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/ THE BODY AND THE ARCHIVE

Of the Body and Flesh: The Animals of Romeo Castellucci

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The author takes a critical stance against director Romeo Castellucci's powerful self-narrative. Her skepticism toward Castellucci's trademark poetic reveals the materialist dimension of his theatre, in light of which such notions as relationality, indiscernibility, simple observation, and giving ground to an animal were revitalized and led to an open, unhampered directorial discourse, in a "thinking-out-loud" style of analysis. The article joins post-anthropocentric thought inspired by Donna Haraway, Jacques Derrida's gentleness toward animals, and Deleuze's take on the work of art in all of its relational complexity.

Keywords: animal, Castellucci, relationality, materialism, post-anthropocentrism

1.

The Charolais bulls are the heaviest and biggest of all cattle breeds – intensely fed males weigh up to one and a half tons and measure up to one and a half meters at the withers. Their characteristically very distinct and well-developed muscles are covered with light (defined as "cream-colored") skin. The Charolais cattle (bulls and cows) compete in international

competitions and win medals, they are also bred and slaughtered for meat, appreciated by connoisseurs for their unusual texture and taste resulting from a careful diet based on good quality grains and vegetables. A Charolais bull appears in *Moses and Aaron*, the unfinished three-act opera by Arnold Schöenberg, an adaptation of the book of *Exodus*. The giant bull appears on stage in Act Two, representing the biblical golden calf. The bull rides in a lit plexiglass display case set on a platform. After a while, the bull is led out of the case by two keepers dressed in black: one of them “supports” the side of the bull's body, the other walks the animal on a special harness attached to its head. Both men wear black gloves. They make a circle and place the bull in front of a choir (a crowd of Israelites) and a naked woman lying on the stage, her back facing the audience. The crowd recedes leaving the powerful bull and the defenseless female body at the center of the stage. The scene of making offerings to the golden calf follows, which becomes rhythmical and choreographic in Castellucci's interpretation. The keepers accompany the bull all the time, supervising its behavior. The animal, probably according to the director's wish, remains motionless, only the tail, which the bull moves from time to time, does not yield to the power of the trainers. Then, the man assisting at the side of the animal pours black paint over its back – which, in turn, is a metaphor for the flaw of language (previously Aaron, who in Schöenberg's story represents symbolic order, is covered with it). The paint slowly covers the back of the cream-colored bull. Shortly afterwards, the keepers retrace their footsteps and walk the animal back to the transparent showcase.

The bull in *Moses and Aaron* based on Schöenberg's work appears to be an ideal melancholic because, according to Castellucci's narrative, it represents asymbolism, therefore, it is incapable of expressing anything by means of human language based on a system of signifiers and signified. Immersion in

asymbolism is, in turn, according to Julia Kristeva, a characteristic feature of the melancholic condition, at the source of which there is the inconsolable feeling of lack. Castellucci upholds the definition of an animal as a being which lacks something, and this definition is implemented in his staging of *Moses and Aaron*. The opposition between Aaron, capable of language, and Moses, who is unable to express anything in words, emphasized by Schöenberg in the libretto, is close to Castellucci's way of thinking. However, the dichotomy, to which Castellucci is so faithful, arouses my resistance. The juxtaposition of language with what is (in common understanding) “metaphysical” is, in my view, in this particular case subjected to the practice of *close reading,*[1] suspiciously too simple. As a consequence, also the presence of an animal on stage in such a context seems to be surrounded by a highly simplified (and at the same time consistently elevated) discourse. According to Castellucci's narrative, the bull would be a “pure being”, which also ultimately becomes contaminated – I treat the pouring of the paint as the violence of the symbolic order into which the mute animal is incorporated. At the same time, its presence on stage is strongly marked with meaning,[2] as it represents the biblical figure of the golden calf, an idol to whom people pay homage in Moses' absence. The consistency of Castellucci's meta-narrative falls apart. The bull clearly communicates something in the performance – it represents the image of a god. It is not a “pure being” also because it does not enter the stage alone, but first it enters in a showcase, like an object from an ethnographic museum. The keepers-trainers do not step away from it even for a moment, making sure that its choreography is consistent with the established score. Therefore, on the one hand, in the performance, the bull is a sign from the order of metaphysics, because it appears as an idol. On the other hand, its appearance on stage resembles a circus situation where an animal makes an

impressive entrance assisted by trainers wearing gloves. Its “entry” is therefore not pure and unconscious, but designed, and is part of a complex operatic machine in which there is no room for the unknown. Looking at the mighty bull, at its muscular body which weighs over a ton, I wonder if it is under the influence of sedatives that could “tone down” the potential threat of some unforeseen behavior. When asked about this, Castellucci strongly denied it:

It's unacceptable to me, it's terrible. Those who say that don't know animals. This kind of bull is completely calm, moves as if in slow motion. […] The bull on stage behaved completely naturally, like every animal, always.[3]

But it does not take careful observation to see that the naturalness of the animal's behavior is questionable in the case of *Moses and Aaron*. Here the bull is part of a huge production and remains under constant supervision. Incorporated into a glamorous spectacle so typical of an opera, it unfortunately also becomes a moving decoration, one of many striking elements. Castellucci declared that the bull was an extremely important presence for him due to its “vitality and carnality”. In the archaic sense the director so often refers to, it is a fascination with *zoe*, a particle of life unlimited by any particular *bios*. Moreover, *animality* also carries the following meaning: not only “animality” [t/n: a quality or nature associated with animals], but also “vitality”. The Latin source, *animus*, means spirit, mind, soul, feeling, life, consciousness, breath, and therefore all the qualities standing in opposition to bodily and material substance. But in *Moses and Aaron*, I see an animal with a body harness that restricts its natural movements. I see two men walking it back and forth in a circle and pouring black paint over it. Restrained, its vitality becomes threatening, as if lurking there. Full-grown, massive muscles are tamed, and become part of the

scenario. But even with the use of such extensive control, the bull's body arouses anxiety, and is associated with possible danger. However, I do not feel that this potential was used in *Moses and Aaron*. The aseptic presence of the bull, its precision, placed the animal among a number of other signs appearing in Castellucci's opera.

The huge animal was placed in a tight transparent cage. The bull appeared on stage as an exhibit, an isolated and separate object to be looked at. Deleuze, in the context of Bacon's painting, wrote about isolation as a tool to escape narration. According to Deleuze, following Bacon's thought, the communicativeness of a work of art can be negated in two ways: either by moving towards pure abstraction, or through isolation, bringing the figural to the extreme (Deleuze 2003: 6). It would then be in contrast with figurativeness as a model of simple representation (therefore the figural means a radical *extraction* of the Figure).

Isolation is thus the simplest means, necessary though not sufficient, to break with representation, to disrupt narration, to escape illustration, to liberate the Figure: to stick to the fact. (ibid.)

Perhaps this is the “purity of being” Castellucci spoke of: it is an isolated laboratorial presence, a seclusion. Purity not as “non-mediation” of being and mythical “innocence” perpetuating the opposition between nature and culture, but as putting a being into a frame, as its extraction. The plexiglass cage with the bull is unveiled, the bull is led out onto stage; accompanied by the keepers, it makes a small circle in the center of the stage, it is doused in paint and led off the stage. Within the complex machinery of an opera, this is perhaps the highest degree of “purity” and “exactness” possible to achieve when an animal enters the stage. Although the bull is cast as the golden calf and occupies such a place in the narrative, due to this extreme and distinct

isolation, Castellucci distorts the representativeness and figurativeness. A bull surrounded by a parallelepiped, like Lucian Freud in Bacon's triptych, may therefore resemble a subject of laboratory research kept behind glass, but may also be treated as a figure abstracted from the background (the container with the animal inside emerges in the background, as if “behind the action”). Isolation is also associated with the inability to move, with being limited to viewing, to one's gaze. When the animal, assisted by its keepers, leaves the showcase and stands in front of a naked woman, a relationship is immediately established between them. It is hard to ignore the gender aspect of this setting. The massive body of the bull is facing the naked woman (who is lying with her back towards the audience) and is towering above her. The choir withdraws, leaving them on the white stage. Motionless bodies confronting each other. Castellucci, by deciding to make this gesture, by making such a choreographic choice, imposes a certain perspective, and certainly provokes one. Taking the bull out of the cage, withdrawing the choir – these are gestures emphasizing the relationship of these two bodies, these two presences. The director makes room for them as if he were saying “look, look at this”. In this way, he includes the bull and its stage presence into his system of meanings. Rather than its “vitality and animality”, Castellucci uses the spectrum of meanings that the bull's presence can potentially produce. In the context of the simple dichotomy used by Castellucci in *Moses and Aaron* based on Schöenberg's libretto, the emergence of the bull is accompanied by easy, “pre-established” associations. If the main theme and the essence of this performance is the tension between language and image, between the inexpressible and the symbolic, then the animal in this constellation falls automatically to the side of the semiotic, “extra-linguistic”. Its stage presence becomes embedded in a system of meanings, entangled in interpretation. I would even say, taking

from the presence of the bull in *Moses and Aaron*, that Castellucci works not so much with the shape as with the contour of the body; not with the three-dimensional solid that a body is, but with the two-dimensional image and the association it evokes.[4]

As I am watching, I notice a certain conflict: a powerful bull is under control, his immobile body is subjected to violence, since pouring paint over it could be considered violence (the animal cannot defend itself because it is tethered). Perhaps, as the director declares, the bull was treated as “king” (whatever that means) in the preparation process, but here it is an animal whose every step is consistent with the predesigned structure. The bull acts according to the score. Castellucci engages the bull's body, but submits it to his own vision. Of course, he points out that full control is not possible, but the same is true for the actors. At this level, instructions for human actors and those for animals belong to the same power structure. The claim that “an animal cannot be fully controlled” is like a rhetorical game that legitimizes incorporating that animal – with its nervous system fully exposed – into the enormous mechanism of a work of art. It is an excuse, embedded in the language, for using an animal as a sign: “I want it, I need it for my construction.” Just like the bodies of the anorexic and obese were needed in *Orestea*. Castellucci thinks about shape, not vitality. He creates a smokescreen through which I begin to see his use of animals as morally “better” than any other artistic gesture of this kind. This narrative is a trap.

Looking at the bull, I also wonder how this huge, majestic animal feels in the overpowering machine of the spectacle, where several hundred people work. While preparing the opera, Castellucci sought the presence of this animal. The process of including it in the production was long, complicated and, as the director says, “strange”. At an early stage of production, the animal

became accustomed to the operatic music to which it listened at its place of residence in France. Tests were then carried out with lights and actors – all to minimize stress and shock. It took Castellucci a long time to persuade the producers, technicians, the opera authorizing officer, as well as the actors and members of the choir, some of whom exhibited animal phobias of varying severity (in any case, it is interesting that fear resulting from the risk of involving the bull in the performance appeared on both sides of this relation. I see this as part of the attention sharing process here: shared attention is focused on fear, threat, uncertainty). The presence of the bull was a necessity for Castellucci, an indispensable part of the script and the pre-designed stage construction. Doubts about this gesture were not only of an ethical and technical nature, but also economic – the performance of the bull (borrowing it from the breeding farm and providing it with appropriate care) entailed enormous costs.[5] Ultimately, the director got his way. He also declared that his ethical concern was not about the team, but about the animal "because it is innocent."[6] At the same time, he refers to the bull as "king" and "star" as a result of the care it received in the production process, but that does not seem like anything special. If one were to look at the whole situation pragmatically, one could say that it could not be otherwise in the case of a bull weighing over a ton and involved in an enterprise of that scale. After all, seeking the bull's participation was also part of the implementation of the director's plan. The bull was supposed to meet specific requirements.

2.

According to Rancière, art comes close to politics when it becomes operational, that is, when it "consists in bringing about a reframing of material and symbolic space." (Rancière 2007, p. 24) In this way, an

aesthetic event, including a theatrical one, becomes a kind of a military action associated with negotiating the territory. According to Rancière, there is no contradiction between the modernist vision of art for art's sake and the relational idea of art as an attempt to reconfigure the community. These are two forms of the distribution of the sensible, two interrelated modes of the presence of bodies in space and time (ibid., p. 26). Thus, theatre both creates and divides the perceptible because it is identical with the system of actions in space. This is interesting in the context of thinking about experiencing theatre communally – Castellucci sees theatre as a collective experience of a mythical procession,[7] while Rancière points to the poietic dimension of theatre, which as a medium establishes a community in a process of distribution. Just like a zone of indiscernibility signifies a common field in difference and not a merging into one, the political community of theatre is not created out of a feeling of identification and phantasmal unity, but precisely in the practice of dividing, delineating, and recognizing borders. It is not the space that is shared, but the process of distribution. Such thinking also breaks with the perception of a theatrical space as a "home" governed by the principle of equality and shared responsibility. Theatre is not a safe place, but a zone of military activities where a community is established that is impermanent and fluid (which is what Samuel Weber says about the theatre audience pointing to the political weakness of such an ephemeral community). (Weber 2009, p. 3)

Castellucci strongly and radically distances himself from the political nature of art and remains suspicious of artists involved in socially engaged activities. However, in reality, the artist employs a number of practices of allowing and isolating, separating and delineating boundaries. These activities are intensely present in his art, although hidden behind a veil – often literally (it is worth considering the cultural and traditional meaning of

a translucent veil, a veil on a woman's face; it is a protection against lustful glances, a symbol of innocence, and belonging to a different “pure” world). At the same time, by engaging animals in his productions, Castellucci involuntarily introduces his theatre into the sphere of an open and lively debate on the subjectivity of non-human animals. His art transcends the compact framework of his own narrative and produces context. Moreover, when Castellucci says that “the people living in cities do not understand animals,”[8] he himself introduces a thread of politics, because he refers to the *polis*, to a community of citizens. The very use of military nomenclature has the power to entangle art in politics, if one defines politics as actions aimed at seizing and maintaining power. Castellucci's theatre is, thus, politically engaged on many levels, although, of course, not in a publicized and literal way. Again, an animal on stage cannot be completely ontologically “pure”. It is not brought onto the stage without consequences. Associations appear immediately and they freely connect aesthetic images with the seemingly “external” stream of the media content concerning present-day human relationships with other animals. Even if the artist does not want to communicate anything, he has no influence over the associations emerging upon the viewer entering in a relation with the stage phenomena (the director is a weak link in that relation). He is also unable to control public responses such as petitions or protests. The radical separation of the figures and signs he uses from the current events amounts almost to a false gesture of extreme aestheticization of his works. To literally, physically separate a theatrical performance with the translucent veil used by Castellucci is like trying to protect art through isolation: taking it out of time and isolating it in space. As if Castellucci organized a feast which escaped the frames of everyday life. However, this is a utopian vision from the order of wishful thinking. The division into a “theatre of journalism”, employing the poetics of

a news program and directly referring to historical events and current affairs, and a “theatre of images” operating with metaphors, is a simplifying, harmful interpretive cliché which renders looking at works of art primitive. Strong, binary oppositions, supplementing artistic choices with contrasting labels, let one wander the plane of appearances, because each spectacle is both an aesthetic and political event, functioning simultaneously in both these domains, and every spectacle takes a certain position, establishes its own territory in a broader picture. Coming back to Rancière: there has not always been politics, but there has always been power. (cf. Rancière 2007, p. 27) In the light of such thinking, the agonistic dimension of culture is emphasized, in which each artistic statement is tantamount to an act of entering the battlefield.

I get the impression that Castellucci sees the political nature of art (understood as commenting on current affairs) as a flaw to which theatre should not stoop down to. He regards art as prior to and more potent than politics. According to him, theatre should also not comment on reality because theatre is neither able to repair reality nor influence human living conditions. However, theatre does not exist, as Castellucci would like, “outside of time”.[9] It cannot be carried out under sterile conditions, as a process with a closed, separate circuit. There is also no animal “outside of time”, which for a director would be like a messenger from a world “uncontaminated” by the present communicated by means of language. If, as Castellucci claims, a Greek tragedy was a “laboratory for the *polis*” because it eased potential tensions within the community by working through aggression and violence on stage,[10] then it is difficult to consider Castellucci's theatre merely an aesthetic means of getting in contact with the theatre audience. Castellucci constantly takes ancient Greece as a point of reference, which allows, however, to consider his work in a context

reluctantly raised by the artist himself.

Social protests have clearly shown that art also affects those who are not its audience. This is what we have experienced in recent years in Poland – on the occasion of *Golgota Picnic* [Golgotha Picnic], *Śmierć i Dziewczyna* [Death and the Girl] and *Klątwa* [The Curse] – and that was what Castellucci experienced when animal rights activists opposed the presence of the bull on the opera stage. This is evidence of the political and social agency of theatre – not as a place of aesthetic representation, but as the aforementioned laboratory of collective moods and a space for negotiating territory.

3.

Where is the animal in all this? I return to the stage presence of the bull in *Moses and Aaron*, which caused perhaps the greatest controversy. The animal's body is in dispute. Its body was hired from a farm, paid for, transported. I think about this body and its nervous system exposed to a multitude of stimuli. At the same time, I realize that I don't know much about it. I do not know exactly what the conditions of its everyday life are and how, on the neurological level, the bull reacts to what happens to him on stage. Hence the thesis that the animal “does not belong” to the stage can be easily challenged. Anyway, thinking so would only petrify the division into separate spheres of nature and culture; it also artificially creates spheres of strangeness. The animal is not a “stranger” on stage the same way a human is not a “stranger” on top of a mountain. Belonging can only take place if there is a certain coherent whole – in that case, part of what ecosystem is this bull traveling along with the opera? Easy Rider, because that is the name of the bull hired from the French breeding farm belonging to Jean-Philippe Varin, is a champion, which means that transport, the presence of

people, flashing cameras, and noise are nothing new. Easy Rider does not live in the wild in the sense that he has not been not captured for artistic purposes. Its life is subject to human rule on a daily basis, it has been appropriated by humans. The performance in the opera (although, of course, as exceptional as it is rare) seems to be a continuation on the path that the bull-champion has long followed. However, the ethical argument that an animal brought onto the stage is suffering is also a misappropriation, though concerning the emotional sphere. How do we know that an animal covered with paint during a performance is suffering?

One of the articles in the German daily *Die Welt* had a humorous title, suggesting that for the bull the Schöenberg's dodecaphony itself was probably a real torture. Protests against Easy Rider's presence in Castellucci's production took place both in Paris (the performance premiered on October 20, 2015 at the Paris Opera) and in Madrid (where it was co-produced by Teatro Real). The artists also complained – dancer Jousa Hoffalt pointed out that the bull was paid for each performance an amount equal to that which he and his colleagues earned in a month.[11] In France, over thirty thousand signatures were collected on an *online* petition, addressed directly to the then Minister of Culture, Fleur Pellerin – the virtual letter unsuccessfully called for ceasing to exploit the animal in the performance. At that time, the Paris Opera issued an official statement denying the claim that the rights of the animal were violated in the course of works on *Moses and Aaron* (*inter alia* the suspicion that the bull had been given tranquilizers). In the face of the controversy, Castellucci decided to issue his own open letter in which he explained his artistic decisions in a way characteristic of him. It is difficult to say for whom these words were intended and whom they were supposed to convince. With the formula of an open letter, Castellucci, so to speak, defended himself against entering the contemporary order of the

everyday. He stood on the threshold of this order, but wanted to remain an artist who expressed himself through the work itself and through his own poetic narrative. The letter was therefore part of his creation, just as the language of this statement.

In my conversation with Castellucci,[12] he insisted that the animal had been treated well, like a star, but the protests did not only concern the supposed treatment of the bull with sedatives, but the overall question of exploiting animals in the name of art and entertainment. The exploitation of animals as such (even in “good faith”) is a phenomenon against which animal rights activists and vegans are advocating. The authors of the petition stated that animals do not exist to satisfy our business-oriented needs, and therefore were against the treatment of animals as objects in general, even while maintaining sterility, safety, and compliance with legal regulations. In his open letter, Castellucci argues that theatre should not be seen as a place of entertainment, but “the last temple where people and animals coexist.”[13] However, the director also perceives the dangers lurking in providing animals with special care: here too, he sees violence creeping up. If we recognize that an animal needs our protection, we automatically create a hierarchical relationship in which a human is the superior being, in command, knowing how and in what conditions the animal should live. This is what Castellucci means when he says that today the city does not understand animals and their nature. At the same time, he speaks as if he himself had a certain secret, exclusive knowledge, thanks to which he is able to read from the animal's eyes the fear of entering the stage or the desire to perform. He creates a barrier between himself and the “city”[14] disturbed by his artistic ideas. It is a very spatial, topographic thinking: his theatre as a place where people and animals unite, a dreamland where, without language, one can “understand” animals and coexist with them; as an

enclave in hostile territory. Castellucci promises (and announces) a return to an undefined state of “primal unity.” According to him, modern living conditions have led to a loss of closeness with animals – and he, through theatre, attempts to restore common ground. Thus, he creates the myth of his theatre. He also designs an emblematic, melancholic image, an atmosphere of lack, which entails the need for return.

Castellucci opposes thinking which sees humans as the “saviors” of animals who will decide what is most appropriate for their subjects. He does not agree with defending animals, which he sees as a contribution to establishing the relation of subordination. His letter can be viewed as a declaration that animals do not need our help. We are the ones who need the proximity of animals. Perhaps Castellucci's power is an institutional minimum necessary to attempt the return he describes. However, I cannot – once again – resist the impression that his rhetoric has performative power; I begin to perceive his theatre as more of a relief. Bacon's two-dimensional painting tells me more about the body and meat than a spectacle in which the body is actually present. It's a sudden burst of intuition, but I decide to follow it (and I'll come back to it later).

4.

According to Castellucci, an animal visits us, haunts our lives to give them the mythical meaning of a common destiny (which is a destiny towards death). He claims that we need the presence of living animals in close proximity, also in order to learn acceptance and communication on a different level than the language available to us. Castellucci then speaks of a certain misunderstanding which is the source of opposition to the presence of the bull in *Moses and Aaron*. In his letter, he states that we do need

animals, but not as objects for our amusement (which he was accused of), but as *zoe* messengers and companions in our march towards death. In this way, an animal on stage is presented by Castellucci as a medium that transmits knowledge about human life in a non-verbal way. According to him, an animal illuminates cognition, invoking mysterious, mythical elements forgotten by the city. In this way, a animal can be seen as a shepherd, in this way, we can interpret the aforementioned reversed subordination. Moreover, Castellucci likes this kind of interesting subversions in thinking: theatre, he says, is not about showing, but about hiding; man appears as a humble pupil of an animal.[15] There is, of course, something deceptive about these counterintuitive theses. The question is why we should maintain any power relationship at all. After all, the rhetorical reversal of subordination can be nothing more than a conscience-soothing consolidation of the hierarchy. Why cannot taking an animal seriously, stepping aside and giving ground to an animal, entail mutual learning from each other? What else – apart from rhetoric – is the declared "reversal of subordination"? As Antoinette Foque argued in the context of bourgeois feminism, inversion does not facilitate a transition to a different type of structure. (hooks 2013, p. 37) Paradoxically, the image of an animal having a symbolic advantage over humans on stage is constructed by a human. The dogs jump at Castellucci on cue and walk away on cue. Likewise, the bull's choreography is fully designed and executed, in an obvious and explicit way the bull is subordinate here. If we are dealing with "reversed subordination" on stage, it is a fabricated phenomenon. It is as if Castellucci rhetorically delimited the extent of animal freedom, as if he located the possibility of making space for an animal's initiative in the sphere of language.

I also wonder how Castellucci imagines putting into effect the ritual community of people and animals when his performances are usually held on

the premises of large, reputable institutions, upholding all elements of theatrical convention (and even social convention); I wonder where he thinks this ritual takes place. This is where I see the threat I spoke of in the context of Castellucci's annexing self-narrative. The first contact with his words evokes my consent, often a kind of cognitive excitement. Only upon closer examination and, in a sense, suspicious analysis of his words, I notice that what the director says does not correspond to what I see. Such a "close reading" of Castellucci's narrative, paradoxically, brings me closer to his work, it is not an act of counterattack aimed at proving whether the director is "right" or not. I deconstruct his poetic interpretation because I cannot omit it in my thinking and, at the same time, I cannot limit my analysis by adhering to his discourse. But I see this gesture as positive. Castellucci's narrative weighs down on the animal he engages in a performance; he assigns the animal a very serious task, which is to change the perception of one's own human existence in the joint pursuit of death. It seems to me that this "mutuality" [Polish "wspólność"] is better expressed in English by the difference between the adjectives *mutual* (having the same feelings, or shared in common) and *common* (shared by all members of a group, but also widespread). This is a nuance of meaning, but in my opinion extremely important. What is *mutual* is shared by both sides of the relationship, creates a certain field of relational intimacy. While watching a performance, I can experience this mutuality, but for me it is something "weak"[16] – private, small. But at Teatro Real, I did not have the impression that I was taking part in a "common ritual of people and animals" – the conditions at an opera are not conducive to building this kind of borderline experience. An opera building is not something separate from the city seen as a certain project – it is an inherent part of that project, it is regulated by the city. The secret ritual takes place in words. It is beautiful, but it remains confined to words.

It is Castellucci's great dream, however, for me it is an allotopy – a phantasmal construction happening parallel to the performance and situated in the narrative. And like an allotopy – the construction is not false or true, but it is parallel, it is built elsewhere, it is a different place

Again, I juxtapose what I observe with the notion of “pure being” – in the face of such strong terms, fixing the presence of an animal in the space of a myth, and putting the human-animal relationship in the context of a phantasmal “return to the past”, it is difficult to recognize the entry of a bull (or rather, above all, the appearance of the bull in a plexiglass cage) as direct and exact. As I have stated above, Castellucci surrounds the bull's presence with a precisely constructed network of meanings. I do not get the impression that the director is working with the body of the bull, that this body is actually endowed with attention – in tandem with such a powerful explication, the bull’s presence dwarfs in my eyes to the rank of a sign with a very specific meaning encoded in it.

5.

On March 24, 1997, Societas Rafaello Sanzio received a two-sentence letter from the organizers of the Vienna festival of performing arts, Wiener Festwochen, addressed to the team manager, Gildi Biasini, regarding the loaning of a horse for the performance of *Julius Caesar*:

This is Paula, a friendly and experienced horse (she took part in film shootings), can be loaned to *Julius Caesar*. We figured the easiest way would be to send photos and ask what you think.

Attached to the letter were four photos, developed from film, of Paula in a stable: two horizontal and two vertical shots, showing the mare from both

profiles. I gained access to these materials while working at ARCH (Archival Research & Cultural Heritage) – the archive of the Societas Rafaello Sanzio theatre in Athens. For me, this is the most interesting document I have come across. The archive is like a lining, like exposing the back room, whole expanses of reality. What has so far been the subject of my aesthetic delight becomes a space for technical and pragmatic analysis. I gain access to the traces left behind by the theatrical mechanism. It is a kind of "disenchantment", i.e. a movement with a vector opposite to that set by Castellucci's meta-narrative – he tries to cast spells with his story, create a highly coherent and isolated image of his theatre (isolated from the order of politics, actuality, tradition, other works of art). Within his story, the "backstage" would be the construction which Castellucci calls his "strategy": his directorial plan, a kind of scenic score, created even before rehearsals begin. However, all this is also part of the image the director creates – the creational part, an element of the work of art. In fact, the real backstage of his theatre, something that really exposes the poietic and pragmatic dimension of the functioning of theatre, are e-mails, faxed letters, cost estimates of scenography, and invoices. The letter about the mare named Paula evokes in me a kind of excitement, and at the same time having accessed it bears the hallmarks of something forbidden. Certainly, the analysis of this type of documents is part of the practice of misreading, that is, reading that is contrary to an artist's intention. It is like dispersing a nimbus of mystery and grandeur and reaching the most basic, simplest rules governing the organization of Castellucci's performances.

At first, the letter seems funny to me – a mare named Paula is the subject of an assessment, like a model being selected for a collection show on the catwalk. The assessment based on some raw photos of a "friendly and experienced horse" is to determine whether it will be accepted (or not) by

the creators of the show. Is the animal also a “king” and a “shepherd” in this case? In the context of the aura Castellucci is trying to create, this kind of collision with the archive creates an almost grotesque effect. The director usually goes to great lengths to protect his theatre as an autarkic performance behind a veil, a mysterious microcosm functioning separately from “external” reality. Observing the organizational backstage places the show in the institutional hierarchy and, therefore, in the hierarchy of power. In this context, I am beginning to see the animal also as an element of a great production machine. What's more, I see it as a deprived of subjectivity element of scenography, which can be visually documented in simple photographs, and then employed as a tool which is to perform a certain task designed at that time. This kind of communication gives off such an impression.

Working in the archive, however, does not yield many discoveries when it comes to the presence of animals. The letter about Paula is, as I mentioned, the most interesting find because it is the only material in which the name of an animal appears; in which the image (photos developed from film) relates to this particular life – in which *zoe* is put into the frame of an individual *bios*. In the set of materials to which I have been given access, animals are not particularly present: their presence is somewhere between dozens of pages, it is a trace, which is what precisely makes animals seem as elements of the machine and institution. Castellucci's theatre too is like the Societas Rafaello Sanzio – not only the Work of Art, but also a formal organization the backstage of which is the backstage of a company. It is a space where – within a theatre production – a zone of indiscernibility reveals itself in the shared status between a human and an animal. Castellucci has repeatedly emphasized that he is not very interested in the psyche of the actors joining his productions and that he works not with the actors’ personalities but with

their bodies or shapes. He speaks similarly about the animals he employs, the difference being that in this narrative suddenly there is a moment of looking an animal into the eyes. When I ask the director how he knows that an animal wants to come on stage, he replies:

I can see it in its eyes. It is clear to me. When an animal is afraid, it is absolutely visible: in the breath, in the eyes, in its steps. And that is, in a way, the answer I get.[17]

I have never heard Castellucci talk like this about people. I wonder to what extent this is just a story sublimating the human-animal relationship, aimed at legitimizing the introduction of animals onto the stage (hard to say if against their will), and mitigating the resurfacing strong relationship of subordination and power.

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Footnotes

1. The wide spectrum of animals appearing in Castellucci's performances makes it impossible to analyze these performances collectively, because they also differ in the affectual dimension. The emotional overtones of animal presence in theatre are completely different in the case of a dog than in the case of a bull. This is an obvious conclusion, but it definitely encourages close observation of specific cases instead of coming up with general conclusions - it is, however, a challenge in the face of the philosophical, sometimes even "aphoristic" poetics of the director's metadiscourse.
2. Of course, the director consciously uses the meaning evoked by the presence of a live bull on stage, but at the same time he repeatedly emphasized that the animal, according to him, does not communicate anything (and theatre itself is a happening, it is a “fact” devoid of any content), hence the special value of the bull's performative presence. It is here in the meta-narrative that I perceive the dissonance.
3. A quote from an interview conducted and translated from English by the author in September 2017.
4. “Dramaturgy is a geometry in which all signs - soma-sema - body-sign, are integrated into a larger picture that unites them.” - this is what the director said about the presence of people and animals on stage in an interview with Dorota Semenowicz during the meeting “Fiction Awareness” as part of the Theatre Olympics in October 2016 in Wrocław. Although Castellucci refers to dramaturgy, in this case he defines it as a relief composition, a kind of plateau. When the director talks about “inscribing signs into a rectangle”, it affects the understanding of his vision of the work (here, the director's discourse, which does not refer to a specific performance, but outlines a wider context, allows for generalization or extrapolation). A transcript of the conversation is available at: http://www.grotowski.net/performer/performer-13/swiadomosc-fikcji, acccessed 16 November 2018.
5. *Le Figaro* reported 5,000 EUR for the breeder per one evening.
6. A quote from an interview conducted and translated from English by the author in September 2017.
7. “However, we must seriously contemplate their [animals – author's note] life, because we share the common fate of living beings; we need animal closeness because we feel the need to be better human beings. Theatre is the last temple where people and animals coexist. [...] It is the last modern temple in which the ritual of real life is renewed.” – a quote from an open letter, the director's polemics related to the events surrounding the presentation of *Moses and Aaron* in Madrid. The letter in the original Italian language version was made available to the author by the director and was translated into English by Pietro Marullo.
8. A quote from an interview conducted and translated from English by the author in June 2017 in Amsterdam.
9. A quote from an interview conducted and translated from English by the author in May 2016 in Madrid.
10. “A tragedy was a kind of laboratory for polis to prevent real violence. Theatre is a means of mitigating this dark aspect of human nature,” says Castellucci in May 2016 in Madrid. The conversation between the director and the author (translated by the author from English) was an annex to the author's BA thesis defended in July 2016.
11. https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/26/inenglish/1461666189_421620.html, accessed 18 May 2018.

12. The interview was conducted and translated from English by the author in June 2017 in Amsterdam.
13. A quote from an open letter, the director's polemics related to the events surrounding the staging of *Moses and Aaron* in Madrid. The letter in the original Italian language version was made available to the author by the director, and was translated into English by Pietro Marullo.
14. I use quotation marks on purpose, because the figure of the "city" to which Castellucci refers is in his narrative a certain imaginary interlocutor/opponent/party to the dispute.
15. “Having an animal on stage is having a king. Subordination is therefore reversed here. The animal is the ruler. When it enters, it brings with it a new kind of time and space, new air. So we have to follow him, not the other way around. The animal becomes the shepherd. The dog is our shepherd. The bull is our shepherd. Ontology meets mythology. In this way, each animal functions mythologically on the stage: it guides us, frees us from language. If the language is the battlefield, the animal is the general, the commander in this battle. " – a quote from an interview conducted and translated from English [to Polish] by the author in September 2017.
16. In the sense given to a weak thought by Gianni Vattimo.
17. A quote from an interview conducted and translated from English by the author in September 2017.

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