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A Frog's Perspective

Curator's text

Contrary to popular opinion, contemporary dance often aims at a critical commentary of the life we live in and the social practices we engage in. More and more often choreographers define not only the abstract parameters of a person moving in space in relation to passing time, but put the strongest emphasis on the context, a framework for the actions and utterances of the performers. This redefined vision of dance prompts choreographers to follow in the footsteps of anthropologists and philosophers, and ponder the standing of animals in our reality. Recently the need to discuss the animal question has grown more persistent, as it appears increasingly often in the quickly growing animal studies, and highlights a different perspective of looking at and understanding the world than that adopted by human beings. In other words there is a need to rethink once again the position of animals in this world, their relations with humans, and to define an animal anew.

I chose "**What they are instead of?**", the duo of **Jared Gradinger and Angela Schubot**, because it discusses intimacy. The choreographers ask about the limits of corporeality. I, in turn, am interested in the language and perception of a type of intimacy that is perceived as instinctive, wild, untamed, and also in a type of description that leads us towards something that is commonly called an "animal nature". What is animal nature as understood by humans? Is it a way of being that is based on instincts, urges? The duo is the least obvious piece of the programme as it says a lot about inter-human relations, yet triggers the most associations and asks a great deal of questions if you put it in the animal context.

In her solo "**Karmi go**", **Iza Szostak** conducts a singular dialogue with a live chicken moving about the stage, trying to copy its actions and presence on the stage. This time, a live chicken is shown on stage in a perverse fashion, as a potential predator, which may choose to attack even a (plush) alligator.

Also **Tatiana Kamieniecka** negotiates between the human and the animal in her "**Wieloryb**". The choreographer draws inspiration from the physicality of the *yurodivy* (a "Fool for Christ" figure well-known among Eastern Orthodox believers): she presents him as standing between sainthood and madness, to finally put him within an animal frame. The

title, which translates as "Whale", most probably is a reference to the biblical tradition, namely the internal transformation of the prophet Jonah that took place in a whale's stomach. His three-day journey inside the animal was an opportunity to face his thoughts, to face himself. The whale is a symbol of dark human desires and our attempts at self-improvement. In the piece you will find a conglomerate of a few traditions that serve the choreographer to explore corporeality, animality, spirituality, and madness together, with a view to reconstruct the existing system of relations between the animal and the human.

In "**Abecedarium Bestiarium**" **Antonia Baehr** recollects animal species that became extinct at the turn of the centuries. The goal of this is not only to engage in a nostalgic reflection on the world that no longer exists, but, more importantly, to provide an intellectual commentary on the way these species' presence was connected with a specific world order and style of life. The animals used to be symbols of their times, of a certain quality of life and social structure. A tale about the animals also becomes a pretext to reminiscence about a few loved ones.

In "**Animal dances**", **Martin Nachbar** and a group of dancers that accompany him, try to embody animal motions without mimicking them. This is the most physical piece of the programme, offering a glimpse of the way humans perceive animal movement.

The programme also includes children's performances: fables that are a perfect manifestation of the way narrations about animals are constructed in culture, of how divisions and hierarchies are formed. "Karnawał zwierząt" (Animal Carnival) by Karolina Garbacik and "Małe zwierzenia. Zwierzątka" by Paweł Passini show the magic world of animals that are most frequently personified.

The performance art programme **A Frog's Perspective** showcases how we can turn our perceptions around and change the way we communicate animals' presence in human reality and beyond. It takes up such themes as human animal, non-human animal, and finding animal features in human beings. I was interested in contexts that bring about animal figures and the meanings we attach to them.