Sacrificial animals and their placeholders: symbolic irreplaceability in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Das Gespräch über Gedichte"

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Introduction

In 1904 "Über Gedichte" [On Poems][1] was published by the Austrian author Hugo von Hofmannsthal. This text is now more commonly known as "Das Gespräch über Gedichte" [The Conversation about Poems] and takes the form of a literary dialogue. It features a conversation between two friends named Clemens and Gabriel who speak about poetry, poetics, and what defines the poetic as a specific form of art. Reference is made to Goethe and others, and several stanzas of poetry are quoted by Clemens and Gabriel throughout their conversation.

At some point during their talk, Gabriel links the notion of poetry to that of the symbol. Because it is by use of symbols, he argues, that poetry can function in the way that it does. Poetry relies on symbols; they are poetry's privileged element. Thus, to understand what poetry is, one has to understand the nature of the symbol first. In order to offer Clemens such an understanding, Gabriel provides him with a fictionalized semiotic genealogy of the symbol. From this genealogy we come to understand that the first and original symbol is reliant on the practice of sacrifice. It is by means of the sacrificial act, during which the body of an animal comes to hold the place of the body of the human who offers the sacrifice and is sacrificed in its place and for its benefit, that a symbol first arises. In other words, by confusing the body of the animal for one's own body, one produces a symbol that makes it possible to perform a sacrifice. Or, again, the animal becomes the first symbol at the moment when a (con)fusion between its body and that of the human who performs the sacrificial act starts to operate at the heart of the sacrificial procedure.

In what is to come, I confront this theory of poetics, symbolics, and sacrifice with the concept of replacement. If it makes sense to claim that Hofmannsthal's text contains a theoretical understanding of the body, I wonder in what sense replaceability is implied in this understanding. If Gabriel's argument casts the human as well as the animal body as potentially and actually sacrificeable, how

1 Unless otherwise indicated all translations are my own.

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am I to understand the moment of replacement that allows the human to stay alive and lets the animal die? Through a confrontation between Hofmannsthal's text on the one hand, and the concept of replacement on the other, this chapter contributes to an understanding of the embodied individual in its relationship to the concepts of replacement, replaceability, and irreplaceability. I argue that the body is both replaceable and irreplaceable at the same time, and that it is with reference to an understanding of sacrifice that this paradoxical nature of embodiment might be grasped in a productive way.

In defense of confusion, or how the occasion for replacement first arises

Theories concerned with subjectivation, or *assujettissement*, often rely on a notion of replacement and replaceability when they consider the human body in its relationship to power. Drawing on Michel Foucault's writings and those of Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler suggests that at the heart of the genesis of the subject is a moment of replacement, a moment by which the body of what is to become recognized as the individual is replaced by a linguistic *placeholder* for that body. This replacement retroactively becomes the occasion for the individual to first recognize itself as an individual wielding a measure of agency within a determined, though continually developing, field of power. In other words, through a moment of replacement, the original of that replacement first comes about.[2] Replacement is the movement that occasions both the original and the copy, or placeholder, for that original.[3] In her 1997 work *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler puts this as follows:

> [T]he subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation. [. . .] The subject is the lin-

2 The Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit* [afterwardness / belatedness] can be compared to this dynamic and it would be interesting, though I do not have the space here, to trace Butler's account of this generative form of retroactivity in the subject's formation to Freud's understanding of this term, sometimes simply translated as deferral, at other times given more prominence as afterwardness or belatedness. For more on the genealogy of this kind of argument see for example Sigmund Freud's "Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose" [From the History of an Infantile Neurosis] 1918 (Freud 1947).

3 For an excellent discussion of this process I would urge my reader to read Butler's essay titled "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in which she outlines an analogous procedure when it comes to notions of homo- and hetero- sexuality (Butler 1993a).

> guistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency. (Butler 1997: 10–11)

What she refers to with the word placeholder, then, operates in a way analogous to what Lacan would situate at the mirror stage[4] where the infant first recognizes itself in the mirror and acquires a measure of subjectivity through this recognition that functions by replacing the body itself for the image[5] of a body in the mirror (Lacan 1966). In the Lacanian account, following Freud, there are two moments of splitting, or *Spaltung*, one imaginary, and one symbolic in nature. The first takes place at the mirror stage, the second with the giving of the name of the father and the implications that follow from it. In what is to follow, I will not go into these different moments, but I would like to urge my reader to take notice of the fact that both rely on a replacement or substitution of one thing for another, a body for an image, a body for a name, such that an individual may finally come about. Towards the end of this chapter I draw on Jacques Derrida's famous encounter with his cat in order to suggest that the naming by the first humans of the animals in Genesis 2:19–2:21 prior to any sacrificial act first opens the way for sacrificial action to take place. In other words, and much too bluntly: only that which has been granted a name will be able to die a sacrificial death. Importantly, that holds for both animals and humans alike.

Recognition in a placeholder, be it linguistic, symbolic, or imaginary, functions as a precondition for the individual to arise. And it does so, though Butler does not explicitly state this in the quote above, by allowing the individual to identify with that which holds its place. Such identification, however necessary it may be, can never be perfect or complete. In Lacan's essay on the mirror stage this incompleteness, or failure to identify absolutely, is precisely the cause for a violent lashing out by the infant against its mirror image. Samuel Weber usefully clarifies this violence in his remarks on the issue in *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis* (Weber 1991: 7–19). This violence would be

4 See his essay "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique" [The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Expérience], 1948.

5 In Lacan's estimation, this recognition appears prior to the symbolic order coming into play; it is a pre-linguistic scene that becomes violent when the infant recognizes that a moment of replacement has been at stake all along. This violence can only be stopped by further subjection/subjectivation through the Name of the Father and the symbolic order that comes along with it. Butler notably disagrees with this Lacanian point, making the comparison more suitable for my purposes here. For more on this see her 1993 *Bodies that Matter* where Butler both analyses and critically reformulates the relationship between the imaginary and the symbolic in relation to Lacan's understanding of the mirror stage (Butler 1993b).

wholly unnecessary, should the image not have been confused for the original in the first place. In other words, the failure to identify completely with an imaginary or symbolic placeholder that replaces the body and allows that body to begin to understand itself as an individual at the same time, is only problematic for the individual-to-be once a confusion between the original and the copy, the replaced and the replacement, occurs. Or, again, subjectivation arises through a moment of confusion between the individual's body and its placeholder. Confusion starts to operate as the context within which the subject can first claim its position.

This first moment of confusion takes place between the replaced and the replacement, the placeholder and the one whose place is being held. But there is a second moment of confusion that arises simultaneously. As Butler suggests, it is in the movement of replacement that the replaced is first produced; that the "individual" achieves "the linguistic condition of its existence," performatively if you will. As such the replaced object, the body that retroactively becomes legible as an individual, will not be effaced at the moment of replacement, however violent it may be. The bodily individual remains irreplaceably there, from the moment of its linguistic replacement onward. A fundamental irreplaceability of the body appears at the very heart of the movement that I have been trying to call replacement. A body is replaced, and becomes legible as a result of this replacement – irreplaceably. The irreplaceable body is produced as an individual, paradoxically, as a result of its replacement. A replacement, that has been framed above as a replacement for a placeholder, but which appears more traditionally in the form of what could be referred to as a 'soul.'

Following Foucault's analysis of these problematics in *Surveillir et Punir* [*Discipline and Punish*], 1975, the body becomes fixed in its place, imprisoned if you like, only with reference to a 'soul,' with reference to something which exceeds this body and which defines it from the outside, subjects it to the workings of power that, while necessary for the subject to emerge, are also disciplinary in their effects. Foucault writes:

> L'homme dont on nous parle et qu'on invite à libérer est déjà en lui-même l'effet d'un assujettissement bien plus profond que lui. Une « âme » l'habite et le porte à l'existence, qui est elle-même une pièce dans la maîtrise que le pouvoir exerce sur le corps. L'âme, effet et instrument d'une anatomie politique; l'âme, prison du corps. (Foucault 1975: 34).

> [The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body. (Foucault, trans. Sheridan 1995: 30)]

The relationship between the body as irreplaceable on the one hand, and a point of reference that is somehow its double, or placeholder, on the other, knows a genesis that can be traced back to a notion of the soul and to a relationship between the finite and the infinite. If the movement of replacement discussed above takes the form of replacing a body for a placeholder, and if, in so doing, it renders the body that is replaced legible as an individual, it makes sense to consider the relationship between this body and its placeholder as a relationship between body and soul.

Here we enter into the problematics of finitude that are at the heart of Martin Heidegger's project in *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*], 1927, who, for Foucault speaking in 1984 had always been "le philosophe essential" (Foucault 1994: 703) [the essential philosopher (Foucault, trans. Johnston 1996: 470)]. If the bodily is traditionally and conceptually linked to the finite – in contradistinction to the infinite that is supposedly situated in excess of the body, beyond it, spiritually, or in the soul – it is in relation to this finitude that it must be understood as irreplaceable. Or, again, the body is irreplaceable because it is finite, because it might die, or, more precisely still, because it must die; because the necessity of death is what defines the body in relationship to the subject from its incipience. The subject becomes an individual when the finite body is replaced and comes into being as irreplaceable.

Sacrificing the irreplaceable

> Wollen wir uns finden, so dürfen wir nicht in unser Inneres hinabsteigen: draußen sind wir zu finden, draußen. (Hofmannsthal 1904: 131)
>
> [If we want to find ourselves, we must not descend into our inner being: we are found outside, outside.]

Now that I have introduced some of my conceptual concerns, I want to move my focus back to the object of analysis. The questions of replacement, (ir)replaceability, confusion, and finitude, will now be confronted with Hofmannsthal's text and specifically with his understanding of sacrifice and the symbol. Hofmannsthal writes:

> Mich dünkt, ich sehe den ersten, der opferte. Er fühlte, daß die Götter ihn haßten: daß sie die Wellen des Gießbaches und das Geröll der Berge in seinen Acker schleuderten; daß sie mit der fürchterlichen Stille des Waldes sein Herz zerquetschen wollten, oder er fühlte, daß die gierige Seele eines Toten nachts mit dem Wind hereinkam und sich auf seine Brust

> setzte, dürstend nach Blut. Da griff er, [. . .] nach dem scharfen krummen Messer und war bereit, das Blut aus seiner Kehle rinnen zu lassen [. . .] (Hofmannsthal 1904: 134)
>
> [It occurs to me that I see the first one who sacrificed. He felt that the Gods hated him: that they hurled the waves of the torrent and the scree of the mountains into his field; that they wanted to crush his heart with the terrible silence of the forest, or he felt, that the greedy soul of a dead figure came upon him at night with the wind and sat himself on his breast, thirsty for blood. And there he grabbed [. . .] for the sharp, bent, knife and was ready to let the blood flow from his throat [. . .]]

Sacrifice, the first sacrifice, takes place, according to Gabriel our protagonist who is speaking here, as a response to the Gods. Sacrifice takes the shape of an attempt at communication, an attempt to free oneself from the hatred that is experienced from the side of a transcendent other. Sacrifice, that is to say, is structured both as a form of response, and in expectation of or hope for a response from the other side.

But we also come to understand that one of the necessary preconditions for a sacrifice to come about is that one has to be ready to sacrifice oneself. This account of the first sacrifice, then, is predicated on the idea that sacrifice is always already self-sacrifice; suicide. And as suicide, sacrifice is a response, a response that awaits an end to hatred; a response that can only be made freely of one's own accord, because if it would not be free and of one's own accord it would not be self-sacrifice at all. It would be, instead, a consequence of some source outside of the self over which that self would not wield command. Derrida puts this as follows in relation to Jan Patočka and Heidegger's respective discussions of finitude and sacrifice in *Donner la mort* [*The Gift of Death*] 1992:

> [L]a mort est bien ce que personne ne peut ni endurer ni affronter à ma place. Mon irremplaçabilité est bien conférée, livrée, on pourrait dire donnée par la mort. C'est le même don, la même source, on devrait dire la même bonté et la même loi. Depuis la mort comme lieu de mon irremplaçabilité, c'est-à-dire de ma singularité, je me sens appelé à ma responsabilité. En ce sens, seul un mortel est responsable. (Derrida 1999: 64)
>
> [Death is very much that which nobody else can undergo or confront in my place. My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, delivered, "given," one can say, by death. It is the same gift, the same source, one could say the same goodness and the same law. It is from the perspective of death as the place of my irreplaceability, *that* is, of my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility. In this sense only a mortal can be responsible (Derrida, trans. Wills 2013: 42)]

The self is *bereit* [ready] to die, it is ready, it is available, it holds itself available for death, which connotes a certain passivity. The one who sacrifices is free, to be sure, but this freedom is a freedom to be available to the other, to be available to die for the other in the form of a sacrifice. To be *bereit* is to be ready, to declare

one's readiness, or perhaps, with reference to Abraham in Genesis 22:2 & 22:11, to announce one's readiness by proclaiming it with the word *hineni*, which can be translated both as 'here I am' or more freely as 'I am ready' (The Holy Bible King James Version 1970).

The subject that is ready to sacrifice is ready to die. And it is in this readiness that irreplaceability, and thus singularity, emerges. It is as a finite being that one becomes a responsible being; a being that is able to respond to the other whose hatred is at stake in this procedure of sacrifice. Or, again, the social character of what we, following Butler, have come to refer to as the individual takes place in the context of its finitude. This is to say that the social character of the individual is situated at the body. The individual is able to respond to the other only in so far as the body of that individual is always already mortal and as such irreplaceable. The body is the locus of the social precisely because it is the site of irreplaceability that the individual needs in order to become an individual in the first place, and in order to consider that individuality as a matter of concern for itself. The irreplaceable body is the site where sacrificial conduct in the form of replacement first becomes an option for the individual who is willing to die. Gabriel continues:

> Und da, trunken vor Angst und Wildheit und Nähe des Todes, wühlte seine Hand, halb unbewußt, noch einmal im wolligen warmen Vließ des Widders. (Hofmannsthal 1904: 134)
>
> [And there, drunk with anxiety and wildness and proximity to death, his hand rummaged, half unconsciously, for one more time in the woolly warm fleece of the ram.]

Here I would like to stress the words *halb unbewußt* [half unconsciously]. Something is not entirely conscious in this procedure. Something has to have taken place unconsciously. Before consciousness takes its place, perhaps, or before the opposition conscious / unconscious is fully operative. To stretch the argument a bit further I would suggest that something about the very procedure of sacrifice itself may not be available to consciousness; that, in so far as a replacement between the human body and the animal body is to take place, this replacement has to remain outside of the realm of what can be understood consciously. If a sacrifice is to be truly sacrificial, replacement cannot be noted; some form of confusion has to be present from the moment of its inception. In other words, if one of the primary operational principles of the unconscious as understood by Freud in his *Traumdeutung* [*The Interpretation of Dreams*] 1900 is that of *Verschiebung* [displacement (Freud, trans. Strachey 2010], it seems to me that even prior to the differentiation between the unconscious and the conscious, replacement in the form of a displacement must already be at work (Freud 1961: 183). Here I am referring to something neither conscious nor unconscious, a form of replacement that pre-

cedes the Freudian *Verschiebung* as it affects the individual before its existence and from the outside, so to speak, half (un)consciously. Gabriel continues:

> Und dieses Tier, dieses Leben, dieses im Dunkel atmende, blutwarme, ihm so nah, so vertraut – auf einmal zuckte dem Tier das Messer in die Kehle, und das warme Blut rieselte zugleich an dem Vließ des Tieres und an der Brust, an den Armen des Menschen hinab: und einen Augenblick lang muß er geglaubt haben, es sei sein eigenes Blut; einen Augenblick lang, während ein Laut des wollüstigen Triumphes aus seiner Kehle mit dem sich ersterbenden Stöhnen des Tieres mischte, muß er die Wollust gesteigerten Daseins für die erste Zuckung des Todes genommen haben: er muß, einen Augenblick lang, in dem Tier gestorben sein, nur so konnte das Tier für ihn sterben. (Hofmannsthal 1904: 134–135)
>
> [And this animal, this life, breathing in the dark, blood-warm, him so dear, so familiar – all at once the knife twitched the animal into the throat, and the warm blood trickled at the same time on the animals fleece, and on the chest, down the arms of the human: and for an instant he must have believed it to be his own blood; for an instant, during which a sound of lustful triumph from his throat mingled with the dying moaning of the animal, he must have taken the enjoyment of increased presence for the first twitch of death: he must, for an instant, have died in the animal, only then could the animal die for him.]

He must have died in the animal; he must have believed that they were the same. A fusion between the animal as symbol and the human as sacrificing entity functions as the precondition for sacrifice to take place, and this fusion is at the same time a confusion. The animal and the human must have become confused to such an extent that the human believed himself to be the animal. Note how the boundaries between the human and the animal start to fade at this point. In order to sacrifice, in order to become different from oneself, in order to free oneself from the burden of attempting to be self-same, one has to suspend the very humaneness which all too often functions as the foundation for humanist discourses that aim at a definition of the human as free and conscious in opposition to the unfree and unconscious animal. The boundaries between the animal and the human become transgressed in Hofmannsthal's writing. It is at this moment of transgression that sacrifice operates to free the sacrificing subject and to subject it at the same time.

On the animal in general, and irreplaceable animals in Hofmannsthal

But is it proper to write about 'the' animal, and 'the' human? Does it not mislead my reader into believing that those categories as generalities are somehow essential to what it means to sacrifice, and as a consequence to what it means to be-

come an individual, time and again, time after time, and every time anew. Heeding Derrida's warning not to speak of the animal in general, given in *L'animal que donc je suis (à suivre)* [*The Animal that therefore I Am (More to Follow)*], originally pronounced as a lecture in 1997 at Cerisy-la-Salle, and first published in 1999, it is decidedly not my intention to think of the animal as the backdrop against which to situate the human as a generality. For Derrida, one of the traditional mistakes made in Western philosophy is to think of the animal as a general and undifferentiated other. It is to suggest that there is only one border between the animal and the human instead of a multiplicity of boundaries between the human as living animal and different animals that are situated at different sites of opposition not only to the human but to each other as well. One of the ways in which this misunderstanding takes shape is by suggesting that it is proper to the human to perform sacrifices, and proper to the animal not to be able to do so but to become the object of that procedure instead. Derrida writes, referencing both the book of Genesis and the myth of Prometheus, that in response to the fall, to original sin, the human first acquires, as a reward almost, dominance and superiority over animals; unconditionally and through sacrificial offering:[6]

> [L]'homme instaure ou revendique d'un seul et même coup sa *propriété* (le propre de l'homme qui a même en propre de n'avoir pas de propre), et sa *supériorité* sur la vie dite animale. Cette dernière supériorité, supériorité infinie et par excellence, a en propre d'être à la fois *inconditionnelle* et *sacrificielle*. (Derrida 2006: 40)

> [[M]an installs or claims in a single movement what is proper to him (the peculiarity of a man whose property it is not to have anything that is exclusively his) and his *superiority* over what is called animal life. This last superiority, infinite and par excellence, has as its property the fact of being at one and the same time *unconditional* and *sacrificial*. (Derrida, trans. Wills 2013: 403)]

What Derrida continues to suggest is that it would be proper, instead, to begin before the fall, before the time of sacrifice, before the time of human failing. Derrida suggests that to think the animal properly is to think of it before sacrifice becomes an issue in the first place. It is to the moment when Adam is said to give names to the animals, it is to the moment of naming and not of sacrificing that he wants to draw attention. Because in the giving of a name, a kind of mortality is already implied. Precisely because and in so far as the name lives on after the animal, it bears testament to the animal as a singular, irreplaceable, being that was once there and is no longer here. That remains there, in a way, in its name or

6 Nudity and being ashamed to be nude is Derrida's interest here as well, but for reasons of space I will not delve into those problematics here.

in its placeholder, but is no longer here, as an individual that needs that placeholder for its subsistence. To name is to give over to mortality, that is. It is to allow the same finitude to the animal as one does to the human.

Sacrifice on the one hand, for Derrida, and naming on the other. Or again, Western thinking on the animal has been led astray when it has become sacrificial in nature. But the sacrifice that Gabriel, Hofmannsthal's protagonist, asks us to imagine is precisely an act of naming. It is an act of naming the self in the name of the animal. And in return it is an act of naming the animal human. It is an act of naming that disturbs the Derridean notion of the performative precisely because its understanding of the symbol is of a different order than the performative as Derrida imagines it. If the performative produces that of which it speaks, and if it implies a certain measure of authority in order to do so, the symbol does not produce that of which it speaks at all, at least not for Hofmannsthal. It does not possess those performative powers. Instead it is powerless and in its powerlessness it turns back on itself. Poetry, as we will see, does not utter its words in order to refer to something outside of its boundaries, it does not performatively summon something into being, rather it speaks for the sake of speaking itself, according to Gabriel.

And, paradoxically, this seems to be in line with another remark that Derrida makes in that same text on his cat. He suggests that one of the most fundamental misunderstandings about the animal in general is that it is unable to be powerless. That it is unable to suffer, in other words. Unable to sacrifice, I would suggest.

> « Peuvent-ils souffrir? » revient à se demander: « Peuvent-ils *ne pas* pouvoir ? » Et quoi de cet impouvoir? de la vulnérabilité ressentie depuis cet impouvoir? Quel est ce non-pouvoir au cœur du pouvoir? Quelle est la qualité ou la modalité de cet impouvoir? Quel compte en tenir? Quel droit lui accorder? En quoi cela nous regarde-t-il? Pouvoir souffrir n'est plus un pouvoir, c'est une possibilité sans pouvoir, une possibilité de l'impossible. Là se loge, comme la façon la plus radicale de penser la finitude que nous partageons avec les animaux, la mortalité qui appartient à la finitude même de la vie, à l'expérience de la compassion, à la possibilité de partager la possibilité de cet impouvoir, la possibilité de cette impossibilité, l'angoisse de cette vulnérabilité et la vulnérabilité de cette angoisse. (Derrida 2006: 48)

> ["Can they suffer?" amounts to asking "can they *not be able*?" And what of this inability [*impouvoir*]? What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability? What is this nonpower at the heart of power? What is its quality or modality? How should one account for it? What right should be accorded it? To what extent does it concern us? Being able to suffer is no longer a power, it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibil-

> ity, the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish. (Derrida 2013: 410)]

Some metaphorical and humanist – as in anti-animal – understandings of the story of The Binding of Isaac suggest that the replacement of Isaac for a ram must be understood as the moment at which God shows to Abraham that human sacrifice is over and that from now on the sacrifice of animals will come in its place. Hofmannsthal's text follows a different trajectory. In Gabriel's account the animal comes first, not in place of the human, but it must come to occupy the human's place through a moment of identification. The human must be in the animal, and this being-in must be such that it would make absolutely no sense whatsoever to argue that there is a difference between sacrificing the human body or the animal body. No place for humanist morality here. Gabriel is speaking of bodies becoming confused, of blood and fleece.

If there is a tendency in Hofmannsthal's text to suggest that the animal can take the place of the human, it seems that there is an awareness, at the same time, that such replacement can only take place when the boundary between the human and the animal is transgressed, when the animal is not taken as the animal in general as opposed to the human in general. Much less as an abject being constitutive of the idea what it means to be human. The animal and the human are different, to be sure, but the difference between the two is not one of opposites, as the metaphorical reading of The Binding of Isaac would have it. Despite appearances to the contrary, Hofmannsthal's animal is a singular being. That singularity can be recognized in the fact that the animal is irreplaceable. It could not have been any other animal. At the most important moment of the story, it must have been this particular animal because it can only be with this one animal that the human who performed the sacrifice confused herself. One could argue, of course, that this confusion could have happened with any other animal in the place of this one. But why not, then, a human in place of the animal as well? And is not the point of this argument, if there is one, that there is no difference whatsoever between sacrifice on the one hand and murder[7] on the other. Be that as it may, the metaphor of sacrifice operates at the heart of Hofmannsthal's text nonetheless, and calling it murder – which it surely also is – does not efface the subtleties with which the animal is treated here. Murder and sacrifice, murder or

7 Søren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* 1843 takes this difference as the difference between one who is able to believe on the one hand, and one who remains ethical on the other. Ethically speaking Abraham committed a murder (Kierkegaard 1983).

sacrifice, to call the animal replaceable for other animals is to inflict additional violence that is not necessary for the understanding of the text itself.

At the opening of this text, Butler spoke of a "linguistic placeholder," it now becomes clear how that placeholder, even though it starts to operate as a replacement at first, cannot be understood fully in those terms. Indeed, the procedure of sacrificial offering only functions in so far as the animal is unable to replace the human, and is confused for the human instead. The animal is a placeholder, perhaps, but as such, it might more properly be framed as a symbol than as a replacement after all. Or as a replacement of the particular kind that adheres to a logic of the symbol as described by Hofmannsthal when he concludes Gabriel's remarks on sacrifice as follows:

> Daß das Tier für ihn sterben konnte, wurde ein großes Mysterium, eine große geheimnisvolle Wahrheit. Das Tier starb hinfort den symbolischen Opfertod. Aber alles ruhte darauf, daß auch er in dem Tier gestorben war, einen Augenblick lang. Daß sich sein Da sein, für die Dauer eines Atemzugs, in dem fremden Dasein aufgelöst hatte. – Das ist die Wurzel aller Poesie [. . .]. [D]iese Bezauberung [. . .] ist der Inbegriff der Symbole, die uns bezwingen. Sie ist, was unser Leib ist, und unser Leib ist, was sie ist. Darum ist Symbol das Element der Poesie, und darum setzt die Poesie niemals eine Sache für eine andere: sie spricht Worte aus, um der Worte willen, das ist ihre Zauberei. Um der magischen Kraft willen, welche die Worte haben, unseren Leib zu rühren, und uns unaufhörlich zu verwandeln. (Hofmannsthal 1904: 135)
>
> [That the animal could die for him, became a great mystery, a great cryptic truth. From hereon forth, the animal died the symbolic sacrificial death. But everything depended on the fact that he had died in the animal as well, for an instant. That his presence, for the duration of a breath, dissolved itself in a foreign presence. – That is the root of all poetry [. . .]. This enchantment [. . .] is the epitome of the symbols that subdue us. It is what our body is, and our body is, what it is. That is why the symbol is the element of poetry, and that is why poetry never replaces one thing for another: it utters words for the sake of words, that is its magic. For the sake of the magical powers that words possess, to touch our body, and to alter us incessantly.]

The nature of the symbol is such that it allows poetry to utter words for the purpose of those words. This is its magic, this is the magic that is unbelievable for us, precisely because it is a kind of magic that precedes our very being – it is a constitutive magic moment out of which the body of the individual arises. Hofmannsthal writes that the symbolic words of poetry have the magical power to touch our body and to transform us unceasingly. The incessant transformation of who we are, through a touching of our bodies, must be understood, I contend, as a mode of subjectivation that is not only incessant but primordial as well. It is through being touched by words, through being affected linguistically as Butler would have it, or rather symbolically as Hofmannsthal would say, that our beings

are always already becoming irreplaceable. But perhaps the emphasis on the linguistic may be confused for the notion that this primordial genesis of the individual is somehow reserved for the human as opposed to the animal in general, or to the human as a human being that exists only in contradistinction to this generality that is referred to as the animal. Derrida writes:

> Personne n'a jamais dénié à l'animal ce pouvoir de se tracer, de se tracer ou retracer un chemin de soi. Qu'on lui ait refusé le pouvoir de transformer ces traces en langage verbal, de s'appeler en questions et en réponses discursives, qu'on lui ait dénié le pouvoir d'effacer ces traces [. . .]. (Derrida 2006: 76)

> [No one has ever denied the animal this capacity to track itself, to trace itself or retrace a path of itself. Indeed the most difficult problem lies in the fact that it has been refused the power to transform those traces into verbal language, to call to itself by means of discursive questions and responses, denied the power to efface its traces [. . .]. (Derrida, trans. Wills 2013: 434)]

If that would be the case, there would be a refusal to let the animal respond, and to let it question itself. But if it makes sense to read the animal as a placeholder for the human, and to suggest that there is a circuitry between the animal body and that of the human which makes that human possible for the first time as an individual, it follows that that circuitry must be allowed to work the other way around as well. If, in other words, the human and the animal can be replaced for one another in a moment of confusion, we must be allowed to replace the body of the sacrificer for the body of the animal in Gabriel's story. We must be allowed to claim that with the symbol we are confronted with the moment where the animal sacrifices the human, confuses the human for itself, confuses that figure that says "I" in a general and autobiographical way, for the animal that traces itself in a silence that is audible not to Gabriel, nor to Hofmannsthal, nor, for that matter, to me, but must be imaginable nevertheless as a genealogy to the symbol.

If the symbol, that is to say, if a moment of confusion, a moment of touch, precedes the becoming of an irreplaceable individual body, and this irreplaceable body is at the same time the condition for the symbol that touches, how are we to decide on the precedence of either of those terms? Does the irreplaceable individual body present itself only in order to produce a symbol through a sacrificial rite – as Derrida, following Patočka and Heidegger would have it in *Donner la mort* – or does the symbol through a gesture of replacement produce the individual incessantly – as Butler, following Foucault and Lacan would prefer? I want to argue that both procedures may be at work at the same time, and that the notion of the placeholder is helpful precisely because it connotes these two moments simultaneously. Hofmannsthal's account suggests that the symbol is a placeholder for a place that exists only in so far as it is being held by that placeholder. A place

is held, not for another, then, but for the self. And the notion of the placeholder is immediately suggestive of finitude as well, of a temporality to the process of the holding of a place. A place that is not understood as the property of the placeholder, but rather as something occasioned by that placeholder half unconsciously, or *halb unbewußt*. The placeholder is the (ir)replaceable site and occasion for the individual to come about, and it is, I contend, always both embodied and symbolic. Always both finite and infinite.

But if all that I seem to be saying here is that finitude and the infinite are always already implied in one another, that body and soul belong together in a fundamental way, my argument may come to be read as an article of faith, a confession almost. The confession that irreplaceability and replacement are inextricably linked. It is my attempt to say more than that. It is my attempt to situate irreplaceability at the body, both of the human and of the animal as it exists not in general but in its singularity, and to show, at the same time, how what is traditionally referred to as the soul, the replacement of the body in symbolic terms that operates as a function of the sacrificial rite, as Hofmannsthal shows, must be understood as a replaceable entity that affects the body throughout its existence. If the body is traditionally understood as the replaceable shell of a soul that lives on eternally, it has been my attempt to show how that shell itself must instead be understood as the irreplaceable precondition for replacement to occur. Or again, if it makes sense to suggest that the subject is a placeholder that functions as the occasion for the individual to come about, it must at the same time make sense to suggest that the body is the irreplaceable precondition for the placeholder to emerge. The word placeholder points at the abyss between the replaceable and the irreplaceable. It is not between in the sense of measures or degrees. Instead, the placeholder is both fully replaceable and irreplaceable at the same time, it must be the body, it must replace it and precede it simultaneously, impossibly, time and again. It must be allowed to die and to live-on at the same time. It must be allowed to be sacrificed, both by humans and by animals alike.

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