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Actor's Score, Martial Arts and Animality: from the *Animal Turn* to *Zoosomatics**

The *Animal Turn*

The relationship between us and other species is essential. Humans have been inspired by – and have extensively exploited – other animals without fully recognising their importance to human progress. Many of our cultural achievements stem from our direct or indirect interactions with them. Not only have we learned, for example, to swim from fishes, fly from birds and climb from spiders, but these animals have essentially shown us that we can swim, fly, or climb¹. In other words, they have opened new dimensions in our perception of ourselves in the world and have impacted our imagination and evolution. These existential passages reflect our animality and have been remarkable revolutions throughout history. However, the anthropocentric view of the world granted human superiority over other species. Established since the Renaissance, such a standpoint found its top in Descartes's considerations, where animals are machines – “*Res Extensa*” lacking *cogito* – and, therefore, are not subjects². Those views were further reinforced by and through the emergence of the Anthropocene³.

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¹ Cfr. R. Marchesini, *Zoomimesis: How Birds Taught Us That We Can Fly*, in «Journal of Posthumanism», vol. 2, 2022, n. 2, pp. 115-124.

² D. Des Chenes, *Spirits and Clocks: Machine and Organism in Descartes*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001.

³ M. Adda, *Recognising Anthrozoalgia on the way to the Symbiocene*, in I. Frasin, G. Bodi, C.

In recent decades, we have witnessed profound intellectual and cultural shifts in how humans perceive and engage with other animals. Animal emotions, cognition, agency, ethics, and subjectivity are now part of the conversation⁴. Progressive research on other-than-human animal cognitive abilities has revealed the presence of sophisticated cognitive processes⁵ and paved the way for the discourse on animal consciousness⁶. These paradigmatic shifts reflect the profound need to depart from anthropocentric positions, challenge hierarchical views of species and aim to understand animals as autonomous and sentient beings⁷. Thus, the *animal turn*⁸ – which emerged in the last decades – emphasises the interrelatedness of humans and other animals and advocates for their coexistence.

Academic research focuses on understanding and re-evaluating human-animal relationships across many disciplines, including philosophy, literature, ethics, ethology (animal behaviour), environmental studies, and cultural studies, signalling a growing recognition of the profound significance of other-than-human animals in human lives. A critical multidisciplinary field that evolved within the *animal turn* is Anthrozoology, which investigates the multifaceted ways humans and other animals interact across time and cultures⁹. Animal geographies focus on the spatial and social dimensions of human-animal interactions, emphasising the importance of space, place, and power relations in shaping these dynamics¹⁰ and highlighting how human activities and urbanisation impact animal habitats and ecosystems¹¹. Fur-

Dinu Vasiliu (edited by), *Anthrozoology Studies, Animal Life and Human Culture*, Presda Universitară Clujeană, Romania, 2022. Cfr. P. J. Crutzen, *The “Anthropocene”*, in E. Ehlers, T. Krafft (edited by), *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene. Emerging Issues and Problems*, Heidelberg, Springer, 2006, pp. 13-18.

⁴ Cfr. M. Bekoff and J. Pierce, *Wild justice: The moral lives of animals*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009; D.A. Nibert, *Animal rights / human rights: Entanglements of oppression and liberation*, London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

⁵ Cfr. D.L. Cheney and R.M. Seyfarth, *How monkeys see the world: Inside the mind of another species*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990.

⁶ D.R. Griffin, *Animal minds: Beyond cognition to consciousness*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992; P. Low, *The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness. Proceedings of the Francis Crick Memorial Conference*, Cambridge, UK, Churchill College, Cambridge University, July 7, 2012, pp. 1-2.

⁷ Cfr. D.J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

⁸ Cfr. E. Andersson Cederholm, A. Björck, K. Jennbert and A.-S. Lönngren (edited by), *Exploring the Animal Turn: Human-animal Relations in Science, Society and Culture*, Lund, The Pufendorf Institute of Advanced Studies, Lund University, 2014.

⁹ Cfr. M.C. Tobias and J.G. Morrison, *Anthrozoology: Embracing co-existence in the Anthropocene*, Heidelberg-New York, Springer Link, 2016.

¹⁰ J. Wolch and J. Emel, *Animal geographies: Place, politics, and identity in the nature-culture borderlands*, London-New York, Verso Books, 1998.

¹¹ Cfr. H. Buller, *Animal Geographies I*, in «Progress in Human Geography», XXXVIII, 2013, pp. 308-318; P. Arcari, F. Probyn-Rapsey and H. Singer, *Where species don't meet: Invisibilized*

ther, Posthumanism transcends conventional human-animal boundaries by stressing interconnectedness, recognising the agency – and rights – of other-than-human animals, and advocating for more inclusive and compassionate engagements with other species¹².

The intellectual underpinnings of the *animal turn* are deeply rooted in the works of influential thinkers. Notably, Derrida's essay *The Animal That Therefore I Am*¹³ has served as a philosophical reference. Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*¹⁴ provides a moral basis for rethinking our relationship with other-than-human animals. Donna J. Haraway's *When Species Meet*¹⁵ goes beyond traditional binaries, emphasising the interconnectedness of diverse species in a multispecies world. Feminist perspectives explore the intersections between gender, oppression, and the treatment of animals. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Carol J. Adams¹⁶ delves into the cultural and symbolic connections between women's oppression and meat consumption¹⁷ and contends that the exploitation of animals is intertwined with broader societal issues, urging to recognise the links between various forms of oppression. In his *The Lives of Animals*¹⁸, Nobel Prize-winning J.M. Coetzee offers a fictional exploration of the ethics of animal treatment and provides a unique narrative approach to human-animal interactions' ethical complexities¹⁹.

The works of Derrida, Singer, Haraway, Adams and Coetzee, among others, contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the ethical, philosophical, and cultural dimensions of the human-animal relationship. As we navigate the complexities of the *animal turn*, we are called to reflect on our past and present interactions with

animals, urban nature and city limits, in «Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space», IV, 2021, n. 3, pp. 940-965.

¹² Cfr. K. Maiti, *Animals in Posthumanist Thought: An Introduction*, in Id. (edited by), *Posthumanist Perspectives on Literary and Cultural Animals*, Cham, Springer, 2021.

¹³ J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008.

¹⁴ P. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, New York-London, HarperCollins, 1975. This cornerstone work presents a compelling case for liberating animals from human exploitation.

¹⁵ D.J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, cit.

¹⁶ C.J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, London-New York, Continuum, 1990.

¹⁷ Cfr. C. Wrenn, *Animals in Irish Society: Interspecies Oppression and Vegan Liberation in Britain's First Colony*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2021.

¹⁸ J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1999.

¹⁹ The *animal turn* has generated valuable insights into animal welfare and conservation. For instance, research has highlighted how the compromised welfare of land-based farm animals negatively impact the environment and human health. These findings have prompted discussions and activism promoting more sustainable and compassionate practices such as organic farming and veganism. Therefore, the *animal turn* extends beyond academia, influencing public awareness and policy plans. Cfr. A.M. Goldberg, *Farm Animal Welfare and Human Health*, in «Curr Envir Health Rpt», III, 2016, n. 3, pp. 313-321.

animals and envision a future that embraces a more compassionate and ethical coexistence.

Somatics, Ecology, Animality and Performance

The evolving paradigm of the *animal turn* heralds the advancement of the Symbiocene, an epoch (*cene*) where humans and other animals live in reciprocity (*symbio*)²⁰. This emergent ethos extends its tendrils into various realms of human experience. To proceed with our discourse, we need to consider a few points.

First, we need to delve into the context of somatics. Whether manifested through mindful movement, kinaesthetic explorations, or contemplative exercises, somatic practices cultivate enhanced sensorial awareness and drive individuals towards a more nuanced understanding of their embodied existence, dismantling from within preconceived notions of human exceptionalism. In this process, the lived experiences of animals can serve as a source of profound contemplation, inviting us to rediscuss speciesism and recognise the richness of other-than-human subjectivities and species-specific values. In such a phenomenological event, the boundaries separating the human and the other-than-human blur, allowing for a more visceral and empathetic comprehension of animality. Further, the transformative potential of somatic practices extends beyond individual introspection, permeating the collective consciousness and contributing to broader societal shifts. In this sense, the profound implications of the *animal turn* ripple through societal consciousness and foster a more enlightened and inclusive human-other-than-human paradigm.

Secondly, we should discuss ecosomatics. Ecosomatics integrates ecological awareness and somatic practices. It recognises the interconnectedness of the body and the environment, emphasising the embodied experience of ecological concerns. It often links to ecotherapy, ecopsychology, and environmental education, aiming to cultivate a deeper connection and sensitivity to the natural environment through embodied experiences. Practices such as mindfulness, martial arts, sensory awareness exercises or dance in nature enhance environmental consciousness and promote a more holistic understanding of our relationship with and within the natural world²¹. Ecosomatic practice encourages a shift from a purely intellectual or cognitive understanding of the environment to one that involves an embodied, sensorial, and experiential engagement with nature and «reveals the possibility of

²⁰ M. Adda, *Recognising Anthrozoalgia on the way to the Symbiocene*, cit.; A.G. Albrecht, *Exiting the Anthropocene and Entering the Symbiocene*, in «Minding Nature», IX, 2016, n. 2, pp. 14-16.

²¹ Cfr. S.H. Fraleigh, *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformations Through Dance, Yoga, and Touch*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2015.



Fig. 1. Ecosomatic tai chi chuan 太极拳 on a beach in Puglia, Italy. *TriBuana* residential workshop by I Gede Tapa Sudana, 2004. Photo: Marco Adda.

a perceptual shift from a narrow experience of embodiment, focused on the will to move, to the deeper and expanded experience of being moved by the world»²².

Thirdly, we must pay attention to animality. Animality refers to the state or characteristic of being an animal. Thus, it unequivocally relates to humans, too. However, it is often – and erroneously – intended in contrast with “humanity” or “human nature” and used to distinguish other animals from humans or to identify an animal component within humans that should be tamed. It encompasses biological, behavioural, and evolutionary aspects. Posthumanism and Critical Animal Studies examine how societal, cultural, and philosophical perspectives shape our understanding of animality and animals. In *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*²³, Abram delves into the sensory and perceptual experience of living in a world teeming with other beings. He explores how perceptions shape our understanding of the environment and how reconnecting with our senses can deepen our relationship with the more-than-human world. A well-known literary example of animality is Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, where the protagonist transforms into a cockroach and realises his *self*, role, and relationship with his family for the first time. In other words, recognising our animality reveals a more authentic nature of human existence.

²² R. Rufo, *Humans, Trees, and the Intimacy of Movement: An Encounter with Eco-Somatic Practice*, in «European Journal of Ecological Psychology», VIII, 2023, p. 110.

²³ D. Abram, *Becoming animal: An earthly cosmology*, New York, Vintage Books, 2010.

By integrating animality, individuals can cultivate a deeper connection with themselves and the environment, moving beyond a dualistic view of self and nature. The *bodymind*²⁴, from a phenomenological perspective, is both a human involvement and an integral part of the broader ecological fabric. When imbued with animality, it emerges as a focal point of experience that transcends conventional human boundaries, reflecting the vital *network*²⁵ permeating all living organisms.

Fourth, we should consider animality and performance. While *animal turn* is a contemporary concept, integrating animalistic elements and nature-inspired movements in theatrical experiences and actor training finds historical roots in various traditions and practices. For example, traditional Japanese performing arts, such as Noh and Kabuki theatre, and contemporary dances, such as Butoh, incorporate movements and gestures inspired by nature, including animals. The *Natyashastra*, a Sanskrit text on dramaturgy, poetics and aesthetics – notably among the earliest known treatises on performative arts in South Asia – outlines principles for actors that include emulating natural elements and animals. Traditional Indian dances, such as Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, often portray animals and mythological creatures through intricate hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements. In the *Wayang Kulit* – the traditional shadow puppetry of Bali, Indonesia – the *dalang* (puppeteers) manipulate the puppets to convey the movements, behaviours and “voices” of animals. The Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*’s masks often reflect animalistic traits or characteristics embodied by actors. Therefore, throughout history and across cultures, various traditions have recognised the expressive potential of animals and nature in performance, with *zoomimesis* representing «the archetype of every theatrical expression»²⁶. Thus, the resonance of the *animal turn* in performing arts reflects evolving views. More recently, new approaches have emerged to reframe animals in performance. Ground-breaking theories and practices such as *eco-theatre*²⁷, coinages such as Chaudhuri’s *anthropo-scenes*²⁸ and *zooësis*²⁹, and

²⁴ For an essential overview of *body-mind* and *bodymind* in performing and actor’s work, cfr. P. Zarrilli, *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, 2nd ed., London-New York, Routledge, 2002; Id., *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski*, London-New York, Routledge, 2009.

²⁵ Cfr. B. Latour, *Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-network Theorist*, in «International Journal of Communication», V, 2011, pp. 796-810.

²⁶ R. Marchesini, *Zoomimesis*, cit., p. 121.

²⁷ Cfr. B. Davis, *Eco-Theatre: celebrating our connection to the more-than-human world*, in «The Trumpeter», XIV, 1997, n. 2, <https://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/192> (last access: 8 aprile 2025); J. Hudson, *The Environment on Stage: Scenery or Shapeshifter?*, London-New York, Routledge, 2019.

²⁸ U. Chaudhuri, *Anthropo-Scenes: Theater and Climate Change*, in «Journal of Contemporary Drama in English», 2015, pp. 12-27.

²⁹ U. Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals. Zooësis and Performance*, London-New York, Routledge, 2016.

new research fields such as Performance Philosophy³⁰ open new and promising perspectives.

Introducing Zoosomatics

Zoosomatics emerges at the junction of ecosomatics, animality, and performance (practice and studies). Incorporating animal-inspired movements into interoceptive explorations and artistic expression fosters interconnection with other species and ecological consciousness. Through embodied practices, *zoosomatics* expand our sensorial awareness and highlight the need to recognise the agency and subjectivity of animals. They may involve dance, physical theatre, martial arts, yoga, tai chi chuan, qigong (氣功) primal movements, and other practices, yet they incorporate elements of animal behaviour, communication, cognition and consciousness. Thus, they are theoretical and experiential endeavours, making the bodymind a fertile ground to cultivate ecological belonging.

Notably, animals' involvement – and exploitation – in performance is employed in traditional circuses – now banned in many countries worldwide – and on stage³¹. Conversely, artists and performers engaging with the *animal turn* leverage performance to explore issues related to animals and the environment. This does not exclude animals from being involved in the scene. Orozco's *Theatre & Animals*³² explores the historical and philosophical underpinnings of animal performance discussions. Chaudhuri and Hughes's *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*³³ provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of theatre and performance studies centred on animals, presenting diverse perspectives from artists who actively grapple with these issues in their creative endeavours. Overall, the intersection of the *animal turn* and theatre and performing arts offers a rich and diverse terrain of inquiry, with many significant contributions from artists, performers, and academics alike.

The ethical implications of *zoosomatics* are twofold. Firstly, they underscore the importance of proper treatment and representation of animals in artistic endeavours. As performers embody animal movements, there is a responsibility to approach those with respect, avoiding stereotypes and cultural sensitivities. Secondly, *zoosomatics* advocates for eco-ethical awareness by prompting performers and au-

³⁰ L. Cull Ó Maoilearca, *Opening the Circle*, in «Performance Research», XXIII, 2018, nn. 4-5, pp. 419-421.

³¹ S. Mei, *Animali da palcoscenico: tra scandalo e censure nella scena italiana del Duemila*, <https://cultureteatralli.it/> (last access: 16 April 2024).

³² L. Orozco, *Theatre & Animals*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

³³ U. Chaudhuri and H. Hughes (edited by), *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2014.

diences to reflect on the ecological impact of human activities, compelling individuals to reconsider their relationship with other species and the natural world.

David Abram's extensive work in eco-phenomenology of perception and geo-philosophy³⁴ provides inspiring views and foundations. The shortage of sensory perception in our experience of the world results in our separation from the more-than-human otherness.

[...] our bodily senses, left to their own devices, are inherently animistic; that sensory perception is participatory; that the senses are gregarious organs that actively participate in the surrounding terrain; and that when we speak of the world around us as a set of objects or objective mechanical processes, we actually frustrate our senses and force our awareness to withdraw from our skin and our eyes and our ears, and we climb up into our heads and live in a set of verbal abstractions – because the human animal cannot help but experience the world as animate and alive through and through³⁵.

To some extent, our disconnection from other-than-human animals and our human animality mirrors the environmental tragedy we are experiencing in the age of the Anthropocene. Dissociating our perceptiveness from the sensuousness of the heart desensitises us to the pain humans are – in some cases – causing to the planet and other species. While some lose sensibility toward animal suffering, for others, such a disconnection is a form of distress, trauma and *Anthrozooalgia*³⁶. Re-integrating animality into our embodied experience can repair – or at least alleviate – such trauma and re-sensitise humans to their feelings. In this sense, *zoosomatics* play a healing role in targeting the fractures between humanity and animality, the mind/body schism, and the separation of humans from the earth, addressing – and possibly repairing – the divisions between humans and nature. It also allows us to evoke ancestral biological memory³⁷, offering a pathway to express our embodied evolutionary past.

³⁴ Cfr. D. Abram, *The ecology of perception. Interview by Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee*, in «Emergence Magazine», 2020, <https://emergencemagazine.org/podcast/the-ecology-of-perception> (last accessed: 21 March 2023); Id., *Magic and the machine: Notes on technology and animism in an age of ecological wipeout*, in «Emergence Magazine», 2018, <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/magic-and-the-machine> (last access: 6 March 2024); Id., *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*, New York, Vintage Books, 2017 [1996]; Id., *Depth ecology*, in B. Taylor (edited by), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature*, London-New York, Continuum, 2005.

³⁵ D. Abram, *The ecology of perception*, cit.

³⁶ *Anthrozooalgia* is a composite word, from *Anthro* (human animal), *zoo* (other-than-human animal), and *algia* (discomfort). Cfr. M. Adda, *Recognising Anthrozooalgia on the way to the Symbiocene*, cit.

³⁷ Research on human evolutionary history is relevant to this aspect. For example, Di-Poi and Milinkovitch suggest that birds, reptiles and mammals – therefore humans – may descend from

Ethology, Martial Arts and Performance Training

Crypsis and Mimicry

Animal mimicry is an intriguing phenomenon. It refers to certain animals' ability to imitate other organisms' appearance or behaviour to look attractive, dangerous, or unpalatable to a predator. Crypsis, too, is a strategy animals use to avoid predation. However, crypsis involves blending into the environment to become less visible. This can include camouflage patterns, colouration, or behaviours that make the animal harder to detect. Therefore, mimicry involves intentionally presenting certain traits or behaviours to be noticed, while crypsis strives for invisibility³⁸.

Those aspects are primarily explored in biology and ethology. Yet, they emerge transversally in anthropology, performance studies, yoga, martial arts, and dance, among others, which examine how martial postures, religious imagery, and shamanic rituals incorporate the imitation of animal movements. Within these fields, performers, martial artists, dancers – and shamans – often replicate the motions of animals, whether these creatures are real or symbolic and mythical³⁹.

As we will see, crypsis and mimicry are echoed when embodying animality in actor training and composition. In fact, from an animal *tàolù*⁴⁰ to a score, the actor absorbs and transforms animality by crypsis. Conversely, from the score to an animal *tàolù*, the actor goes through a mimicry process and acquires new animal characteristics.

Animal movements in Martial Arts and Performing

Notably, various martial arts traditions across time and cultures have drawn inspiration from animals, incorporating animal movements and psychological characteristics into their techniques. In their turn, martial arts animal movements have

a single reptilian ancestor approximately 320 million years ago. Cfr. N. Di-Poi and M. Milinkovitch, *The Anatomical Placode in Reptile Scale Morphogenesis Indicates Shared Ancestry among Skin Appendages in Amniotes*, in «Science Advances», II, 2016, e1600708.

³⁸ Cfr. D.L. Quicke, *Mimicry, crypsis, masquerade and other adaptive resemblances*, Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2017; J.A. Endler, *An overview of the relationships between mimicry and crypsis*, in «Biol. Journal of the Linnean Society», XVI, 1981, n. 1, pp. 25-31.

³⁹ Cfr. M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press / Bollingen, 1974; M. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, London-New York, Routledge, 1993; R. Schechner, *Ritual and Performance*, in T. Ingold (edited by), *The Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life*, London-New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 613-647.

⁴⁰ Martial art long forms are systematised combinations of movements with embedded fighting strategies. They have different names in various traditions. For example, they are *tàolù* 套路 in Chinese, *kata* 型 in Japanese, and *Jalan Panjang* in Indonesian. In this essay, we use *tàolù* to refer to martial arts long form in actor's work.

influenced – and are intertwined with – performing arts, including actors’ training and characters’ creation.

Capoeira, a martial art rooted in Afro-Brazilian traditions, incorporates animal-inspired movements such as cat, spider and scorpion. Kalarippayattu, an ancient Indian martial art, features animal-inspired movements that mimic snakes, elephants, and roosters. Kung Fu (功夫) Shaolin includes animal forms such as tiger, crane, snake, leopard, and dragon – and has inspired martial artists, actors, dancers, and somatic practitioners worldwide. Further, Silat, the traditional martial art practised in Southeast Asia, also includes animal-inspired movements. In particular, the Sino-Indonesian *Siauw Lim Pek Ho Pay*, alias Bangau Putih (BP) Silat⁴¹, is a relevant example of “martial art-acting”, martial arts employed for actor training and composition⁴². BP Silat influenced W.S. Rendra, the most prominent theatre director of Indonesia of the dictatorial era, and the actors of his company, the Bengkel Teater⁴³.

Actors and performers draw upon martial animal movements to integrate dexterity, rapidity, fluidity, suspiciousness, bravery and other psycho-physical and behavioural characteristics into their movements. Embodied animalities become foundations for the characters’ creation⁴⁴.

A Workshop on Animality at the IPPT Conference 2023

The conference «After the Empty Space: From Traditional Settings to New Creative Ecologies», hosted by the International Platform for Performer Training

⁴¹ The juxtaposition of Shaolin with Bangau Putih Silat is worth noting. When the Shaolin monks visited the BP Silat group in the 1980s in Tugu, West Java – although there was no trace of the two groups having been in contact previously – striking similarities emerged. Emiliano Ruggeri states that «the leader of the (Shaolin) group said that our school had old kung fu movements that they had lost in time» (*personal communication*, author insertion). Ruggeri is a BP instructor, head trainer in Bali, head Liaison in development and research, and secretary of relations with the PGB branches outside Indonesia.

⁴² M. Adda, *Martial art-acting in dictatorial Indonesia: Antigone (1974) and Lysistrata (1975) directed by W. S. Rendra*, in «Theatre, Dance and Performance Training», XIII, 2022, n. 3, pp. 397-415. Cfr. P. Allain, T. Wilson and G. Ziolkowski, *Editorial*, in «Theatre, Dance and Performance Training», XIII, 2022, n. 3, pp. 347-351.

⁴³ M. Adda, *Rendra 2.0*, in P. B. Zarrilli, T. Sasitharan and A. Kapur (edited by), *Intercultural Acting And Performance Training*, London-New-York, Routledge, 2019, pp. 217-245; Id., *W.S. Rendra: Traces of Stanislavsky in Dictatorial Indonesia*, in «Stanislavsky, Here, Today, Now», 2020, <https://stanhere.wordpress.com/2020/09/04/w-s-rendra-traces-of-stanislavsky-in-dictatorial-indonesia/> (last access: 25 April 2024).

⁴⁴ Cfr. D.S. Farrer, *Becoming animal in Chinese martial arts*, in P. Dransart (edited by), *Living Beings: Perspectives on Interspecies Engagement*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 145-166; G. Guarino de Almeida, *Humanity and animality in Chinese martial arts*, in «Theatre, Dance and Performance Training», XIII, 2022, n. 3, pp. 482-495; C. Ciocan, *Embodiment and Animality*, in «Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology», L, 2019, n. 2, pp. 87-103.



Fig. 2. IPPT Conference (2023). A moment of the workshop “Actor’s score, martial arts and the *animal turn*” led by Marco Adda. Photo: Marco Adda.

(IPPT), occurred in Chiusi, Italy, on 13-15 January 2023. The event – coordinated by Angelo Romagnoli (University of Kent) – featured lectures, workshops, online interventions, and more⁴⁵.

During the conference, I proposed a workshop, «Actor’s score, martial arts and the *animal turn*», programmed for Day Two in the afternoon. The duration was set at 45 minutes. The workshop did not require any technological support. The space was an indoor gymnasium, heated to approximately 20 degrees Celsius. The floor was concrete covered with linoleum. About 30 people participated actively, with another nearly 20 sitting along the walls of the training space and observing.

We started in a circle and with a short ritual by synchronising simple movements. Hence, we moved to the initial part, focusing on warming up, characterised by groundwork, animal-inspired movement, and vocal work. This first part – primarily fun – enhanced readiness, awareness, playfulness and reactivity. It lasted about 15 minutes.

The score composition characterised the second part for about 20 minutes. Participants were given two options: they could work A) inductively, that is, starting from a score, a movement they already had, or from an improvised movement, to create then a martial composition, and B) deductively, namely, learning a martial composition and transform it to a possible acting score.

⁴⁵ E. Kolliopoulou, *After the empty space: from traditional settings to new creative ecologies*, in «Theatre, Dance and Performance Training», XIV, 2023, n. 4, pp. 564-566.



Fig. 3. Marco Adda shows the basic hand-posture of the Tiger movement by the Silat Bangau Putih repertory from three views: top (left), side (centre) and bottom (right).

Two groups formed. The two groups worked in parallel on two sides of the space. We proceeded rapidly through the various stages of the two opposite patterns. While those processes can take months or years of work to be embodied, we could briefly overview all of the steps involved.

Group One's participants were initially asked to use or create briefly a short sequence of movements inspired by their personal and artistic backgrounds. In other words, they need a score as their starting point. Thus, they were asked to work on the three following steps: 1) make their movement very precise and repeatable; 2) choose an animal they liked (individually), and try to "insert" the animal – and the movements they imagined or knew of the animal – on their initial score; and 3) to turn their "animalised" structure in martial terms, as if those movements were deflections, attacks, defences from an opponent, similarly to what happens when practising a *tàolù*.

Group Two's participants were initially proposed to learn a few tiger's moves inspired by the BP Silat's *tàolù* "Five Tigers". After they knew these moves, they were proposed to work on three steps: 1) "absorb" the animal; 2) put the movement into a different action; and 3) add some voice in the form of text or vocal sound.

The indications were given in succession for both groups, and participants were given time to work on each target. As the facilitator, I moved from one group to another to support the process.

Participants shared their work in the third part of the workshop, which lasted about 10 minutes. At the centre of the training space, individuals from Group One were asked to interact with individuals from Group Two. Interactions were in couples or three or even more people. Eventually, everybody was called to the centre to share their work and have a final interaction with all of the others. Barbara, a participant in the workshop, described her experience as

Very interesting! To integrate the instinctual work of animality with the preci-

sion of martial arts. Also, working at the same time, in the same space, yet in the opposite direction of the other group is quite an experience, and having the freedom to observe at the same time what others are doing is a gift! (*personal communication*, 15 January 2023)

The workshop revolved around two core principles: firstly, martial arts can shape an actor's dramaturgy. Actors can use a *tàolù* to master space⁴⁶ and create acting scores. That requires the transitioning from a *tàolù* to a non-martial action. This is a process of *absorption*, where the martial movements are "absorbed" and hidden behind the actor's movement. The final score appears as a non-martial development and reflection of inner martial components.

Conversely, the actor's score can be restructured as a *tàolù*. In this case, the actor's imagination becomes the "fighting ground" on which the score is martialised. The process allows actors to expand on precision, proprioception, truthfulness, awareness, attention, and consciousness, which are eventually expressed in the actor's bodymind. This is a *transposition* process, where an actor's score gets "transposed" to a martial dimension and appears as *tàolù*.

The processes – from a *tàolù* to a score and from a score to a *tàolu* – echo *crypsis* and *mimicry*, respectively. The practice can flow in a one-directional, bi-directional, or circular progression. From fighting techniques and tactics, the *tàolù* – as starting or landing points – become pedagogic strategies, supporting actor training and composition in rehearsals and performing, where actors can store, restore, elaborate, express, transform, transmit, and create.

The workshop fuses *zoosomatics* with actor training and composition. *Absorption* and *transposition* echo – and are informed by – the work of theatre reformers of the 20th century⁴⁷ and find relevant links with neurosciences⁴⁸. *Zoosomatics* offer further links, intersecting pertinent notions from philosophy, biological sciences and other disciplines.

Reframing Views

Integrating the *animal turn* into actor training and performing arts challenges traditional concepts of domestication and colonisation. Pre-domestication human-animal interactions, based on coexistence rather than dominance, contrast with anthropocentric approaches prioritising human control. Ingold describes the leap as

⁴⁶ D. Mroz, *Tàolù – The Mastery of Space*, in «Martial Arts Studies», X, 2020, pp. 9-22.

⁴⁷ Cfr. F. Ruffini, *Theatre and Boxing: The Actor Who Flies*, Holstebro-Malta-Wrocław, Icarus-Routledge, 2014.

⁴⁸ Cfr. C. Falletti, G. Sofia and V. Jacono (edited by), *Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

«from trust to domination»⁴⁹. Transposing such a matter onto the embodied experience prompts critical questions about the negotiation – or contrast – between coexistence and dominance within the bodymind: Do we domesticate the animal within, or do we allow her to remain wild⁵⁰, engaging in a dialogue and preserving her inherent possibilities? What kind of interaction can we develop with her, and how does embodied animality affect our perception of self and the environment?

With *zoosomatics*, animality is reconceptualised as an embodied technology. Bodymind decolonisation challenges conventional understandings of – and acknowledges other-than-humanness' role in reshaping – the self. Animal imitation profoundly affects the actor's perception, engendering an embodied metamorphosis and redefining species identity. Theatre and performance emerge as pivotal places of renegotiation, inviting actors to rediscover, unfold, and sometimes express animality. This echoes in animal terms what Camilleri describes regarding objects and technology, such as the passage from bodymind to bodyworld and the transition from psychophysicality to post-psychophysicality⁵¹. After all, excluding animality from embodiment results in what Tim Ingold calls the “logic of inversion”⁵², creating a boundary around “humanity” where animality – an integral part of being human – has been rejected or constrained. Conversely, here, animality is allowed to re-enter the spaces to which it belongs. Animal movements and *tàolù* provide suitable avenues, facilitating the dialogue with animality while resisting attempts to tame her. The bodyworld of the actor acquires ecological and ethological significance, becoming a point of reconnection among what we are used to distinguishing as nature, animality, and humanity. Such a rewiring transcends performative action, positioning the actor as a vehicle for renovation and ecological consciousness within the theatrical space and beyond.

Embodying animality implies embodying what animals experience. An animal's *umwelt* – the subjective reality of an organism⁵³ – is vital to *zoosomatics*. While we

⁴⁹ T. Ingold, *From trust to domination: An alternative history of human-animal relations*, in A. Manning, J. Serpell (edited by), *Animals and Human Society*, London-New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 1-22.

⁵⁰ Consider “wild” as “integral to an environment” and not as synonymous with “uncontrollable”.

⁵¹ F. Camilleri, *Performer Training Reconfigured: Post-psychophysical perspectives for the twenty-first century*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019. “Bodyworld” is a new coinage Camilleri proposed in his book.

⁵² T. Ingold, *The Art of Translation in a Continuous World*, in G. Pálsson (edited by), *Beyond Boundaries: Understanding, Translation and Anthropological Discourse*, Oxford, Berg, 1993, pp. 210-230; cfr. also Id., *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London-New York, Routledge, 2022.

⁵³ T.E. Feiten, *Jakob von Uexküll's Concept of Umwelt*, in «The Philosopher», CX, 2022, n. 1, <https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/post/jakob-von-uexkull-umwelt> (last access: 17 April 2024).

cannot see as a tiger sees, we can “translate” the tiger’s experience into our cognitive possibilities and grasp elements of the tiger’s existential dimension. This is essential to expanding our perception of other species, environments, and ourselves. Insights into animals’ subjective realities result in an expanded understanding of interspecies relationships. This evokes Ingold’s notion of perception⁵⁴ and Bateson’s “consciousness” as environmental matter⁵⁵.

As we become more aware of environmental damage from human activities, we must remodel our knowledge and foster empathy towards other species and ourselves. Integrating the *animal turn* into performing arts promotes ethological and ecological embodiment, expanding creative boundaries and advancing the Symbiocene. Input from ethology can ensure accurate representation – enriching performances and advocacy for animal justice – while the embodiment processes of performing arts can support ethological work, where researchers often remain “disembodied”⁵⁶. In other words, ethology can inspire performing, and performance principles and somatic practices can support animal behaviour studies and practices.

Embodying other-than-humanness impacts sensorial experiences and phenomenological processes. *Zoosomatics* offer a framework to extend our sense of self beyond the ‘human’. The relationship with our animality and other species is the core of humanity, evolutionary heritages that we must recognise, reintegrate, preserve and propel.

⁵⁴ T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, cit.

⁵⁵ G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972.

⁵⁶ V. Despret, *Responding Bodies and Partial Affinities in Human-Animal Worlds Theory*, in «Culture & Society», XXX, 2013, nn. 7-8, pp. 51-76.