



EDITORIAL – Animals in Performing Arts and Cinema: Ethics or Aesthetics?

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After the publication of a pilot issue and a special issue – [CRISE\(s\)](#) and [Exceeding binarities: representations and performances of genders and sexualities](#) respectively – the *In Vivo Arts* collective continues on the path of research-in-action with a first issue dedicated to the use of and recourse to animals in Performing Arts and Cinema.

Animals abound on contemporary stages and screens to such an extent that they are considered, more or less legitimately, “performing species”¹. Within such a framework of abundant animal presence – which develops in an intimate relation with the human animal performing itself – is inscribed the first issue of the IN VIVO ARTS platform. Its title, simple yet somewhat abysmal, is ANIMALS. Signalling this animal proliferation might be seen as obvious, even redundant; nevertheless, the rich and varied contributions to this issue reveal that these emerging questions are far from being easy to circumscribe.

Firstly, if today’s tendency within Performing Arts and Cinema is to explore the animal presence through the prism of recent artistic creation, ANIMALS points out that long before contemporary theatrical and cinematographic experimentations, that is, more than two millennia ago, animals were “performing” an *avant la lettre* symbolical and political role in ancient theatres and arenas. In this regard, one of our contributors, Sarah Kourdi, delineates an epistemological framework, as she identifies a “demonstration of power” within representations of animals on ancient Roman mosaic decorations, distinctly reproducing some of the first animal performance acts.

Following the chronological path, ANIMALS moves to the dramaturgy of the Spanish Golden Age, as another contributor, Dominique Blumenstihl-Roth, highlights the aesthetics of “gatomaquia”, spanning from Cervantes to Lope de Vega, through which “cats *learn* how to imitate human species”.

¹ Una Chaudhuri, Holly Hughes, *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today* (eds.), Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014.



Then, between the Spanish Golden Age and the moment of the abundant animal presence occasioning the launch of the issue ANIMALS, a hiatus sets in, as attested to by the fact that the reflections and interrogations of our contributors are focusing almost exclusively on (very) contemporary aesthetics.

When animals are brought into the focus of current research, they “testify” to an extreme aesthetics. On the one hand, there are artists like Romeo Castellucci, whose use of and recourse to animals – living proof of an “aesthetic and dramaturgical obsession”, according to our contributor Amandine Mercier – render ineffective the much-discussed Aristotelian concepts of "fear" and "pity", in the sense that cathartic purgation seems to lose its speculative power. On the other hand, there is the hypersensitive (and somehow critical) approach of artists such as Stefan Kaegi, Nathalie Küttel, Judith Zagury or Emmanuel Gras, an approach which denotes an almost visceral love for the intelligence, sensitivity, and beauty of animals. The warning over the need to protect animals, as well as the call to raise awareness about the dangers they incur – as they emanate from the works of those artists – have been pertinently identified by Ketzali Yulmuk-Bray, Alice Rosenthal, or Ombre Tarragnat.

The above-mentioned approaches have proven to make for a harmonious coming together as part of the five-section structure underlying the ANIMALS issue. The first section, entitled *From Roman Arenas to Militant Performances*, brings together conceptual, quasi-methodological texts, ranging from the origin of animals in Roman arenas (Sarah Kourdi), passing through a (falsely) scenographical approach (Céline-Marie Hervé), concluding with Judith Butler's conceptualizations of anti-species performances as rendered by Ombre Tarragnat's contribution.

The second section, entitled *Emergence(s) and Transformation(s) on Stages and Screens*, brings together dramaturgical (Dominique Blumenstihl-Roth), scenic (Amandine Mercier, Ketzali Yulmuk-Bray), and cinematographic (Alice Rosenthal, Fatima Seddaoui and Adrian Fix) case studies, in which are discussed *representations* of and with animals.

The third section, entitled *Animals and their Welfare*, consists of a vast quantitative analysis developed by a team of researchers and artists from North-East Asia, coordinated by Xiuli Chen and Jiyeon Baek, whose sampling strategy provides surprising results.

The fourth section, entitled *Artistic Experience and Philosophical gaze*, brings together two visual essays. The first, proposed by Charlène Dray, relates the artist's personal experience of working with horses, combined with extensive research in Performing Arts. In the second



essay, Adrian Switzer, weaving words and images, puts forward eight philosophical variations on *Animalinside* (an idiosyncratic multimedia collaboration between the writer László Krasznahorkai and the artist Max Neumann).

Finally, the personal observations of a cinema lover and specialist, Hervé Couchot, testify to the cinematic experience undergone by the author during the viewing of Jerzy Skolimowski's last film, *EO*, awarded the jury prize at Cannes in 2022.

Within this vast animal landscape, transhistorical and transcultural, one question remains unresolved. How to overcome the gap between the two typologies of use of and recourse to animals in the Performing Arts and Cinema? Namely, on the one hand, there is an artistic approach that turns animals into simple aesthetic objects (props for stages and screens), and which seems to almost evacuate the question of animal right policies completely. And, on the other hand, one can witness a paradoxical artistic approach to animals, whereby the attempt to raise awareness and ring the alarm bells coincides with the use of living animals as an aesthetic means. Ethics or aesthetics of animals? What resources will allow to resolve this hiatus, in the near or distant future? It is important to specify, perhaps, that the few associations dedicated to the protection of animals that we contacted for the publication of this issue never responded to our proposal for dialogue. How to interpret this "silence"?

The issue ANIMALS is accompanied by a special *dossier* entitled [*Jewish Theatre as an anthropological object*](#) – emanation of an International Study Day which took place on June 28, 2022 at INALCO, Paris. The dossier raises questions – through an anthropological and ethnoscenological lens – on how aesthetics, culture, and identity relate to three forms of Jewish theatre, apprehended in their chronological evolution: the first Jewish "tragedy" – *The Exagogue* of Ezekiel the Tragedian, Yiddish theatre, and contemporary Israeli theatre.

In conclusion, I would like to publicly salute the unshakeable confidence of the contributors – be they emerging artist-researchers or established specialists – who have made it possible to put together this first issue of the IN VIVO ARTS platform. And I would also like to publicly thank the members of IN VIVO ARTS' editorial team, whose unbroken investment enabled the emergence of the platform, as well as the publication of the ANIMALS issue. The research-in-action adventure continues...