



HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language (Posthumanities)

Kalpna Rahita Seshadri

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HumAnimal explores the experience of dehumanization as the privation of speech. Taking up the figure of silence as the space between human and animal, it traces the potential for an alternate political and ethical way of life beyond law. Employing the resources offered by deconstruction as well as an ontological critique of biopower, Kalpana Rahita Seshadri suggests that humAnimal, as the site of impropriety opened by racism and manifested by silence, can be political and hazardous to power.

Through the lens of such works as Coetzee's *Foe*, Chesnutt's "The Dumb Witness," Dr. Itard's "wild child," and aerialist Philippe Petit's *Man on Wire*, Seshadri lucidly brings Derrida's concept of the trace and his theory of sovereignty into conversation with Agamben's investigation of the analytics of power. The task is twofold: on the one hand, to question the logocentric presumption that determines the separation between human and animal, and on the other to examine the conflation of this separation as an instrument of power in the practice of racism. Thus *HumAnimal* details the differences and intersections between Derrida and Agamben in their respective approaches to power, claiming that to think simultaneously within the registers of deconstruction (which conceives of power as a symptom of the metaphysics of presence) and biopolitics (which conceives of power as the operation of difference) entails a specification of the political and ethical consequences that attends the two perspectives.

When considered as the potential of language to refuse the law of signification and semantics, silence can neutralize the exercise of power through language, and Seshadri's inquiry discloses a counterpower that does not so much oppose or destroy the politics of the subject but rather neutralizes it and renders it ineffective.

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