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Animals in Drama and Theatrical Performance: Anthropocentric Emotionalism

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This article outlines how nonhuman animals are framed by the emotions of drama, theatre and contemporary performance and considers a distinctive tradition in western culture of enacting animal characters who function as surrogate humans. It argues that, contradictorily, while animal characters confirm anthropocentric emotionalism, drama also contains pro-animal values and concern for animal welfare. Animals embodying emotions in theatrical languages are part of the way animals are used in the traditions of western culture and to think and philosophize with, but they also indicate thinking about the emotions in theatrical performance. The article considers if, however, staging living animals can challenge or utilize anthropocentric emotionalism and whether such practices can support the ethical effort to draw attention to other animal species.

Keywords

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Nonhuman animals and birds (henceforth animal/s) were regularly staged in entertainment spectacles historically, while animals were routinely portrayed in western theatrical performance as either comic or tragic symbols and metaphors for humanity in dramatic language. This article outlines how nonhuman animals are framed by the emotions of drama, theatre and contemporary performance in western culture by presenting examples from a distinctive tradition in which actors enact animals who function as surrogate humans, and contrasted with examples of contemporary performance with living animals. The human enactment of animal identities is evident in ancient Greek drama, Shakespearean drama, nineteenth-century variety theatre, early twentieth-century drama and contemporary performance. From speaking to miming, from full-body costuming to a few feathers, performers embody animals across theatrical eras. While dramatic language can be said to reflect how animals and birds are used to think with and philosophize with across history and cultures (Lévi-Strauss; Daston and Mitman; Mynott), animal characters embodying emotions within dramatic and theatrical works became significant to thinking about the emotions.

As Una Chaudhuri explains, human orientation to nonhuman animal species is an ‘anthropomorphic reflex that is all too often rooted in an anthropocentric outlook’ and within theatrical mimesis that is ‘obsessively anthropocentric’ so that it obscures actual animals (*The Stage Lives of Animals* 30, 95). The ‘anthropocentric outlook’ in theatre converges with the tendency to view and experience the world emotionally and shared through ‘emotionalism’ in theatre (Stanford 15). ‘Emotionalism’ is described as central to Aristotle’s analysis and Greek theatre (Stanford). It implicitly underpins complex human communication and specifically in accounts of suffering (Travis). The tradition of anthropocentric depictions of theatrical animals is imbued with emotionalism.

This article argues that animals are framed by human emotions and affect in drama, theatre and performance and yet, as the examples of animal characters played by humans in drama reveal, anthropocentric emotionalism can contain pro-animal concern for animal welfare and/or rights. The discussion subsequently considers the extent to which theatre’s

anthropocentric emotionalism continues in contemporary performance that includes living animals and whether such practices support or detract from the ethical effort to draw attention to other animal species.

Two anthologies with ‘animal acts’ in the title – about animals in representation and in performance – convey a shift in recent scholarly approaches to animals in drama, theatre and contemporary performance. The first, *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, encompasses historical events and philosophy and the way humanity came to think and define itself in relation to an exclusionary category of animal. Its editors, Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior, write that the animal act can reveal animality in the human and vice versa, and explain how animals were considered to deliver what is described in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as ‘excellent dumb discourse’ (3). The second anthology, *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*, edited by scholar Una Chaudhuri and performance artist Holly Hughes, presents the first collection of recent pro-animal performance scripts from the USA influenced by three decades of animal rights activism and its theory and these have accompanying scholarly analysis. The scripts highlight animal species and human relations with dogs, cats, horses, goats, as well as bees, cockroaches, and monkey and elephant species. The editors sought contributions that would ‘talk about actual animals’ rather than animals as symbols (Chaudhuri ‘Introduction: Animal Acts’ 5). Hence the second anthology addresses the issue of how animals in performance are recognized as animals and implicitly questions whether living animals can be ethically put on the stage. Chaudhuri and Hughes’ anthology innovatively pairs a performance artist with an academic scholar to reflect the performance studies field as well as the animal studies field and the respondents include Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe. While scripts in this anthology depict emotionally close human-animal relationships, only one earlier text – Rachel Rosenthal’s *The Others* – stages actual animals. A pro-animal choice not to stage animals even with human performers, however, may mean animal species remain absent in the emotional communication between human performer and human spectator. The concluding section of this article considers some contemporary performers who collaborate with actual animals and draw attention to other species through highlighting anthropocentric emotionalism within human-animal relations.

Comic Surrogates

Animals are central to the comic drama of Aristophanes, which includes *The Birds*, first staged in 414 BCE, presenting birds as human-like characters and as a chorus who come together to create a city under King Epops, formerly the human, Tereus. More specifically, the birds in this classic Greek comedy are not only human-like but are proxies for ideas of emotions. Jeremy Mynott suggests birds were commonly and widely performed by humans in Greek theatre (304). While birds are described in *The Birds* as signifying love to humans and taking their messages to the gods, humans are the enemies of birds until the visitors, Pisthetarios and Euelpides, convince the birds to go to war with the gods and claim their rightful god-like atmospheric heritage, which is older than the earth. The humans seek a ‘cloudcuckooland’ above the earth, a ‘bird-dom’ (Aristophanes 61; Cless 30, 36). Initially, the birds are hostile and ready to attack the human visitors as spies, and the twenty-four distinct birds in the chorus accuse humans of being liars, deceitful and always ready to double cross (Aristophanes 37). As the birds continue to describe human flaws and the absurdity of human society, different bird species are accorded emotional dispositions. Establishing himself as an intermediary for the birds, and expressing the wish to be a bird, Pisthetarios threatens to usurp Zeus in demagogical delivery, which also creates a performance dynamic in which an audience ‘*is the Birds*’ (Arrowsmith ‘Aristophanes’ *Birds*’ 156, italics in original). The audience reflects an emotionalism that is equivalent to the birds.

Ideas of the emotions are central to *The Birds*, with Euelpides meaning ‘hopeful’ and Pisthetarios meaning ‘plausible’, that is, he seems credible (Aristophanes 11). William Arrowsmith contends that the play is about the Athenian concept of *polupragmosune*, which refers to how the city state’s inhabitants were characterized on the one hand as energetic with ‘daring, ingenuity, originality, and curiosity’, and on the other as having restless moods of ‘discontent’ from ‘interference’ and mischievousness (‘Introduction’, 3). Moreover, Arrowsmith identifies how the gods represent ‘wealth’, ‘happiness’, and ‘freedom and power’ and thus are a source of human ‘envy and terror’ (‘Aristophanes’ *Birds*’, 124). Importantly, the birds stand for ideas of freedom more than virtue and good behaviour within the play’s symbolism (Dunbar 4). The birds seem physically free and the emotions accompanying freedom matter to humans. The meddling comic rascal, Pisthetairos, ‘dazzles’ the birds through cunning and ‘calculating *hybris*

and his ravenous eros', and the play's idea of eros encompasses political 'ambition, the love of glory, envy, lust for power', concerns evident in Greek thought along with the Dionysian belief in love and chaos that is at once profane and metaphysical (Arrowsmith 'Aristophanes' *Birds*', 129, 133, 137 italics in original). The god, Dionysius, who is at the centre of a major sacred ritual, is also the god of theatre (and wine) and *The Birds* was first performed at the City Dionysia Festival. There are also comic references to sexual desire throughout the play.

The play's anthropocentric emotionalism absorbs the birds into a human world as if there is no separation between species' worlds. Emblematic of love and sacred religious practices (as signifiers of omens), birds fulfill anthropocentric emotional ideals as they mark the changing seasons for agricultural food practices (Aristophanes 50). But *The Birds* parodies human beliefs and hypocritical practices that proclaim love of birds all the while catching and trading them and consuming them as food. The narrative satirically delivers an anti-war message as humans provoke war between the gods and the birds, and aggression and war remain identifiably human. By implication, human treatment of birds is part of a war on animal species (Wadiwel; Tait, *Fighting Nature*). As the comic action unfolds, the gods soon want to make peace as they have become hungry since no sacrificial 'roast' meat from human altars has floated up to heaven via bird messengers since the war began (Aristophanes 94).

Even with its underlying anthropocentric emotionalism, *The Birds* contains pro-animal values with clear acknowledgement of the ways that birds are used, objectified and discarded. Although the play is considered to be critical of war and democracy, the meaning is contested and controversial (Arrowsmith 'Aristophanes' *Birds*', 146; Dunbar 1). It is considered ambiguous even though it can be interpreted as being about nature. In his study of depictions of the environment in drama, Downing Cless discerns concepts of nature's degradation and human 'eco-hubris' in the play (29–30). By the end of *The Birds*, for example, Pisthetairos is dismissive of Poseidon, the god of the sea, in an instance of human overreach. While Arrowsmith finds nostalgia for an idyllic rural past, Cless interprets the satirical comedy as showing 'men acting as gods controlling the environment' and characters exposing what Val Plumwood identifies as dualistic human thinking that locates the nonhuman environment in a binary category with the female and the animal (Arrowsmith 'Aristophanes' *Birds*' 125; Cless 37;). To some extent,

however, in its depiction of specific emotions, *The Birds* inverts the hierarchy of human over nonhuman by ridiculing humans for pride and greed, and allocating goodwill and trust to its speaking bird characters. The birds are elevated with the division between positive and negative emotions that are either socially beneficial or antisocial.

Along with a familiarity with Aesop's fables, Aristophanes could have been educated in natural philosophy, the elements, and Dionysian principles of love and chaos, and the specificity of his bird identities means he may have had a personal affinity with the fifth century BC rural world (Cless 31–2). Humans turning into birds reflects Plato's philosophical rejection of the division between humans and animals, and the need to preserve the environment and his metaphysical ideas of the soul's reincarnation, all of which Aristotle rejects in a reasoned but more materialistic philosophy that does at least recognize kinship with animals (Carone, 70–2, 74). While Aristotle initiates a philosophical belief that an animal's lack of speech means a lack of reason (Orozco, *Theatre and Animals* 21), bird characters speak in *The Birds* and emotionally chastise humans. At the same time the bird chorus acknowledges humankind as feeble and born to suffering. Claiming to be weary of the hypocrisy and grovelling in Athenian society, and apparently being pursued for debts, Pisthetairios and Euelpides seek a peaceful world without law courts and political rule. The play opens with the lost Pisthetairos carrying a magpie and Euelpides holding a crow whom they are following in order to escape from the 'legal locusts' (Aristophanes 14). They encounter a sandpiper servant who accuses them of stealing eggs. King Epops appears as a hoopoe, a bird with striking black and white and pink feathers except that he is visibly human with few feathers in the play. Epops is married to a nightingale who makes a melancholic song, and they bring the birds together. The play names the actual birds in the ancient Greek environment, for example, a flamingo, a partridge, a plover, a pigeon, lark, a wren, a dove, a hawk, a gull, and a vulture (Aristophanes 29; Pollard). Even with its anthropocentric emotionalism, *The Birds* reveals human dependency on birds and animals and the newly created bird city is soon visited by a poet, an inspector, and a legal representative all seeking employment. Pisthetairos dismisses each one as a shirker. Birds are concurrently symbolic of social hierarchies in the play. The eagle and a woodpecker are associated with Zeus, an owl with Athena, a hawk with Apollo, a rooster with Persian kings, and kites with the kings

of Hellas (Aristophanes 39–40). The triumphant seemingly impossible feat of flight means that birds serve as emotive symbols of earthly and heavenly power. While they are purveyors of Greek belief, the birds speak in their own defense within the play's anthropocentric emotionalism as they criticize human treatment of them and ongoing trickery. *The Birds* expressly condemns humans for their one-sided, duplicitous anthropocentric emotionalism.

Animals are widely used motifs and symbols and are embodied in the major period of drama encompassing the Renaissance and Shakespearean drama with language that has been widely analysed for revealing an affinity with nature (for example, Höfele; Cless; Raber and Dugan). But Andreas Höfele finds that when Bottom changes into an ass in Shakespeare's romantic comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this has 'little to do with a real animal; it draws on a stereotype of anthropomorphic projection' (35). This pattern of finding humor in animal surrogates in theatre, however, still conveys an appreciation of animals. Höfele argues that the numerous references to animals and birds in Shakespearean drama signify inclusion and permeability rather than human separation from the nonhuman world.

Conversely, the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment is considered to entrench a separation from nonhuman nature and even its 'enslavement' (Thomas; Höfele 278), and animal characters in drama become less apparent. Instead, eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century public menageries developed as separate enterprises that exhibited living animals in increasing numbers within an anthropocentric binary in which they embodied either aggression or affection (Tait, *Fighting Nature*). From the mid-nineteenth century, music hall and vaudeville regularly presented living animals as well as human animal characters such as two-legged dogs in pantomime (Young 89). Human impersonators of dogs were particularly popular for sentimental effect. This historical practice coincides with Darwin's empirical studies speculating about humans and animals and the evolutionary development of the emotions, and proclaiming the affection of dogs with surety from observing the vocal sounds and bodily and facial changes of their aggressive behaviour (116–9). Acts with performing dogs became a particular focus of turn-of-the-twentieth-century campaigns against animals in performance and indicative of human compassion for animals (Tait, *Wild and Dangerous Performances* 36).

The dominant identity in drama and its theatre was and is human. In this way, theatre arts have implicitly contributed to cultural thinking and philosophy that elevates humanity over animality (Orozco and Parker-Starbuck). The ways in which theatre encapsulates philosophical ideas, including those of Nietzsche on theatre, converge with theatrical ideas of the emotions (Aristotle; Puchner 146). In the nineteenth century, as Jennifer Ham explains, Nietzsche describes theatre within a binary that exemplifies either emotional Dionysian chaos or rational Apollonian order, and he has animals express the former and its ‘wild, animalistic philosophy’ (159). Nietzsche’s prophet philosophically proposes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that while the ropewalker bridges the human and superhuman like an eagle, it is the lion that is needed to create or steal new values and freedom (55). The animal embodies freedom. If this animate lion belongs in a long tradition of human-animal characters that represent far more than a figure of speech, in this context, Nietzsche’s lion is emblematic of a serious thinking and feeling being.

By the early twentieth century, with one noticeable exception of a comic play by George Bernard Shaw, animate animals and humans playing animal characters were absent from realistic modern drama and theatre – and John Berger finds animals largely absent from modernist visual art. The vegetarian Shaw, however, dramatizes a Christian fable in his play, *Androcles and the Lion*, staged in 1913, which depicts early Christians taken captive and facing death from gladiators or lions. Shaw’s tongue-in-cheek play is unquestionably pro-animal. It parallels the loss of freedoms of human slaves and captive animals and it contains human declarations of affection for animals, a refusal to eat meat, and a denouncement of animal captivity. The lion is embodied by an actor in pantomime style and in the slap-stick action, Androcles and Magaera, his wife, trip over the lion in a forest. The miming lion does not speak but roars in ‘suffering’ – lions roar to attract the attention of other lions – because of the thorn in his paw (Shaw 21). Chastised by Magaera for not sacrificing animals to the Roman gods and for talking to animals for hours, Androcles baby-talks the lion into submission as he removes the thorn: ‘Clever little lionpiony! Understands um’s dear old friend Andy Wandy’ (Shaw 33). The lion is being treated like a surrogate dog (or human baby) by Androcles in the slippage created by human anthropocentric emotionalism. This provides an early dramatic example of the depiction of animals as family members. As the Christian prisoners are sent to the coliseum with

the Romans claiming it is their suicidal choice not to repent, Ferrovius is elephant-like and Lavinia is described as a good-looking filly (Shaw 49, 59). Acknowledging his fate, Androcles does not want to go to a heaven without animals, and notes that the lion will enjoy eating him and the other Christian (human) lambs. When the lion recognizes Androcles as his helper, they embrace and ‘waltz’ around the arena and, after Androcles encourages the Emperor to tickle the lion’s belly, he is freed (Shaw 141). The moral of the fable is that Androcles gains his freedom from captivity because of his love of animals. Hence humanity becomes free through a process of emotionally connecting with animals.

This comic spoof reflects a nineteenth-century sentiment that humanity is of a higher order and therefore obliged to protect animals. It is often left out of the analysis of Shaw’s dramatic contribution to innovative social ideas (Innes). As it confronts attitudes to animals, *Androcles and the Lion* stands out for its decidedly pro-animal philosophical position. Susan Stone-Blackburn decides the play is a rare fusion of comic farce and philosophy and for its rejection of pious Christian beliefs, and while Androcles is rewarded for his humility and kindness to animal friends, Shaw considers the lion ‘fearless and amiable’ (Stone-Blackburn 92, 98). But the lion is accorded an emotional temperament that confirms compatibility with humans rather than that of a lion which undermines species recognition. At the same time, the play champions the cognitive and emotional similarities of animals and humans. Shaw’s drama was particularly attuned to social progress (Innes), and therefore this play about human-animal affection – Androcles prefers their company – can be considered to expand on Shaw’s dramatic political oeuvre concerned with worker rights and gender equality. Shaw’s comic human lion provides a theatrical embodiment of concern for animal welfare in an early-twentieth-century play that extends freedom and rights to animals.

Tragic Symbols

The human-lion in Shaw’s play seems to be an anomaly within modern drama even though animals and birds feature prominently as emotionally-laden symbols from Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* and Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (Cless) to Eugène Ionesco’s mid-twentieth century absurdist classic,

Rhinoceros. Presented as stage props, animals were inanimate objects within serious narratives of human emotional loss. For example, the birds in Ibsen's and Chekhov's drama are metaphoric of the loss of youthful innocence and the illusion of individual freedom as they predict emotional suffering and death, while the rhinoceros suggests a loss of humanness itself.

In *Rhinoceros*, humans turn into rhinoceroses. Although not embodied on stage by actors, this transformation is described and the (off-stage) sounds of galloping and trumpeting provide an impression of living animals. They interrupt Sunday morning in the town square as Ionesco's eponymous character, Berenger, meets with his ordered, disciplined friend, Jean, and Berenger confesses that his dishevelled appearance and alcohol habits are the result of being frightened and anxious, and feeling out of place (Ionesco 24). Jean advocates self-help, order, cultural education and willpower, which he claims will also resolve Berenger's failure to attract Daisy (27, 30). They speculate that the rhinoceroses are from a zoo or circus and their dialogue is interspersed with comically absurd comments from a philosopher logician who extends syllogisms about cats to the rhinoceroses. A pet cat is trampled to death and brought onstage by a sobbing housewife as the stage directions make the horns of rhinoceros visible. On Monday, colleagues in Berenger's workplace are disbelieving until a rhinoceros destroys the office stairway, and firemen have to rescue Daisy and the other workers. Mrs Boeuf (beef) suddenly recognizes the rhinoceros as her husband. As it becomes evident that humans are becoming rhinoceroses, Berenger argues that humans have 'a philosophy that animals don't share' and values built up over centuries, while Jean has changed and defends rhinoceroses as having the right to live and argues for upholding nature's laws, describing Berenger's humanism as 'ridiculous old' sentimentalism (79, 80). As Jean turns green and becomes a rhinoceros, he calls out, 'I'll trample you. I'll trample you down! [...] I'm furious' (81–2). A suppressed rage is revealed through his transformation. Rhinoceros heads become visible. Berenger declares his love for Daisy, and that he feels 'such tremendous emotion!' and claims they can regenerate the human race, but even Daisy is changing, which frightens her (110). She is finding human (Berenger's) love weak compared with the energetic rhinoceroses who look happy and normal, and says 'we must try to understand the way their mind works, and learn their language' (118).

The emotions accompanying Daisy's transformation include love as she advocates for the rhinoceros. Alone on stage, stranded with his beliefs, Berenger remains resolutely human as he describes his body as white and monstrous.

The play deliberately confuses whether these are black or white rhinoceroses who have appeared in Europe without further explanation, as it insinuates their cultural association with the mythic unicorn, animal exoticism, and a reputation for ferocity and ugliness that was offset by docile behaviour in captivity (Enright 2008). Grouped with the elephant, rhinoceroses proved more elusive in the wild although the captive animals proved compliant, and there are claims of emotional bonding with human keepers like the claims made about elephants (Tait, *Wild and Dangerous Performances*). But this is an animal species whose emotions are not easily interpreted by humans; rhinoceroses seem metaphoric of how the emotional feelings of others are difficult to fathom. Longstanding interpretations of the play find that it depicts a society turning away from humanist values and adopting conformist (fascist) beliefs, along with the difficulty of communicating with language, a common theme in the French-Romanian Ionesco's work accorded autobiographical significance (Esslin). But the rhinoceroses embody Dionysian chaos against the precarious artifice of rational order. (The fossils of prehistoric species were first discovered in abundance in Romania's Transylvania, and multiple rhinoceros species once lived in Europe.) In her description of the 1974 film of the play presenting only audible rhinoceroses, Kelly Enright writes that the rhinoceros is an 'absurd counterpoint to civilization – a ridiculous sublime' (110). Characters in *Rhinoceros* describe themselves as 'thinking beings', including about racial difference, and one by one they adhere to the momentum of the social group and become rhinoceroses (50, 97). While Berenger resists this conformity, he is unhappy in his solitary freedom.

Chaudhuri (*The Stage Lives of Animals*) elaborates on Baudrillard's insight that animal silence means human language fills up the spaces around them and that modernity made animals into something other than animals. Yet she identifies a strong animal presence in *Rhinoceros* that can be interpreted with Deleuzian philosophical ideas of becoming animal, and she challenges dramatic interpretations that find only human symbolism. Chaudhuri explains that it is the animal's 'indistinguishability' within the herd that sets out the contrast with belief in human

individuality and liberty (*The Stage Lives of Animals* 30). Even with scholarly attention to the prevalence of ideas of atmospheric air and pollution in Ionesco's drama, because of the drama's elliptical meaning, there was limited appreciation until recently of how a play such as *Rhinoceros* demolishes the division between culture and nature (Lavery 168, 173). Carl Lavery points out that the rhinoceros spread clouds of dust that force the characters to retreat indoors, and Jean's lungs become infected with rhinocerotitis and characters fear contagion (175, 179). The transformation that happens bodily and emotionally means human and nonhuman merge. Lavery notes Ionesco's anti-Brechtian resistance to pedagogical political theatre even though Ionesco's dramatic depictions contest nuclear testing and its threat, cold war conflict and environmental collapse, and Lavery argues that the plays reveal interconnectedness with the environment (167). Humans reject the nonhuman world as abject and Lavery suggests that while the characters seek to transcend toxic atmospheres, Ionesco's absurdist humour suggests a never-ending process of catharsis and bodily laughter to avoid an apocalyptic end (Lavery 186-8). Catharsis in theatre refers to its emotional process that builds to a climax and then dissipates – which here supports the ethical effort to draw attention to other animal species. The play depicts how an ever-present nonhuman world, Plumwood's 'backgrounding of nature' (Cless) will only be noticed through an intrusion that is often extraordinary. By then, however, a takeover cannot be prevented, which prefigures twenty-first century environmental and climate change concerns.

As *Rhinoceros* presents the escalating irrational intrusion of the surrounding nonhuman world into orderly human society, characters describe their emotions and Jean and Daisy emotionally change as they turn into rhinoceroses. The rhinoceroses actively demolish the walls and buildings of the social, domestic and workspaces which contain friendship, romance and marriage, and workplace hierarchies. Berenger, who from the outset describes fear, anxiety and love, is left human at the end, forlorn and wretched, whereas characters who seem more self-assured turn into rhinoceroses. If the transformation into rhinoceros stands for the characters' deluded thinking and misguided emotional feeling, the play's humorous twist makes those characters certain of human accomplishment and oblivious to doubt, frailty and weakness; that is, susceptible to a herd mentality. Berenger's awareness of his inadequacies and emotional

failings, his individuality, seems to preserve his humanness as the emotionally less questioning characters become rhinoceroses. The play implies that human emotional conviction and certainty, is to be feared – and by animals.

In her extended argument that animal species need to be reinstated in the discourse of twenty-first century theatre, Chaudhuri (*The Stage Lives of Animals*) calls for a ‘theatre of species’ in which to encourage inclusion. She advocates a process of ‘zooësis,’ (from the Greek *zoion*) in which animals are put into discourse that requires new ways of ‘thinking, writing and speaking’ even about existing texts (‘Introduction: Animal Acts’ 6; *The Stage Lives of Animals* 18). The omission of actual animals from modernist theatrical performance reflects their increasing absence from everyday worlds and the momentum of exploitation developing from the 1970s with an increasingly industrial scale away from public view. Chaudhuri’s extended explanation analyzes the drama of Edward Albee, whose absurdist realist drama shifts from omission of animal characters to inclusion, embodied by a living animal. As Chaudhuri explains, in line with other modern drama, Albee’s 1958 *The Zoo Story* about a young man’s suicide reveals the animal as the ‘contained other,’ whereas in the 2002 *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* – in which a married man falls in love with the goat, Sylvia – the animal is depicted as the ‘excluded other’ (Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals*). Importantly, Sylvia is a character in the play and a live goat silently embodies the character on stage. Sylvia is emotionally significant within the human relationships and while an emotional declaration of love can be understood, it is difficult to fathom whether love is mutual with the inscrutable bodily presence of the goat on stage. An emotional declaration of love seems one-sidedly anthropocentric.

Chaudhuri accepts that the inclusion of other species in contemporary performance can produce change in thinking and values about animals (‘Introduction: Animal Acts’ 1). She explains that the ‘animal turn’ evident in humanities scholarship, and to a far lesser extent evident in performance studies scholarship, represents increased awareness within all aspects of culture about the oppressive treatment of animals. It also reflects the shift in ecological language away from, for example, the nature/culture binary. But Chaudhuri warns that this shift might actually continue to reflect human self-interest in the nonhuman and the environment and, for example, in the impact of climate change on humans rather than all species. Regardless, the

challenge to – even the possibility of the dissolution of – ‘human exceptionalism’ leads to a new orientation within human ‘connections’ with other species (Chaudhuri ‘Introduction: Animal Acts’ 2). This type of reorientation can expose the multiple ways in which animal lives are embedded in the identity structures and constraints of human society. Chaudhuri’s ‘theatre of species’ is suited to this purpose of multi-species engagement, even where it is dominated by human emotional relations. As argued here, animal species highlight theatre’s anthropocentric emotionalism.

Sensory Body Insensitivity

Historically, the restricted movement of animals in menagerie exhibition and in circus performance was staged to appeal to human emotions, to satisfy curiosity, to please and excite, and to embody aggression. The exhibition of one or more exotic animals intersected with theatre within history, often to theatre’s disrepute; for example, in Shakespearean England the venues for bear-baiting and for human theatre were in close proximity, often part of the same venue and business (Höfele 6–7). The nineteenth-century colonial practice of hunting exotic wild animals for trophy specimens or to provide living exhibits progressed to an unprecedented scale, and can be described as part of a ‘war on other species’ (Tait, *Fighting Nature* xvii, 101). Nineteenth-century popular entertainment with animals was dominated by horses and monkeys, and large animals imported to menageries made episodic appearances in nineteenth-century circus and theatre until the 1890s when individual elephants and big cats were trained and could be routinely presented in each performance, and came to dominate the circus ring displacing equestrian acts as the lead acts (Tait, *Wild and Dangerous Performances*). Animals in circus performance went largely unchallenged until organized opposition developed in the early twentieth century. At this time, circus-trained animals began to feature in the stunts of early twentieth-century cinema and were thereby encompassed within its emotional narratives (Tait *Wild and Dangerous Performances*).

Trained animal performers were common in variety theatre acts including American vaudeville at the turn of the twentieth century; they provided opening and closing acts framing

the theatrical experience in what were termed “sight” or “dumb” acts’ – a ‘sight act’ label also given to human athletic displays (Young 84). By the later decades of the twentieth century, animal identities in theatre had become quarantined into two genres with high levels of emotional sentimentality, the musical and children’s performance (Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals*) and circus accommodated both aspects. While the production elements such as lighting and music enhance the evocation of responses, these technical elements also add to how animals are framed in an emotional scenario. Trained animals are everywhere in cinema and screen performance, with its ubiquitous human emotional layering of the narrative, the music and the *mise-en-scène*. Trained animals are evident in the crossovers between entertainment forms in the 2000s; for example, the cute pet dog as family member (or fashion accessory) in the 2007 stage musical of the 2001 film based on Amanda Brown’s novel, *Legally Blonde: The Musical* by Laurence O’Keefe, Nell Benjamin and Heather Hach. In this production the dog was also like an emotional surrogate of a child. All these types of performance reiterate a fundamental question about why humans insist that four-legged animals reflect humanness back in their actions and more specifically, as suggested here, in the emotional dynamics. Perhaps this question should be turned around: can humans see the nonhuman world other than through the prism of human emotional experience? The brief history of theatre and performance outlined here would suggest that anthropocentric emotionalism is also revealed by theatre.

Lourdes Orozco points out that by the 2010s ‘animal presence has become a regular feature of experimental theatre’ in the effort to make performance ‘real’ (*Theatre and Animals* 3). In contrast to sentimental theatrical musicals or cinema, an animal in innovative performance is displayed silently for the affect, the visceral sensations of viewing the animal body rather than for an emotional effect. The strategy of staging actual animals in performance expanded in the 1970s and 1980s through reinvigorated traditions of shows such as the equestrian *Zingaro* by Bartabas (Williams), but it was decentered in the 1990s–2000s by bioartists such as Kathy High in the USA and performance artist Kira O’Reilly in the United Kingdom and also visual artist Catherine Bell in Australia (Orozco, *Theatre and Animals* 26–7). There are a number of important precedents in international performance, and notable dance productions in the 2000s included Pina Bausch’s work (Ridout; Orozco, *Theatre and Animals* 56). At the same time dead animals

and body parts in contemporary performance intersect with the tradition of taxidermy (Tait ‘Confronting Corpses’). Practices with live or dead animals for visible effect seems to be more about their utility for human art rather than pro-animal values and the animal is physically compromised. As Orozco explains, not only are animals staged in misleading ways, but their offstage treatment is not visible and the ethics of their care are contentious (*Theatre and Animals*).

Orozco and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck ask: ‘what is the animal *doing* in performance? as inflected both materially (what is the animal *actually* doing in performance?) and ethically (what is the animal *even* doing in performance?)’ (6). The activity with and around living animals can be philosophically meaningful beyond staging realism. For example, in imaginative productions by Società Raffaello Sanzio directed by Romeo Castellucci with a horse and dogs in productions such as *Genesi: From the Museum of Sleep* and *Inferno*; these are texts about Biblical belief, mythic imagery and inhuman cruelty, torture, and violence. At one point, large dogs prowling the stage add to a mood of ominous, if unspecified, threat. Castellucci includes animals because they were part of the origins of Western performance. He refers to the goat (*tragos*) song that gave its name to tragic drama and outlines a mythic significance for actors in theatre, and Castellucci explains that an ‘animal form’ could encompass the ‘specific animality’ of each production as well as restoring theatre’s general animality (23, 28). If domesticated animals appear among the atypical bodies staged in Raffaello Sanzio’s performances (Di Benedetto 164–5, 186–201), they contribute to its strange beauty and an emotional aesthetic of unease and fear. They focus attention on diverse living bodies across species in emotionally ambiguous ways.

Crucially, however, as David Williams points out in his exploration of human-animal subjectivities, a horse in performance or an art gallery can appear sensorily disturbed within the human-controlled environment to humans who understand horse body language. An inappropriate sensory environment indicates insensitivity to their welfare and should be a constraint on artistic inclusion. Steve Baker describes alternative visual arts practices that take place in the habitat of the animal species to which the artists go, and the documentation of the visit is the artistic product such as a photographic or painted artifact. Leaving aside human collaborative performances in zoos (Kershaw), the emergence of site-specific theatrical

performance in the habitat of the animal species is a promising alternative because it pays attention to the sensory experience of other animal bodies.

While innovative twenty-first century theatre directors have been putting living animals back into theatre and performance, this remains an ambiguous practice in relation to embodied sensitivities and sympathy for animal rights issues. Even putting an animal on to the stage necessitates training the living animal out of his or her bodily reactions and behavioural inclinations. The right of humans to dominate other animals continues to be what is implicitly demonstrated in theatre. But staging the living animal can halt the automatic absorption of theatre's anthropocentric emotionalism. The goat or a horse or a dog can seem to bodily stand outside the human to human emotional exchange.

The removal of actual animals, including from contemporary performance, seems at odds with what has become an urgent socio-political need to challenge the invisibility of many non-pet animal species in the twenty-first century urbanized world. Indeed, it may be the unexpected visibility of an animal in theatre and eliciting human bodily affect that suggests cognitive similarities and emotional lives – even given sentimentality – and develops sensitivity to the lives of nonhuman species, for example, in recognizing how mother animals love their young. By highlighting emotional affinities, anthropocentric performance which includes animals can contribute to twenty-first century questions about how nonhuman animal species think and feel.

Performing Emotional Connections

While humans enacting animals, birds and insects implicitly confirm human-like emotion, anthropocentric emotionalism has become more acceptable as studies confirm a comparable emotional range in other animal species, including grief (for example, Bekoff; de Waal; Pribac). Contemporary performance also involves reviving the western cultural tradition of humans performing as animals – which is distinct from the ongoing indigenous performance traditions of movement. In a recent example in the play *Carla and Lewis*, about climate change, human performers are the surrogate butterflies, Lewis and Carla, who live on the mud seeping through

the art installation in the New York apartment of Elsa (Enelow). This suggests a pro-animal alternative to the staging of living animals.

The inclusion of living animals in performance needs an animal-centred approach. While it can reinforce a belief that the human and the animal are emotionally connected, it need not overtly attribute human emotion to the animal. From the 1970s a small number of artists created performance with an awareness of pro-animal political values derived from the philosophical thinking of writers such as Peter Singer, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway. Performance with animals is one domain in which creative work can be particularly effective when it operates in tandem with the philosophical thinking (Chaudhuri and Hughes). The American artist, Rachel Rosenthal, stands out for her early pro-animal stance in performance (Chaudhuri, 'Animal Rites'), and for the graphic exposure of cruel practices. Her early controversial works happened within the ambit of 1970s animal rights activism exemplified by Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*. In 1982, Rosenthal did the first of three performances with her pet rat, Tatti Wattles, on her shoulder (Rohman). Tatti was definitely a performer with a persona in a performance that intended to counteract negative human emotive attitudes toward rats. Rosenthal's texts probe what Singer terms 'speciesism', as he describes how the human mistreatment of animals 'can be properly understood only as the manifestation of the ideology of our species – that is, the attitudes which we, as the dominant animal, have toward the other animals' (Singer 185). Ideology about other species also involves emotional attitudes which performance can challenge. Rosenthal's emotional attachment to Tatti justifies staging an aspect of their cohabitation in public and with 'shared agency' (Rohman), and serves the political purpose of countering how rats are deemed abject, and attract alarm and fear and are killed. While Rosenthal's performance sets out to confront human emotional reactions by showing love for Tatti, it also coincides with what Mel Chen discerns as animacy hierarchies that contrast with the inanimate, and lead to the queering of affect in biopolitical encounters.

Rosenthal's *The Others*, created in 1984, stands as a seminal text in recent performance and in the animal studies field. This script is anchored in Rosenthal's embodied spoken delivery, and it includes the staging of numerous pet species. The cast has 'forty-two animals and their human companions', including children, live in the performance and with filmed and projected

images on a screen (Rosenthal 217). The structure might be termed ‘postmodern’— more recently termed ‘postdramatic’— as writer-performer Rosenthal presents multiple personae. The script consists of a rich collage of philosophical ideas, fables, literature, poetic stanzas, colloquial sayings, religious iconography, factual information, and personal revelations about animal lives and their mistreatment. While it encapsulates a comprehensive summary of thinking about animals in culture, the performance form includes dynamic physical action. The script’s confronting revelations remain emotionally disturbing for a reader/spectator.

The Others begins with a type of Grimm’s fable about a woodcutter’s daughter who gets lost in the forest and, invited into the hut of an old man, cooks for and feeds him but overlooks the animals’ needs, and is imprisoned. The next segment involves Rosenthal carrying a mechanical dog indicative of Descartes’ declaration that an animal is a machine without feeling. She explains dreams, including her mother drowning her pet rat, each line interspersed with a moo or a squeak or a hoot. A live horse appears. Rosenthal’s persona speaks about how human dog breeding has physically distorted the body as she is gagged and physically restrained; this action is observed by a number of dogs and their human companions standing to the right on a platform.

In a comment reflecting Tom Regan’s arguments for the moral value of each animate subject, Rosenthal queries: ‘Surely the question of the moral status of nonhuman beings, of whether animals are direct objects of moral concern, is at least a legitimate subject of inquiry’ (Rosenthal 224). The moral worth of each individual animal contrasts with Singer’s more utilitarian approach that weighs up the general overall good. The rat, Brownie, enters and Rosenthal’s persona says: ‘The sewers of the human psyche are clogged with the corpses of children, animals, women, animals slaves, animals, prisoners, animals, animals, animals ... (227). Using a sequence of masks, she describes human contradictions and the brutal use of animals within scientific experimentation, farming and food production. ‘Animals are property and are viewed as “models,” “tools,” “receptacles,” and “renewable resources”’ (Rosenthal 229, 230). Finally, the third woodcutter’s daughter feeds the animals and the old man is transformed into a prince, and they live happily ever after. The animals in fables are the focus of emotions only insofar as it suits humans.

Rosenthal is everyone – that is, every human. The performer verbalizes the gamut of attitudes to animals and Rosenthal shifts to ‘herself’ in places to distinguish the performer’s subjective experience (227). The performance form places the animals in the performance as well as makes them spectators – an audience watching silently. This doubling effect of being on stage as well as watching suggests how animals observe humans and their actions, living their lives with human imposition and perhaps animal curiosity. Rosenthal voices the rejection of animal abuse, and the silent presence of animals implies that they contribute to this understanding. The human reader/spectator is encouraged to ask how the animals feel.

In writing of how humans categorize all nonhuman others as ‘the animal’ in a process of misrecognition, Derrida writes that this is part of how humans manage ‘on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence that some would compare to the worst cases of genocide’ (120). Rosenthal’s 1984 text also points out a Nazi genocidal parallel. Multiple political and philosophical pro-animal perspectives can be tracked within *The Others* and Chaudhuri (‘Animal Rites’) draws on Cary Wolfe’s ideas of subjectivities and rites in her analysis. Emotional responses might be enacted by Rosenthal as a performer, but numerous human-animal combinations in the staging provide a silent indication of a fundamental anthropocentric emotional bond with other species. Yet the domestic animals on stage are habituated in ways that reflect the conditions that Haraway explains make it possible for species to meet. At one point, ‘Animal People’ are asked to briefly describe their feelings about the animals. Throughout, Rosenthal has spoken on behalf of animals to reveal their broken lives, but her depiction of embodied empathy for the suffering of animals is physicalized silently – danced to music – as if the human animal’s understanding is without speech. It implies that empathy is felt rather than spoken. In a radical statement of animal rights advocacy, the spoken text explains that finding a newer, wiser way of relating is necessary for the human self to be whole rather than divided from its own physicality (Rosenthal 236). Here, anthropocentric emotionalism is put to good effect on behalf of animals in the claim humanity is incomplete without union with the nonhuman animal.

A comparable exploration to *The Others* in both its form and content might be Deborah Levy’s 1997 *Diary of a Steak*, which describes the subjective experience of animals among a

proliferation of species and interweaves voices in verbatim conversations, official statements and personal declarations, and intertextual references to madness and nineteenth-century female hysteria. It reflects the cultural alignment of animal rights and feminism exposed by the work of Carol Adams that analyses the imagery and language of animal bodies and of female bodies in culture. Levy's early work was for performance, and in a return to a Nietzschean animal who might think if not speak in *Diary of a Steak*, the thread of two remembered stories involve the last six days of a calf born from a cow with BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), and the lives of her antecedents. The language mirrors the effects of the disease as the calf bodily disintegrates and thought fails (McKay 155). If this exposes the resistance of humans to understanding the material bodily needs of other species, the larger revelation is that human-animal relations are diseased by the division of animals into pets that are emotionally encircled and loved and other species that are renounced emotionally and become food.

It is suggested here that performance in which pro-animal perspectives are integral to the creative process should not preclude integrating living animals with sensitivity to the sensory needs of animal bodies in combination with thoughtful approaches to its anthropocentric emotionalism. There seems to be a good argument for a case-by-case consideration of actual animals in contemporary performance. As Michael Peterson suggests, it is about ethical relations rather than achieving absence. Whether an individual animal should embody a species identity remains arguable, but the emotional attachment of a human can be a reason for an animal's presence. In a continuation of her performance work with animals, Finnish artist Tuija Kokkonen, in collaboration with Alan Read, created the durational performance, *Chronopolitics: Reading to Dogs* in 2013. (I viewed it at Performance Studies International conference on June 28, 2013, University of Stanford). Humans brought along dog companions to participate in this all-night performance in which the dogs were framed as spectators as well as participants in the reading activities. They were allowed to lie down on mattresses and go to sleep. Part of Kokkonen's ongoing project, 'Memos of Time: Performances with and for Non-Human Animals', started in 2006, *Chronopolitics* intertextual references included Franz Kafka's 1922 *Investigation of a Dog* – written in the voice of a dog about human social behavior – although *Reading to Dogs* could be additionally pointing to Rosenthal's *The Others*. The human was

spending time with the dog in a relaxed intimacy, and it seems possible to claim that this manifested their mutual emotional connections; the dog would have understood the emotional connection, if not the literary text that was read.

Animal identities need to be prominent personae in performance, but whether they are to be embodied by actors or living animals requires careful attention to the emotional dynamics of the text and to the physical sensory needs of the animal body. Animals who live with us can be familiar bodies but their perspectives can be obscured in the midst of the noisy clatter of human emotionalism. There are possibilities for companionable cross-species exchange in the silence as well as the sounds of performance. As indicated here, the emotional experience of living with animals can be presented in performance and there are now significant examples in which the creators' work aligns with pro-animal politics. The emotional connections and contradictions can be exposed in provocative ways through performance. Thoughtful depiction of anthropocentric emotionalism can draw attention to actual animals and their lives.

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