ibid., 127). But she goes on to argue that ‘It is presumptuous to assume that certain concepts of future and death are the only capacities that can allow individuals [human and nonhuman] to value their lives’ (ibid., 131).

Earlier on, I suggested that performance time is one of the aspects of performance that might be transformed through animalization. In *Interspecies Performance*, my co-editor and I note that: ‘Amongst its many possible durational invitations, interspecies performance might ask human actors to wait, to slow down, for patience - when seemingly ‘nothing’ is ‘happening’ from a human perspective. A recurring observation is that working with nonhumans takes time: it takes longer to get to know each other - years maybe, rather than weeks or months - in ways that put pressure on the human-centred logics of performance production schedules. If ‘understanding what animals say, think and feel requires an “intense familiarity” with them’, then we may need to rethink the temporality of performance-making: from rehearsal processes to research periods’ (Cull Ó Maoilearca and Fitzgerald-Allsopp, forthcoming) But how do we adjust these ideas to take into account that human time itself was always already multiple;

that there is and has always also been crip time – for instance – operating alongside and in relation to other rhythms? As Taylor notes, whilst crip time 'means many things to many people', it broadly 'asks us to think about time as variable and changing with our embodiments' (Taylor 2017: 132). Crip time emphasises that 'time is relative'; 'that we live at different speeds, that our very sense of time is shaped by our experiences and abilities' where disability 'fosters a different sense of pacing, of progress, sometimes even of life span' (ibid). For Taylor, both disability and animality demand a multiplication of notions of temporality: not one time, but many times and speeds:

> If time can change so drastically for those of us for whom mundane tasks such as getting dressed, preparing a meal, or speaking take longer, then how might time be reconceptualized for those who have profound intellectual differences or for the great variety of animals? It is easy to jump from crip time to what we might call animal time – species whose life spans are only a few hours, days, or weeks, for example, certainly must have a different conception of time than those who live for one hundred or two hundred years (ibid.).

I mentioned at the start that one of the circles that has figured in my thinking is Bergson's image of the field of attention as being 'like the interval between two points of a compass' (Bergson 2014: 320) which can be more or less open and closed. Drawing his audience's attention to the unfolding event of his own lecture, Bergson said:

> My present, at this moment, is the sentence I am pronouncing. But it is so because I want to limit the field of my attention to my sentence. This attention is something that can be made longer or shorter, like the interval between two points of a compass ... an attention which could be extended indefinitely would embrace, along with the preceding sentence, all the anterior phrases of the

> lecture and the events which preceded the lecture, and as large a portion of what we call our past as desired. The distinction we make between our present and past is therefore, if not arbitrary, at least relative to the extent of the field which our attention to life can embrace (ibid., 320).

As John Ó Maoilearca (2023) has discussed, this enables a conception and practice of attention as a form of ordinary, 'mental' time travel (Ó Maoilearca 2023: 2). But arguably – in this context - this attentional practice could also be an extension not only to include the past, but to embrace more of the multiplicity of all the lived ways of being in time: crip time and animal time. If structural ableism and anthropocentrism are not just ideas but embodied practices, then one way to break the circle of their endless re-iteration and re-enactment might be according to a practice of "attention training": an opening to the ethical demands of the co-existence of multiple durations, of human and nonhuman life as an assembly of dances happening at difference speeds and rhythms.

V. Coda

What is a circle? How do circles perform? What can they do? Are all circles ultimately neutral? Or how do we account for the difference between or the movement from vicious and non-vicious ones? Can we even speak of virtuous circles? Is circularity inevitable or can some circles be escaped – and which ones? Circles can transform into cycles – as we think of the ouroboros: the ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon eating its own tail which is often interpreted as a symbol for eternal cyclic renewal or a cycle of life, creation out of destruction and life out of death. At least in its Nietzschean formation, this is the ceaseless recurrence of difference, not of the same.

I'm never gonna dance again
I'm never gonna dance again
I'm never gonna dance again
They say: Some snakes, such as rat snakes, have been known to actually consume themselves. "One captive snake attempted to consume itself twice, dying in the second attempt. Another wild rat snake was found having swallowed about two-thirds of its body".

For sure then, circles are polyvalent. Circles become vicious when they occur as self-perpetuating processes which return to their starting points with no improvement from when they began - whether we think of the unilateral determination of dance by philosophy in some standard aesthetics or the anthropocentric assumptions imposed on animals in human knowledge-production. Circles might be seen to become non-vicious or even virtuous in the form of a centrifugal movement that qualitatively expands concepts of performance, philosophy, animals and equality. *To dance a circular movement of reciprocal determination.*

Following Bergson, what matters is *how we practice* the thought of equality, not the concept of equality that we posit. And to repeat Mullarkey: 'We can only understand equality through a performative thought, a movement or vital action rather than an intellectualist representation of it' (Mullarkey 2012: 63). There is no formula for equality; equality must be endlessly performed in and as practice to break the impasse of intellectualist circularity (ibid., 61). Intersectional interspecies performance − including Criptonite's disabled dance thinking with animals − is one site in which this practice of equality is happening. Breaking the circle; dancing thinking and thinking with dance; performing a new politics of animal and disability justice.

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초록

원 안에서: 퍼포먼스. 철학. 동물. 평등

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본고는 공연, 철학, 동물 그리고 평등 사이의 관계에 대해 마치 원의 형상을 따라 춤을 추듯이 사유해본다. 이는 존재론적, 인식론적, 미학적, 정치적, 윤리적 질문으로도 이해되는 평등의 문제와 비인간 동물과의 관계를 춤으로서 사유하고, 사유로서 춤을 추는 것이라고도 할 수 있다. 본고는 이러한 평등의 실천이 이루어지는 현장으로서 종간 교차 퍼포먼스를 제안하며 종간 공연은 크게 세가지 방식으로 공연을 동물화 하는 것을 보여준다: 첫째, 동물과의 만남은 공연의 개념 자체를 변형시킬 수 있다. 둘째, '동물을 위한 공연'을 만들면서, 종간 공연은 관람과 관객이라는 규범적 개념을 동물화 한다. 셋째, 인간 공연자가 다양한 방식의 동물화, 혼종화 하는 방식을 통해서 이루어질 수 있다. 본고는 흑인 채식주의(Black vegan)와 장애의 정의에 관한 문헌을 바탕으로 취리히에 기반을 둔 퀴어 장애예술단체 'Criptonite'가 2020년에 선보인 무용극 "Slow Animals" 작품에서, 느리고 바닥을 기어가는 것과 같은 동작을 통해 장애인의 신체와 동물화의 억압과 해방의 역학을 탐구한다.

키워드: 종간 퍼포먼스, 동물, 공연철학, 춤, 장애정의, 교차성, 비인간화, 평등, 인간중심주의

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