

THE ANIMAL AND THE NEGATIVE: HEIDEGGER, AGAMBEN AND THE RELATION OF LANGUAGE AND DEATH

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Abstract

The text examines Heidegger's remarks concerning the «essential» yet «unthought» relation of language and death through Giorgio Agamben's readings of Heidegger in *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* and *The Open: Man and Animal*. In the discussion of the possibility of this relation, Heidegger describes the animal as that lacking language and death, thereby intimating that the latter may be read in terms of a certain condition for the assignment of language and death to Dasein. If, as Agamben draws from Heidegger, language and death are indicators of a negativity that already «permeates» Dasein, what role may the animal play in this negativity, considering that the withholding of the animal from the experience of language and death may asseverate the relation as such? Connecting Agamben's readings of Heidegger's account of the animal and the unthought relation of language and death, the text suggests that the separation of man and animal discloses something to the effect of an inconsistency within what Heidegger posits as the shared corporeality of man and animal, an inconsistency that evinces this more primordial negativity in terms of a negativity intrinsic to the corporeal itself, viz., a negativity which may be posited beyond any anthropomorphism.

Keywords: language, death, the animal, Heidegger, Agamben.

1.

The relation of language and death given by Heidegger is immediately incisive in its heteroclitic description. Derrida will note that Heidegger's remark holds one «in suspense»¹; Calarco contends, following Derrida, that Heidegger «does not further authorize himself to explicitly say what the essential relation between language and death is»²; forthwith is the withdrawal from the essay towards an acuity. This is a withdrawal that Heidegger unequivocally suggests; thus, perhaps the remark can be said to function initially according to the force of its motif:

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«Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either. The essential relation between death and language flashes before us, but remains still unthought. It can, however, beckon us toward the way in which the nature of language draws us into its concern, and so relates us to itself, in case death belongs together with what reaches out for us, touches us».³

Insofar as language and death are aligned according to a provisional form of relation, a fracture persists in the place of a hypostatization of the latter, evinced in language and death's momentariness and its postliminary comportment towards thought denoted by a privative that is the unthought; the obliqueness of the remark turning on the layered motifs of an incomplete relation of language and death, and how thought is then related to language and death in terms of an absence, as the remainder of this unthought.

The thinking of this incompleteness is thus either an imperative towards the completion of the relation; or, to the degree that the relation remains unthought, the status of the unthought is not that of the demarcation of a to-be-thought which intimates some excision of the privative, but rather Heidegger's intent here being that the thinking of the relation carries only in a certain anomalous, truncated instant – the relation then vanishes, it predicates an inconsistency and language and death separate themselves from any hypostatization – although Heidegger structures language and death according to the plausible relation, the latter is given in terms of the endurance of the unthought. To read the fragment from a perspective of the privative of thought is intimated in the transition Heidegger makes after the initial remark. The notion of unthought shifts to that of a «beckoning»: Heidegger's transition will run from the dissipation of the relation towards the identification of death and language as elements that are to indicate Dasein's concerning and belonging, a *negativity* to both concern and belonging, alluded to in the incompleteness of the relation and the form of the unthought. In the presence of this negativity that will exclude a completed relation of language and death, the alternative circumscription is that of the manner in which a consistent caesura regarding language and death will provisionally delimit the notions of belonging and concern, i.e., a lack constitutive of belonging and concern. In other words, in that the relation is conceded as a glimpse, it is conceded as a non-relation, the latter articulating the concern and belonging of Dasein itself.

Agamben in his *Language and Death: A Seminar on the Place of Negativity* takes up the privation Heidegger gives as the unthought relation of language and death, appropriating language and death to develop a dwelling, a site and, with an etymological commitment, an ethos of the negative. As Heidegger's unthought language and death collapses into the motifs of concern and belonging, Agamben's title reads as a formula wherein the language and death conjunction cedes to the notion of a place of negativity. Agamben's interpretation of language and death is organized according to the persistence and primordially of this negative

site, in that the *Blick* of language and death's relation, its very irregularity is manifested through the invariance of this site – the underlying inconsistency of the representation of language and death is to be understood as a consistent representation of the negative, viz., the proposal of the language and death relation/non-relation is derivative of the belongingness to a place of negativity that is the authentic site of Dasein:

«Both the faculty for language and the faculty for death, inasmuch as they open for humanity the most proper dwelling place, reveal and disclose this same dwelling place as always already permeated by and founded in negativity».⁴

Language and death's incompleteness is to suggest a completion of Dasein in the form of the identification of its site: they will act for Agamben as symptoms of the negativity of this site, a negativity that segregates Dasein within the contours of an authentic site. To the extent that language and death are exclusive to Dasein, they are merely representations of this negativity to which Dasein is both belonging and concerned.

Thus, for both Heidegger and Agamben there is an apparent subversion of any originary primordially to language and death. The proposed significance of language and death is rather one where the dyad functions as the derivation of this subtending *X*, in that an account of Dasein is suggested wherein language and death are not the grounding terms, but rather corollaries of the true negative ground, as Agamben phrases it the «groundlessness», following Heidegger, «the placeholder of nothingness». Language and death will re-mark the initial place of negativity, this initial segregation of Dasein; they will index this more primordial concern as a site constituted by a negativity. Yet if language and death are mere indicators of this negativity, the index of a concern and belonging, what is this negativity in itself? How does language and death emerge as ulterior to these motifs, that is, through their relation and its incompleteness function as the disclosure of a *sine qua non* negativity?

Agamben has approached the problematic in his text through a diverse arrangement: a grammatical investigation of the significance of the *Da* in Heideggerian Dasein, i. e. *Da* essentially as a privative which functions as revealing a negativity *vis-à-vis* Being, an encounter with the thought of Hegel, and a meditation on the voice as the demarcation of absence. The necessity of this disparity precipitates from Agamben's description of the problem as representative of an «outer limit» to Heidegger's thought, a negativity that, for Agamben, Heideggerian ontology cannot account for. An attempt to follow the initial remark of Heidegger will lead to this limit, viz., in the reading of the unthought as coextensive to a limit, the problem's development is to require these disparate forms qua response. Yet perhaps a reading of this negativity that would remain within the Heideggerian space, that would in turn develop this «outer limit», lies in the persistence of the privative of the unthought of language and death, and the latter's status qua relation incomplete: a thesis stating that the transitions from the irregularity of language and death

to concern and belonging (in Heidegger), to the «ownmost dwelling» and the «place of negativity» (in Agamben), are indicative of a critical, anterior delineation which Heidegger makes in his remark, a delineation that initially enables the context for the language and death relation/non-relation to be exhorted. To take Agamben's rubric(s) of the ownmost dwelling and the place of negativity, irrespective of the content of this site, the notations here function as the inscription of an acute site; what occurs is a localization of the negative, a localization of Dasein itself, and therefore, inherent to the localization, a separation. This notion of separation is what is to be taken as apposite here, as Agamben's separation is consistent with the separation that engenders Heidegger's reflection on the possibility of the relation of language and death. The separation drawn by Heidegger is between man and animal: the animal will be withheld from language and death, and thus language and death as some dyad of essential relation precipitates from this introduction of the animal as separate from the former.

Derrida's reading in *Aporias*, as Calarco has noted, is concerned with precisely the notion of separations («borders» in Derrida's terminology) vis-à-vis the essential relation of language and death, coupled with the acute separation of the animal as decisive to these borders. Although Agamben's text predates Derrida's reading, the animal is not posited within *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* at any length with a view to this separation. Nevertheless, insofar as Agamben does employ the notion of a site, there is an awareness of the significance of this separation. To develop Agamben's reading of the relation of language and death in consistency with the possible significance of the animal however, this will require a linking of *Language and Death* with his reading of the animal in the text *The Open: Man and Animal*. It is the linking of Agamben's two respective readings of Heidegger that, we are to suggest, provides the initial theoretical material for a possible development of the notion of this negativity primordial to language and death, which Agamben has posited in the earlier monograph as representing an «outer limit» to Heidegger's thought.

2.

To return to Heidegger's remark, the acute terms of the separation that engenders language and death are posited as the experiencing of death as death. The transition demarcated by the «as» suggests the intercalation of a linguistic dimension that allows death to appear as death. There is a splitting of death via the «as»; this split will indicate Dasein's experience of death. Insofar as the animal's experience of death is that lacking the «as», the animal, as the living without the «as» designates the obverse to the thinking of the relation of death and language, in that it is identified in terms of it being without language and without death. The animal is here utilized by Heidegger to elucidate the presence of this «as», to «beckon» the formulation of Dasein's experience of death as death – a measured lack of the animal is mobilized to dedicate lan-

guage and death to Dasein. Accordingly, in the giving of death as death which for Agamben is to index the site of the negative, the function of the separation of man and animal operates as a symmetrical «as» within the series: the animal's exclusion from language and death gives the latter as language and death, it gives the site as such, and allows the possible assignment to a site congeneric with this method of a separation. That is, the possibility of the(se) site(s) emerge(s) *as* an exclusion in the participation in this site by the animal, or inversely, Dasein *as* excluded from the site of the animal according to the preliminary identification of language and death. The suggestion of this anteriority of the animal provokes the question of its surfacing here: in what sense is the separation of man-animal through language and death the necessary condition to any development of this relation, in that the consistency of this relation is to assert itself over against the phenomenon of the animal – if language and death are essentially tangential and derivative negativities of the place of the negative, will the separation of man and animal indicate the negative ground(lessness) of language and death as such?

According to its brief citation, the animal functions as the most obscure term in the fragment; yet concomitantly the most lucid, in that its status is clearly given, as opposed to the obscurity of language and death, the obscurity of concern and belonging. The series of privations that traverse this denotation of Dasein bears a contrast with the perceived positivity of the animal, what appears to be the clear denotation of what constitutes the animal, i. e. that its constitution is the fulcrum from which positions to and with language and death can be established. The denotation of Dasein relies implicitly on this consistency of the animal – the method being that of the addition of motifs of language and death to the animal that will in turn admeasure Dasein as such; the addition of motifs from the base term animal will inculcate the negativity of Dasein, to engender an affirmation of Dasein. In this case, the qualitative observance that the addition to the animal is that of the «faculties of the negative» (i. e. a certain posited lack *vis-à-vis* the animal that cedes language and death), this observation does not subvert the problem of the consistency of the animal allowing for the separation of language and death from the animal. Heidegger's persistent opposition to the classical metaphysical denotation of man as *animal rationale* is in a sense the problem mimicked here: the supplementary solution to the problem presupposes this very consistency, and undermines the function of the «as», indicating that the animal operates in the description of Dasein as a putative invariant, a generative matrix, despite the positing of the animal ascribed only in terms of privatives. Moreover, the animal, according to this privative status, denotes an absence itself – the form of the animal effaces itself of all contents to give the content of Dasein – in this account, *Dasein is denoted as Dasein, only through the vitiating of the animal*. The perceived theoretical impasse in the supplement is thus the putative affirmation of some consistency to the animal from which the supplement can then function; however, in this presupposition, the animal, in its construed absence of any qualitative denotation,

is suggested as a possible location of emptiness, of negativity. The relation of death and language is revealed in the mise-en-scene of the empty place of the animal, a figure (non)constituted by an absence that is a pure negative identity in opposition to the negative, yet qualitative, assertion of language and death, and as such belies the terms of the initial appellation.

Insofar as Heidegger seeks to construe Dasein without the motif of a supplement, therein giving language and death as the unthought privation, as the absence – that is, without the aggregation of the syntagm language and death to Dasein as the demarcation of the gap between the animal and Dasein – the force of the account hinges on a certain disclosure of the animal, wherein Dasein is not developed as agnate to the animal's (mis)perceived consistency, but rather the animal, in its exclusion from a site through the identification of a distinct form of privation which constitutes it, indicates a symmetrical inconsistency within the parameters of its own site. Heidegger's vitiation of the animal through death and language will function as the aperture towards its own development. That is, a first concern: is the animal to be located in its own proper site, its own site of the negative?; secondly: if this thought is licit, does the animal's exclusion from language and death reveal a site of the negative which is more primordial than language and death, which is not initiated by language and death (i. e. the absence of language and death), but rather manifests the lack of language and death in the same manner as which language and death are to intercalate Dasein's negativity? The possibility of this separation would require an inconsistency of the animal, i. e. its negativity – the absence of language and death to the animal will be developed in congruency to this negativity, the introduction of the non-relation to the animal, the privation of the animal. When Heidegger separates the animal from language and death, when he denotes the animal coextensively with its lack, the motive here appears precisely this: to avoid the thought of Dasein as the supplement to any putative content of the animal. And in this same gesture, as Heidegger separates the animal from language and death, he illustrates the animal in terms of a privation, of a concern and belonging intrinsic to the animal – he maintains the possibility of negativity to the site of the animal itself.

Although within *Language and Death: The Place of the Negative*, the animal is not treated extensively, Agamben does cite a passage where Heidegger brings to the fore the problem of the obscurity of the animal:

«Of all entities, the living being [das Lebewesen] is the most difficult for us to conceive since, on the one hand it is strictly linked with us, in a certain sense; on the other hand, however, it is also separated from our ek-sisting essence by an abyss. In comparison, it might seem that the divine essence is closer to us than the impenetrability of the living being, close in terms of an essential distance, which, as distance, is however more familiar to our ek-sisting essence than the almost inconceivable and abysmal corporeal link we share with the animal. Since plants and animals are always already held in their environment [Umgebung], but never

freely placed in the clearing [Lichtung] of Being – and this alone constitutes “world” – for this reason, they lack language. But they do not remain suspended without world in their environment, since language is denied to them. Rather, in this word “environment” the whole enigma of the living being is concentrated. In its essence, language is neither the manifestation of an organism nor the expressions of a living being. Therefore, it never allows itself to be conceived by any means that is adequate to its essence, not on the basis of its sign-character [Zeichencharakter] nor, perhaps, even on the basis of its signifying character [Bedeutungscharakter]. Language is the clarifying-obfuscating advent of Being itself».⁵

In this fragment, Heidegger will inverse the traditional onto-theological vector: over against the metaphysical question of the «divine essence», the living corporeality, the onticity shared by Dasein and the animal, articulates the impasse for thought *par excellence*; the metaphysical question can be read immediately as inferior to a question of physis. In this inversal, the account of the animal ascribes to the latter a qualitative negativity, as again the animal is construed through a series of lacks – a lack of the clearing of Being, a lacking in world, a lack of language, etc. In the sense that the relation of man-animal is thought according to a relation as such, the animal is given only through these gaps, however with the concession of its onticity, the animal bears a continuity to Dasein. In this continuity is therefore the introduction of the theoretical problem of the separation itself, i.e., the nascent predicate of the relation. Since for Heidegger there is something to the phenomenon of distance which is intimate to Dasein, the apparent lack of a distance evinced in the perceived shared corporeality introduces a more profound, more disturbing variant of distance and of segregation: Although there is a distance, this distance is groundless, viz., insofar as the divine essence is groundless in its lacking of an onticity, the separation drawn between the animal and Dasein is a more radicalized groundlessness, in the positing of this separation on the plane of a pure onticity, of a pure ground. The abysmal link that is the groundlessness of this ground suggests the paradoxical status of the ontic; an intuited separation within the ontic consistency of the animal and Dasein that becomes an «abysmal link» according to the paradoxical nature of such a separation. Heidegger will thus describe a lacuna in corporeality, despite the very corporeal continuity of Dasein-animal. The terms of this gesture may be read as a separation of corporeality from itself, intended for the ascriptions of the respective sites of Dasein and the animal. The inference of a lacunar quality to the corporeal will be Heidegger's condition for the identification of the animal site, the *Umgebung*, as the source of this ambiguity, the inscription of a site of the animal: The designation of *Umgebung* as the particular site of the animal asserts the distance, and thus, obscurity of the animal. The implicit imperative here is that the thinking of the animal lies in the research of its own site, where here site is only the equivalent for its own series of segregations and privatives, its own consistent place of negativity.

Agamben responds to this imperative in a footnote:

«In the word *Umgebung* (the circumscription, the inscription all around) we should hear the verb *geben*, which is, for Heidegger, the only appropriate verb for Being: *es gibt Sein*, Being is given. That which “is given” around the animal is Being. The animal is circumscribed by Being; but precisely for this reason, he is always already held in this “giving”. He does not interrupt it, he can never experience ... the taking place of Being and language. On the other hand, man ... in language he experiences the advent (*Ankunft*) of Being. This Heideggerian passage engages in an intimate dialogue with the eighth *Duino Elegy* of Rilke, and the two should be read together. Here man, who sees only “World”, is contrasted with the animal “who looks into the Open with all of his eyes”; and while for the animal Being is “infinite” and “misunderstood”, and dwells in a “No-place without a not” (*Nirgends ohne nicht*), man can only “be face to face” in a “Destiny”».⁶

The linking of Being and the interruption via Rilke is Agamben’s critical premise, elaborating the apparent corporeal discontinuity Heidegger draws from the separation of *Dasein* and the animal: Agamben will develop Heidegger’s reading of *Umgebung* as the reference to a particular location where Being exists in an utter consistency with the animal. There is no experiencing of Being as such; there is no experiencing of interruptions: the lack of the interruption of the *Umgebung* is posited as the animal given by Being in oblivion of Being. What is perceived from the *Umgebung* is Being as infinite, Being without language, without the «not», and thus, introduces the notion of a suspension of the animal within the *Umgebung* through Being. The suspension, this «circumscription» will bar an inconsistency to its site. Nevertheless, the account is still indicative of a negativity inherent to the animal: the *Umgebung* is a «No-place without a not», a privation of the place, that is, a place lacking the privation itself. For Agamben, following Rilke, this is a negative infinity in the absence of this «not» – a negativity that hints at the primordial negativity to be grasped *pace* language and death – according to the segregation to the site of the *Umgebung* does the animal remain separated from language and death, not *vice versa*: rather, in the animal’s experience of this negative (i.e., the abysmal link without language and death and without the caesura of this suspension), the animal is described as *being* in the very limit of the *Umgebung*. Without the introduction of an inconsistency, the negativity is not disclosed to the animal, as this limit and boundary itself is withheld from the animal. Perhaps what Agamben develops in this footnote is the following provisional thesis: that only in Being’s inconsistency does the *Umgebung* become subverted – i. e. Heidegger’s «clarifying-obfuscated advent of Being» – the negative infinity of the *Umgebung* is transversed by *Dasein* via the site of a negative finitude, essentially death and language working in concert to bring forth the motif of the negative finitude of the site of *Dasein* in juxtaposition to the negative infinity of the animal. The transgression of this *Umgebung*, the transgression of the consistency of

Being according to a shift wherein Being is no longer a negative infinity, an infinity whose negativity receives the nomination of the lack of the privation, would demarcate a segregation that is the abysmal corporeal link, giving the corporeal as such to the corporeal, and consequently some anthropological-intuitive experiencing of being (as being) in terms of finitude and interruption.

3.

The location of Agamben's continuation of this thought may be found in his *The Open: Man and Animal*, appearing in publication some fifteen years after the seminar *Language and Death*. In the former text, Agamben is occupied with an analysis of the separation animal and man, the return to an examination of Heidegger's research of the animal, and hence the possible sites delineated and segregated by the term *Umgebung*: what is this site of the animal, and how does the separation of *Dasein* and the animal function in the possible identification of their respective sites, of *Dasein* as such, of the animal as such?

One of Agamben's strategies in the text is a development of the Heideggerian *Umgebung* in terms of continuity to the work of the zoologist Jakob von Uexkuell. This continuity to Uexkuell is inspired by Heidegger: Agamben provides a reading of Heidegger's seminar of 1929–30 at Freiburg entitled *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt-Endlichkeit-Einsamkeit*, where Heidegger presents an elaboration of Uexkuell's conceptual schemata. Agamben cites Heidegger's remark that Uexkuell's research is «the most fruitful thing that philosophy can adopt from the biology dominant today»⁷, with his addition that «[Uexkuell's] influence on the concepts and terminology of [Heidegger] is even greater than Heidegger himself recognizes»⁸. The key terms subtending Agamben's reading are collated from Heidegger's commentary on *Umgebung* and *Umwelt*, the latter being Uexkuell's term for the animal's environment. Uexkuell's theoretical problematic is most germane in this space – it is precisely that of the problem of the description of the animal site(s) without the intrusion of anthropomorphism – he is to accomplish this through a distinctive account of the animal environment:

1. An *Umwelt* forms a homogeneous, «harmonious» space. The *Umwelt* consists of «carriers of significance» (*Bedeutungstraeger*) / «marks» (*Merkmaltraeger*). This is a finite series of elements with which the animal interacts, therefore the space of an *Umwelt* can be ascertained through the identification of these marks, essentially the limits and frontiers of a particular *Umwelt*: the space of the animal's behaviour qua suspension that is the *Umwelt*.

2. The particular animal itself is designed with what Uexkuell terms a «unity» to the elements of the *Umwelt*, its own corporeal, organic structure fitted to engage the marks: the *Merkorgan*, the perception of the mark, and the affect of the mark, *Wirkorgan*. As such, in its very corporeality, the animal exists in a consistency with this *Umwelt*: its form is coextensive to the elemental «syntax» constituting the *Umwelt*.

3. This unity leads Agamben following Uexkuell to remark: «it is impossible to say how two such heterogeneous elements could ever be so intimately connected»⁹, viz., the animal and an element within its Umwelt. The difference in the forms of the elements of a given Umwelt are radical; however, since the heterogeneous elements are linked, essentially designed one for the other to comprise the space of the Umwelt, in this very corporeal heterogeneity of the elements there is the introduction of the lack of a heterogeneity (that the Umwelt is exhorted as such, the question of its structure displaces the question of its genesis). There is not the designation of any structural relation according to individual animals and the signs they respond to, but instead the pure phenomenon of the oneness of the Umwelt – i. e. that an Umwelt, in the diversity of its contents, subtracts itself from a diversity of potential – Uexkuell’s formula: «It is impossible for animal to enter into a relation with an object». That is, in spite of the unity of the Umwelt, its perceived homogeneity, there is a lack which is present, a lack of the possibility of a relation to an object – the homogeneity of the space of the Umwelt is that of an overall function, which in terms of the heterogeneity of the elements involved in the Umwelt, refuses to yield the aperture for any heterogeneity, as the animal and its elements are unrelated, but nevertheless bound – the structural oneness of the Umwelt, despite its disparate composite elements, will exclude the phenomenon of the relation according to its radical singularity.

This latter thesis recapitulates the problem Heidegger had discerned as the inconsistency of the corporeal in terms of the gap between the body of man and the body of the animal: the animal can not be taken into a relation with an element in its environment as the heterogeneity of the element discloses nothing within itself that gives it as an element to which the animal is to be open to a relation to. Rather, the animal is merely taken in by the situation, which in this very takenness illustrates the phenomenon of the environment qua radical singularity: the elements themselves are essentially instances of supplement. That is, the circumscription itself, *pace* the supplements, will asseverate the essence of the environment – as Heidegger phrases it «[the animal’s] being in relation with it cannot properly be defined as a true relationship, as a having to do with»¹⁰¹¹ – the animal is rather subject to what Heidegger terms a captivation (*Benommenheit*), its behaviour restricted to the elements composing the environment thereby signifying a determination by the very phenomenon of the captivation, by the radical singularity of the environment as opposed to any random element given in an environment:

«Captivation is the condition of possibility for the fact that, in accordance with its essence, the animal behaves within an environment but never within a world».¹²

The critical inclination of Heidegger’s treatment is that of the purely ontological concern with the animal: it is denotative of a shift of the analysis away from the research of a particular environment (Uexkuell)

and towards the problematic of what evinces an environment as such, the structure of this site of the animal appearing as a site intrinsic to the animal. The condition of the discernment of the animal's site does not lie merely in the gathered contents of the animal and the elements composing its environment in itself, but moreover in the structuring effect of the environment, the captivation that gathers the elements in the perceived consistency. It is this captivation that holds the animal within its site, which, in consequence, is its coetaneous barring from the experience of Dasein, i. e. worldliness, the perceived location of Dasein itself.

To develop this phenomenon of captivation Heidegger refers to an experiment conducted by Uexkuell: the particular captivation at work in the environment of the bee. Let us take Agamben's introduction of the experiment and then his citation of Heidegger's commentary:

«For a vivid example of captivation, which can never open itself to a world, Heidegger refers to the experiment ... in which a bee is placed in front of a cup full of honey in a laboratory. If, once it has begun to suck, the bee's abdomen is cut away, it will continue happily to suck while the honey visibly streams out of its open abdomen.

This shows convincingly that the bee by no means recognizes the presence of too much honey. It recognizes neither this nor even – though this would be expected to touch it more closely – the absence of its abdomen. There is no question of it recognizing any of this; it continues its instinctual activity [Trieben] regardless, precisely because it does not recognize that plenty of honey is still present. Rather, the bee is simply taken [hingenommen] by the food. This being taken is only possible where there is an instinctive “toward”. Yet this being taken in such drivenness also excludes the possibility of any recognition of any being-present-at-hand. It is precisely being taken by its food that prevents the animal from taking up a position over and against this food».¹³

The function of the captivation is double: It evokes a radical singularity in that a lucid elemental content can be identified as denoting an environment, in this case the elements of the bee and the honey, wherein the bee as captivated by the honey is the inference of a unity; yet is also introduces an emptiness vis-à-vis the captivation in the form of an exclusion, the barring of a privative to the environment, the alien phenomenon, here that of the laceration of the bee itself. There is the absence of the interruption of the captivation; various possibilities of the abjuration are removed. In this perceived consistency of the environment, the phenomenon which thusly becomes absent in the environment, not as the absence of a presence, the absence of an onticity, but rather the absence of any function¹⁴ as determined by the captivation is the possibility of the dehiscence of this environment, viz., the captivation is evinced through the exclusion of an interruption of its space. The laceration, despite its very ontic «realness», is absent to the bee in the endurance of the captivating consistency of its site, as there is the lack of any elemental function within the defined environment to be attributed to

the laceration. The captivation will thus introduce a phenomenon which demarcates negativity in its profound nothingness vis-à-vis the environment: to the extent that the laceration is directed against the bee itself, it continues its suckling through its being given over to the captivation, as overwhelmed by the delineation of the space of the environment. As Heidegger notes, the quantitative character of the element (here the question of the amount of honey) is irrelevant to the behaviour of the animal: the latter is rather wholly determined by its environment, by the behaviour forced by the captivation itself. The onticity in the form of the laceration is a vitiated gesture to the animal, the perceived trauma to the body of the animal is absent, when it is simply seized by the composition of its site – the environment bars the aperture that is its own effacement. Thus, to think the environment is to exclude the perceived consistency of the ontic (a being outside of the radical singularity) according to the captivation's expression of limit: a negativity posited according to the exclusion of this consistency of a corporeal body to inscribe itself within a given environment: *the environment denotes an abysmal link between the animal and that outside its environment*. Not only is there a discerned abysmal link between man and animal, but Uexkull's experiment demonstrates *the possibility of an abysmal link between the animal and that which is not a part of its environment*. Accordingly, what is immediate here is a possibility of this abysmal link as not merely attributed to some intuitive anthropocentrism, insofar as the environment *prima facie* evinces this same link.

Insofar as there is a shared abysmal link between man and animal, the difference between the two will be posited in terms of the respective *being* of man and animal *vis-à-vis* this abysmal link: viz., how this abysmal link ontologizes man and animal will separate man and animal, delineating the possibilities of their respective sites. For Heidegger, in the sense that the animal's behaviour is a mode of being, the particular impossibility apposite to the animal, the negativity of its own site, is intimately linked with Being. However, the privation of the wound will suggest Being is to a degree absent from this site, a site devoid of the particular incident of the experience of being as being. Heidegger will describe the animal's experience of Being as a case of Being abjuring itself from the animal through this captivation:

«The captivation of the animal characterizes the specific manner of being in which the animal relates itself to something else even while the possibility is withheld from it – or is taken away from the animal, as we might also say – of comporting and relating itself to something else as such and such at all, as something present at hand, as a being».¹⁵

Insofar as the animal behaves with the elements in its environment, the animal can be said to participate in a quasi-relational form; however inasmuch as this quasi-relation is delimited by the captivation over against the contents of the environment, that a content outside of the environment is essentially a nothing – that there is nothing outside the radical singularity – the animal is suspended in Being, in the notated

captivation. The inscription of Being will remain vitiated, coextensive to the presence of captivation – the Being of the environment will be the force of Being's withdrawal. As such, the designation wherein Being engenders the environment in its absence evokes a negativity of Being which intersects the animal's environment. Agamben will abstract this phenomenon as follows:

«If the animal is captivated, it is because this possibility (of Being) has been radically taken away from it ... (Being) thus introduced ... into the animal's environment negatively – through its withholding».¹⁶

The circumscription of the environment is affirmed by the absence of Being; yet despite this negativity, there is still an introduction of Being, its negative introduction according to its withdrawal; therefore, in this negative introduction the behaviour of the captivation is not a pure nothingness, as Heidegger stresses:

«If behavior is not a relation to beings, does this mean that it is a relation to the nothing? No! Yet if it not a relation to the nothing, then it must be a relation to something, which surely must itself be and actually is. Certainly – but the question is precisely whether behaviour is not a relation to».¹⁷

The absence of the relation will not denote a relation to nothing, as the corporeal presence, the onticity, is precisely not a nothing. In light of Heidegger's identification of the animal's lack of the relation, Agamben will recapitulate Heidegger's remark to preserve the negative introduction of Being to the animal with the animal's evident corporeality and its participation in the captivation of the environment; the animal's behaviour is to be notated as a non-relation:

«For the animal, beings are open but not accessible; that is to say, they are open in an inaccessibility and an opacity, that is, in some way, in a non-relation».¹⁸

That Being is withheld from the animal according to the radical singularity of its environment will identify that the animal exists in its captivation in oblivion to the instance of relation: the non-relation as the lack of the experiencing of the dehiscence of the environment, is to describe the specific negativity intrinsic to the animal – the animal is to be defined as a non-relation to the relation, *as a privative vis-à-vis the privative itself*. What Agamben has alluded to as the negative infinity of the animal's comportment qua suspension is this very tautology given in the non-relation to the relation, the animal's absence of the absence as an absence of Being in the withholding of Being through the withholding of the lack. The captivation that is the radical singularity of an environment, as Uexkuell had already indicated, is still to introduce a particular negativity in the absence of this privative – insofar as the animal is not given over to experiencing the laceration of its body when captivated, it is as estranged from its apparent corporeal oneness as from Being it-

self – to the extent that it is estranged from a relation through the radical singularity of the environment, it is estranged from Being.

In turn, the possibility of the interruption will rudimentarily asseverate something to the effect of an experiencing of being as being. As the captivation denotes Being as consistent with an absence, the privative of the environment which evinces the suspension of captivation is the aperture of the experiencing of being as being – the possibility of this suspension of captivation via the interruption as opposed to captivation itself intimates this possibility, inasmuch as there exists the possibility of the relation in this interruption, a relation which is the index of the privative itself – the positing of the privative within the ontic as the dehiscence, or an excessive phenomenon over against the environment with which the animal does not comport itself towards. The non-relation is the withholding of the aleatory quality of the captivation qua radical singularity (the absence of the absence), whilst the relation is a mode of being that is not only separated from the particular environment, but moreover describes the extent of its limit through its identification of the privative in the environment. Therefore, what is at stake here is *two different arrangements of a singular negativity*: whilst the particular site attributed to Dasein (i. e. the privative that indicates the lack in the environment) will admeasure the privative of the environment as such, the site of Dasein is structured from the very privative the animal lacks. The negativity arranged according to the relation will suggest that Being qua absence, viz., the withholding of the absence within onticity, is to describe the absence particular to the environment, viz., if for the animal there is a non-relation to the relation, with Dasein this syntagm is inverted: *a relation to the non-relation*. Dasein's relation is to be posited from the privative of a space towards the space itself – the corporeal and the series of privations in the corporeal, these abyssal links which evince a negativity to the ontic, insofar as the ontic "consistency", both because and despite of its paradoxical inconsistency qua «abyssal link» (i. e. this apparent separation of man and animal; this dehiscence and its non-impression: the bee and its separation from the laceration to its own body) gives this radical singularity of the non-relation and the particular negativity it describes – the notion of a more primordial negativity is posited in terms of an abyssal link that describes the ontic itself.

4. Conclusion

From this reading of Agamben's treatment of Heidegger in *The Open: Man and Animal*, it is now possible to briefly assert a provisional continuity with the initial question of death and language. If a possible denotation of Dasein is the relation to the non-relation, the critical significance in the Heideggerian ontology ascribed to death is most apposite, as in *Sein und Zeit*, death, as that to which Dasein is to relate to for the disclosure of its authenticity, is notated as the non-relation: «Dasein's ownmost possibility – non-relational, certain, and as such indefinite, insurmountable, not to be outstripped».¹⁹ This finitude qua

death, the purely real limit of the absence of Dasein itself, determines Dasein's possibility: the authenticity of Dasein rests in a Being-towards-death which is an authenticity towards the inexorability of this limit, of the *Real* of the non-relation – viz., Being-towards-death denotes Dasein's relation to its own environmentality.²⁰ Dasein will thus find its ownmost dwelling in relating itself to the non-relation that is through language towards death: that Dasein is towards death, signifies that it is towards the non-relation, its constitution an «anticipation» of the non-relation and the dissolutions inspired by the non-relation. This anticipation thus takes the form of death as death, a relation, rather than death itself, which is death in «the radically singular», that is, the non-relation.²¹ The authentic thinking of relation will lie in the situating of the relational thinking through the passing of a limit of non-relation that negates any instance of the relation; as the locus of Dasein's authenticity, the terminus of the non-relation is to indicate the fundamental structure through which all relation, belonging and concerning is posited. In consequence, *language and death's ascribed negativity becomes derivative of death itself, of the negativity of the non-relation*. Insofar as death is the relation to the non-relation, the syntagm will evince the negative environmentality of Dasein as intercalating its *Jemeinigkeit*, or its «ownmost» dwelling. This negativity would serve as the possibility of Dasein *vis-à-vis* its site, and as such is the negative ground, the utter groundlessness of this site:

1. Insofar as Dasein exists in this absence of the captivation, in this no-place-with-no (as opposed to the animal's no-place-without-no), this site remains coextensive to a plausible radicality of thought (ontology) that is preliminarily identified with language and death (as death). Nevertheless, this site remains constituted by the relation to the non-relation, thus this relation is posited as determined «in the last instance» by the negativity of the non-relation, of environmentality, the heteronomous residue of an absence: Being here functioning as the conceptual nomination for the privation of the non-relation itself, a nomination for the abysmal link, viz., a nomination for the privation within corporeality, within environmentality, within the ontic.

2. And perhaps the turn away from purely anthropic readings of Heidegger lies in the notion of non-relationality as condition for anthropic relationality: the separation of man and animal understood as variations of an invariant negativity, thus belying a rigorous anthropic schism between the two, is a premise of this possible organon.

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- ⁴ Agamben G. *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*. Trans. K. Pinkus. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1982. P. Xii.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 54.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 64.
- ⁷ Agamben G. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Trans. K. Attell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004. P. 51.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 51.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 41.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 52.
- ¹¹ As we are utilizing Agamben's reading of Heidegger, we have cited Agamben's citations of Heidegger. All original Heidegger citations are to be found in the aforementioned *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*.
- ¹² Agamben G. *The Open: Man and Animal...* P. 52.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 52.
- ¹⁴ Possibly phrased, following the school of biosemiotics of which Uexkuell is one of the founding inspirations, a semiotic function: the wound is an unintelligible sign and thus must be viewed as having no ontological status for the bee's environment.
- ¹⁵ Agamben G. *The Open: Man and Animal...* P. 53.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 55.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Heidegger M. *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962. P. 195.
- ²⁰ A nascent corollary of this non-relation of both the environment and death is that if the aforementioned reading of Heidegger's priority given to physis in the fragment cited by Agamben subordinates metaphysics to physics, what surfaces is the possibility of a Heideggerian Naturphilosophie, which would concomitantly avoid the trappings of a mere vitalism, insofar as death and environmental life are posited both as non-relations: that is to say, the possibility for a materialist Heidegger, which is incisive insofar as it belies anthropocentric accusations made against Heidegger (i. e. Heidegger's ontology as «mundane anthropology» according to Husserl), an anthropocentrism that Heidegger certainly can be read as struggling against: i. e. the instances of his anti-humanism, formulas such as «language speaking man», rather than vice versa as explicit attempts to develop a non-anthropomorphic ontology.

²¹ And as Heidegger notes in his reading of *thaumazein* as the condition of philosophy, the effect of *thaumazein* is precisely thus: the negation of all relation *in toto*, and philosophy, in its wake, is a relation to the non-relation. See: Heidegger M.: *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected «Problems» of «Logic»*. Trans. R. Rojewicz, A. Schuwer. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.