

ANIMAL PERFORMANCE STUDIES

The scene of the non-human in an anthropological and philosophical framework

The study days "Animal Performance Studies: the scene of the non-human in an anthropological and philosophical framework" arises from the ecological urgency of our present time: an extreme vulnerability, shared by both humans and non-humans, the global pandemic against the backdrop of the climate crisis and the sixth great extinction.

The image selected to symbolically represent it is the painting by Tiziana Pers *'Bats burned to prevent the spread of new pandemics'* (Indonesia, March 2020) - created in dialogue with the model of the Fosse Ardeatine gate by Mirko Basaldella.

The perspective chosen for this symposium is to investigate methodologies, theoretical and practical frameworks that connect the arts, in their performative dimension, to animality, in the profound belief that "other animals" pose ontological, epistemological and ethical questions that go to the roots of not only what we think but also who we are.

The "Critical Animal Studies" embrace a vast cultural territory that connects theoretical reflection to practices by taking the issue and the animal condition as a priority and positioning itself in a dimension of absolute interdisciplinarity or "indisciplinarity" and from a liberationist perspective. For some decades, even in the humanities there has been an animal turn or Cultural Studies have turned their gaze to another vital dimension of marginalization as has already happened with Women's Studies, Queer Studies and Disability Studies. Already in 2007 the activist and lecturer Steve Best hoped that the academic dimension would not weaken anti-speciesism, the political drive that aims to break down the ideology and practices of domination over other species, from the dimension of action to counter domination of the human in its various forms and institutions. The systemic-critical force of the "animal point of view" can provide a vital and extraordinary critical understanding of the origins of warfare, slavery, hierarchical domination and a broad spectrum of psychological, moral, social and ecological crises.

In this context, studies and practices of theaterology as well as Performance Studies join other disciplines in expressing the *animal turn* of contemporary thought, while the liberated animal energies can reconfigure the genres and aesthetics that have produced the "anthropocentric theater" that we have known over time, which rigorously excludes the non-humans from its own practice (if not including it instrumentally, and not as a significant subject) as well as from its own analysis.

The same performative practice becomes a vehicle for exploring new relational modalities between different species for a redefinition of language that encompasses embodied communication, as well as for exploring the subjectivity of humans and animals and how these two categories continue to redefine each other, in that branch of practices and theories that we can call Animal Performance Studies, in the wake of Una Chaudhuri, Alan Reed, Laura Cull, Lourdes Orozco, Teresa Grant and others.

In the anthropological and philosophical fields, for at least two decades we have witnessed a deconstruction of the ways in which a series of dualisms of a theoretical and conceptual order have long been configured: nature-culture, mind-body, man-animal. The transversal philosophical approach of posthuman philosophies and zooanthropology question the hegemonic and self-referential status of man, considering instead hybridization with non-human otherness. In the posthumanistic focus, the hybrid, the mutant, the non-conforming have lost those negative connotations or in contrast with human predicates because, as rightly pointed out by Donna Haraway, "it is precisely on the border that humanity reveals itself". Research "located" in the new territories of human-animal hybridization is able to put in check those disjunctive dichotomies that were the foundation of humanistic thought and

theriomorphism will therefore no longer be indicative of regression, involution, loss, but rather of anthropopoiesis or production active in culture.

Recently Rosi Braidotti wrote: «the power of viral formations has become manifest in the pandemic, stressing the agency of non-human forces and the overall importance of Gaia as a living, symbiotic planet. But at the same time a global revolt against endemic – and indeed viral – racism has also exploded in this fateful June 2020, led by the “Black Lives Matter” movement. As these multiple crises unfold, the politics of the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others are moving centre stage, pushing old Anthropos offcentre».

The reflections of these days arise in the hope that this condition of planetary crisis may suggest different ways of taking care, a more transversal relational ethic that includes non-humans. After all, the binary distinctions between nature and culture, human and otherwise, central to European thought since the Enlightenment, are not universally valid, many cultures on earth do not adopt this partition. This is the strength of the insights and understandings that can be learned from indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies, from postcolonial thought and from non-Western knowledge.

Many of these cultures represent a "multinatural" continuum that includes humans as well as other species. When it comes to human / non-human relationships it is time to start learning from the global South.

Taking into account the cultural dissonance that still dismisses animal themes as irrelevant but at the same time gets (involved) in pets care, birdwatching, safaris or naturalistic documentaries, both scholars and artists are expected to answer the following questions:

- What could it mean to practice, think and write theater beyond the human?
- How could we practice, think and write a theater - and make art - in line with the present troubled planetary conditions where not only humans and other animals but also rivers, oceans, coasts, waters, forests, ice, air and atmosphere are at risk? Or, as great feminist and eco-performer Rachel Rosenthal used to say, how can art connect us to the Big Picture?
- How can cosmology findings of anthropologists in various parts of the world redefine or overturn certain, commonly accepted assumptions, linked to the distinction between nature and culture?
- What adjective would you use to define the anti-speciesism you support?
- How could a political agenda be turned into a practice of liberation?
- Can violence perpetrated against animals be read without first being conceptualized as such?