



## bio/zoo

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When in 1937, in Rio de Janeiro, a lawyer invoked the rights of animals to defend the life of a political prisoner who was being tortured and kept in subhuman conditions by the Getulio Vargas regime, something in order of the political and juridical languages that separate the animal from the human went into crisis. The same State that only a few years earlier had legislated against animal cruelty and recognized animals as subjects of rights and legal protection, showed itself capable of enormous brutality against the body of a political prisoner, from whom it withdrew recognition of political rights and humanity.

The story of the animal rights of this political prisoner, included in the dossier in this issue, has as its counterpoint the story of the “human” rights of an animal on the loose in the Colombian jungle that was executed by the army in 1993. The animal was killed as it grazed not quite in a recuperated state of nature, but in the juridical vacuum created around it by the decision of a State that mobilizes its mechanisms of sovereign violence when facing uncertainty. The animal in question was a hippopotamus owned by the then-recently deceased drug king pin Pablo Escobar that escaped from the private zoo where it was in captivity. The images of the hippopotamus’ execution by firing squad, which restage the hunt for Escobar in the key of farce, circulated as a classic fable in which the death of an animal—in all of its precarity and disprotection—is applied to human life and to the right of all human beings to survive in the

animal kingdom of biopolitics.

The contributions in this issue of *e-misférica* investigate the multiple slippages from the biological body of humans towards their animal other, following vectors of humanization and dehumanization that pass through the field of citizenship and the production of subjects of rights. The essays and aesthetic interventions herein map a terrain of epistemological, political, juridical, anthropological, ethical and aesthetic disputes that surround the issue of species—a category that is central both to the critical reflection surrounding the so-called “animal question” and to approaches which, from the prism of biopolitics, reflect upon modes of domination, governance and antagonism centered on claims to biological life.

Naturalized by a field of power that colonizes the life of the body and its affects, man emerges as an endangered species in need of protection and humanitarian assistance, to be produced through eminently biopolitical mechanisms of control and normalization. Taking up the notion of life that Michel Foucault, in his last seminars, left as a task for future philosophy, Roberto Esposito and Raúl Antelo interrogate the notion of biopolitics from the starting point of the unstable, ambivalent, and always political difference between *bios* and *zoe*. Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito’s reflection on biopolitics introduces some of the problems and vocabularies that recur across a number of texts in the issue. Many of the discourses on the subject of human rights (or the human animal), moreover, make of species life the nucleus of “immunitarian” protection in the face of real or imagined threats to the individual and social body. But how can it be that in the “defense of the life” of the species, the very power that can make live can turn its technologies against particular individuals or groups, exposing them to acute forms of political and economic violence and sentencing them to live rather than die as human remains in the state of exception, bereft of a place within the social and economic order? In his essay “Comunità, immunità, biopolitica,” Esposito describes what he sees as an “excessive immunization” that is always latent and which can reverse the mechanism and turn against the very life that it seeks to defend and nurture. In this context, he also rehearses the conditions for a new politics of the commons.

Starting from the fact that Foucault begins to think about the notion of biopolitics in Brazil, Raúl Antelo weaves a network of contagion and connection between concepts and the visual and poetic works of the vanguard in order to show the relationship between the absolute quality of sovereign power—in the sense of its foundational violence—and the governance of life. Antelo introduces the figure of Prometheus and the eagle as figurations of Western biopolitics in order to reflect upon the negative origins of the human.

Along similar lines, Ed Cohen examines the emergence of “species” in the context of modern secularization, focusing on the articulation and tension between the notions of species and population both in the fields of knowledge in which they are constituted as well as in the space of the contestations that they inaugurate.

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With respect to the crucial antinomy that destabilizes the relation between life and power, *e-misférica* has opted for critical and creative practices that take the notion of species and its power of variation as the starting point for thinking about alternative forms of community and ethical-political bonds. In Latin America, as in other post-colonial regions, the idea of species as a zone of transit between bodies, politics, forms of knowledge, and texts is vividly present in the works of contemporary artists like Nuno Ramos and Ernesto Neto, who explore its dynamic density as well as its role as a node of conceptual exchange. From their practice as writers, Martín Kohan and Sergio Chejfec locate a tension in the figure of the animal which oscillates between the power of representation and opacity, allowing them to reach, in relation to the “virtuality” of that which is alive, a threshold wherein illegible bodies and floating words may intersect. While this intersection is never free from unease, these words attempt to name that which cannot be securely named by the discourses of knowledge, law, and politics.

María Esther Maciel reconstructs a tradition that stretches from Montaigne to Machado de Assis in which fiction and the poetic imagination of the “other” animal—endowed with its own point of view, with sensibility and knowledge—are the point of departure for an anti-Cartesian ethic of coexistence between human and non-human species. Julieta Yelín, for her part, maps the impact of Kafka’s work upon literary reflections on animality and posthumanism, which is precisely the terrain where Kafka’s writing definitively deconstructs all presuppositions about what is properly human.

A diverse array of aesthetic practices, ranging from the visual arts to performance, have provided us with fertile ground for these reflections, particularly in relation to the slippery boundary between the human and the animal, and the crisis of existing notions of belonging and specificity. Poets who are visual artists or writers who also make installations practice what Florencia Garramuños describes, approximating Esposito’s reflections, as a *non-specific or improper art*—an art which jumps from one discipline to another based on the exploration of intense affective materials and fluid spatio-temporal configurations that cross the boundaries of the proper/proprietary in order to invent forms of being in common (rather than common forms of being).

Ernesto Neto’s installation *O Bicho SusPenso na PaisaGem*, which was exhibited in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro and which is included in this issue, serves as yet another platform from which to interrogate the zone of interderminacy that is characteristic of mutating species. As we know, a species has never been conceived as a stable, unchanging organism. Precisely because of the vibrancy with which life imbues it, the species concept has been a body that has resisted the technologies through which modern science has attempted to apprehend it. The organism (*O bicho*) asks us to think in and about the landscape (*Penso na PaisaGem*) and to suspend ourselves within it, as Álvaro Fernández Bravo’s Reading of Neto’s work suggests. Eduardo Jorge’s essay continues this exploration of contemporary art as both research and as the invention of forms of life. Closely examining the work of Nuno Ramos, Allora & Calzadilla and Rodrigo Braga, the author investigates the ways different

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aesthetic practices lead to alternative epistemologies through which different modes of habitation and community, not limited to the privilege or norm of the human species, may be rehearsed.

The participation of Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in the issue offers a measure of the productivity that the animal question and the notion of species have within critical analysis and the Latin American imagination. Only recently translated in the United States, the work of Viveiros de Castro centers on the notion of multinaturalism and the humanity of the animal. Whereas cultural relativism affirms the diversity of peoples and cultures who represent themselves in diverse and partial ways within one nature, Viveiros de Castro—in his reconstruction of Amerindian “multinaturalism”—affirms a non-heirarchical multiplicity of perspectives or different corporeal “worlds.” These perspectives are affirmed against a common backdrop of a cosmic humanity which enables all species to make their experience in the world as if persons. We exist in a fluid world comprised of transformations and becomings in which the category of person is extended to non-human species for which humanity is a virtual “reality.”

This issue of *e-misférica* is itself a archive of a hemispheric itinerary that began with the colloquium entitled “The Animal Turn: Imaginaries, Bodies, Politics,” which took place at NYU-Buenos Aires on August 5-6, 2010. At the event, in which several of the contributors to this issue participated, we began to develop hypotheses regarding the crisis of humanism and the nature of the “post-human,” and we attempted to dismantle “the great divide” between the animal and the human based on the research and reflections of scholars and writers in Argentina, Brazil, Peru and the United States. The itinerary then led us to Brazil, where on May 4-6, 2011 we convened “Anamais, Animalidade e os Limites do Humano,” a colloquium held at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte with the support of NYU-Buenos Aires. Some of the works presented there were published in an [Aletria, Revista de Estudos de Literatura](#) (vol. 21, n. 3, set-dez 2011) dedicated to contemporary zoopoetics.

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