

Philozoe

edition farangis



Edition Farangis: Philozoe

Volume 4, No. 1, February 2026, ISSN 2702-8178.

Animalistic Issue > Art and Speciesism series

Philozoe. An e-journal on image creation, mythologies and experiencing subjectivity. Arts and fragments by Farangis G. Yegane Arani and Gita Yegane Arani.

Animalistic Issue > Art and Speciesism 2



The Animalistic Issue; Art and Speciesism 2.

Art and Speciesism 1 mapped how contemporary art scenes normalize animal objectification and ethical erasure through anthropocentric assumptions, speciesist iconographies, and inherited conceptual frames. Art and Speciesism 2 translates this diagnosis into an initial short methodological tool: a single foundational essay and a mapping of speciesist mechanisms and ideologies disseminating through artistic creation and arts discourse.



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Animalistic Issue

Fundamentals > Speciesism and Art. [Version
dated February 4, 2026]

Theses on the Critique of Speciesist Art Continuums

1. Speciesism is a fundamental social relationship, not a marginal problem.

Speciesism is not a misunderstanding, carelessness, or mere prejudice, but a structural relationship of violence that determines whose lives are considered morally relevant and whose bodies appear to be expendable.

2. Artistic continuities, particularly in the DACH region from Nitsch to his offshoots, are based on this accessibility

A continuum that is prominently established in the DACH region by H. Nitsch, his students, and today's followers presupposes socially accepted violence against non-human animals (which it requires) not as a theme, but as an ontological basis.

3. Animal bodies do not appear here as victims of injustice, but as a 'natural given' or matter of course.

Violence against animals is not addressed as a moral injustice, but treated as a culturally exploitable fact. The fact that it is made “meaningful” in aesthetic, symbolic, or ritual terms does not change its character as violence.

4. The question is not whether violence is ‘(also) meant critically’

The crucial question is not whether violence is intentional, reflective or contextualised, but rather: Why is violence against animals considered open to interpretation in the first place? This question would not arise in the case of violence against humans. The fact that it can be asked here is itself an expression of speciesist thinking.

5. Art functions here as a mechanism for refining societal violence

In these contexts, art does not become a place of questioning, but rather an aesthetic refinement of an already normalised relationship of violence. It makes acceptable what happens elsewhere on a daily basis: the reduction of living beings to expendable bodies.

6. Such places cannot be helped because their foundation is not critical but affirmative.

These places cannot be ‘reinterpreted,’ ‘critically used,’ or ‘transformed from within’ because they only function as long as the accessibility of animal bodies is socially accepted. Their existence depends on precisely what they purport to transcend. (...)

7. Societal normalisation is their actual basis for existence

These art venues do not thrive on provocation, but on habituation. Habituation to a world in which animal bodies are rendered commonplace as food, commodities, research objects or symbols – without this being considered an injustice.

8. The sacrosanct artistic field protects speciesism

The notion that art is beyond ethical evaluation serves as a strategy of immunity here. It allows violence to be aestheticised without having to take moral responsibility for it.

9. Individual vegan or animal-friendly attitudes do not change this

The fact that individual visitors or participants consider themselves vegan or animal-friendly does not disrupt the structure. As long as the basic assumption of the legitimate accessibility of animals is not challenged, participation stabilises the system.

10. Anti-speciesist criticism rejects aesthetic exceptions

As stated in our comments in the Animalistic Issue [<https://www.farangis.de/blog/category/animalistic-issue>, 04.02.26], this is not a matter of taste or symbolic debate, but rather a radical shift in the moral horizon: non-human animals are not carriers of meanings, but carriers of life, interests and vulnerability.

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In a speciesist world, it is terribly easy to normalise speciesism – especially where it appears as art. What is considered an aesthetic liminal experience is in reality the cultural continuation of a violent relationship that is constantly being re-fundamentalised, here as rite and everyday life.

The aesthetic normalisation of animal bodies in art, language, science and culture does not serve critical reflection – that would be a contradiction in its own terms, unless one were to attempt to ‘ethicise’ violence as such and thus ideologically legitimise it – but rather reproduces and reinforces, as a logical and deliberate consequence, the speciesist relationship of violence, because the systems-given accessibility of animal subjects is taken as a matter of course.

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A mapping of aesthetic mechanisms in the normalisation of speciesism

Critique of the visual refinement of animal-objectifying practices in art, the art market and society

I. Basic assumption

Speciesist settings no longer require justification.

They require aesthetic infrastructure.

This infrastructure ensures that:

- Violence does not appear as violence
- Objectification is not named as objectification
- Criticism is either integrated or made invisible

The result is not conflict, but normality.

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II. The most common aesthetic mechanisms

1. Aesthetic refinement

Mechanism:

Animal bodies, animal remains or animal-related violence are transferred through art forms (installation, photography, performance, design) into a space of meanings in which aesthetic value overshadows ethical questions.

Effect:

- Violence is perceived as refined
- Availability is perceived as legitimate
- Criticism is considered a matter of taste, not ethics

Normalisation effect:

What is beautifully framed is not considered problematic.

2. Symbolic abstraction

Mechanism:

Animality becomes a metaphor, a symbol, ‘material for something else’ (death, nature, transience, ritual, primal origins).

Effect:

- The concrete animal disappears
- Suffering is semantically outsourced
- The individual is erased

Normalisation effect:

Violence is no longer directed at the animal, but at an ‘idea’.

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3. Ontological emptying

Mechanism:

Non-human animals do not appear as subjects with interests, but as:

- Bodies
- Forms
- Materials
- Relics
- Data

Effect:

- No moral addressee remains

- There is no one to whom injustice is done

Normalisation effect:

What is not a subject cannot be harmed.

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4. Irony and distance aesthetics

Mechanism:

Animal objectification is presented in an ironic, playful, absurd or 'broken' way.

Effect:

- Criticism is defused
- Responsibility is denied
- Seriousness is considered naive

Normalisation effect:

Anyone who seriously disagrees is considered humourless or dogmatic.

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5. Ritualisation and naturalisation

Mechanism:

Violence is portrayed as archaic, ritualistic, natural or culturally necessary.

Effect:

- History replaces ethics
- 'It's always been this way' replaces responsibility

Normalisation effect:

What appears natural or ancient seems inescapable.

6. Scientific-aesthetic hybridisation

Mechanism:

Art draws on science, research, biology, archiving (e.g. artscience, taxidermy, bio-art).

Effect:

- Objectification appears factual
- Violence appears neutral
- Criticism is considered anti-rational

Normalisation effect:

What appears scientific is not considered ideological.

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7. Market-driven depoliticisation

Mechanism:

Art that objectifies animals is:

- collected
- curated
- traded
- branded

Effect:

- Criticism disrupts the market
- Ethics are considered an externality

Normalisation effect:

What sells is considered legitimate.

III. Mechanisms on the part of the ‘opposing side’

8. Co-normalisation through relativisation

Mechanism:

Critical voices argue:

- ‘One must differentiate’
- ‘Art is ambivalent’
- ‘It's a matter of interpretation’

Effect:

- Violence becomes opinion
- Injustice becomes perspective

Normalisation effect:

There is no longer a standpoint, only discourse.

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9. Integration instead of confrontation

Mechanism:

Anti-speciesist criticism is invited, but:

- not prioritised
- not seriously considered
- not acted upon

Effect:

- Criticism serves to self-legitimise the system

Normalisation effect:

The system appears open, but remains unchanged.

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10. Making radical criticism invisible

Mechanism:

Positions that fundamentally reject the objectification of animals are:

- not invited
- not quoted
- not discussed

Effect:

- The conflict appears smaller than it is

Normalisation effect:

What is not visible is considered non-existent.

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IV. The core structural problem

There are no recognised spaces for this criticism

- No established art context allows:
 - the rejection of animal-objectifying art as a legitimate point of view
- Criticism may analyse, but not refuse
- Rejection is considered anti-artistic, not ethically 'justifiable'

Public discourse does not accurately reflect the problem.

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V. Summary

Speciesist scenes do not normalise themselves despite criticism, but rather through aesthetic mechanisms that render violence invisible, diffuse responsibility and structurally exclude radical counterpositions.

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VI. Concluding statement

The visual refinement of practices that objectify animals is not a side effect of speciesism, but its cultural cradle.

As long as there are no spaces that acknowledge the fundamental rejection of such art as a legitimate point of view, speciesism remains aesthetically secure – and socially untouched.

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Violence in art and animal objectification

Speciesism as a means of aestheticisation and art creation

Speciesism is not a marginal phenomenon of cultural aberrations, but a fundamental social power relationship. It structures whose lives are considered morally relevant and whose bodies may be regarded as available, usable or meaningful. This distinction has a profound effect on social practices – in economics, science, everyday culture and, in particular, in art. There, speciesism is not only reflected, but often aesthetically stabilised.

The approach developed here does not understand speciesist art as deviation or provocation, but as part of a cultural continuum. This continuum, which is paradigmatically visible in the DACH region in the Nitsch scene, its current offshoots and related forms, refuses to critically examine and address violence, and persists in its unquestioned assumption of animal availability.

Non-human animals do not appear as moral subjects or victims of injustice, but rather as a natural resource for artistic meaning production.

The decisive factor here is not the intention of individual artists. Whether violence is ‘critically intended’, symbolically charged or ironically broken remains secondary. The real question is: Why is violence against animals considered open to interpretation in the first place?

Why is it considered aesthetically workable, while violence against humans does not have this openness? The fact that this question can be asked in an artistic context is itself an expression of a fundamental speciesist relationship.

In such scenes, art does not function as a place for questioning social violence, but rather as a mechanism for refining it. It shifts the problem from the level of ethical responsibility to that of aesthetic evaluation.

Animal bodies, remains, or discriminatory to completely destructive practices that typically target the mental and spiritual realm are transferred into symbolic, ritualistic, or cultural spheres of meaning in which the violence itself becomes ‘invisible’ by being banished or exiled into the non-human realm.

What is framed aesthetically is no longer considered problematic, but rather complex, ambivalent or open to discourse. Recurring aesthetic mechanisms are central to this normalisation. Symbolic abstraction transforms concrete animals into metaphors for death/birth, nature/anti-nature or transience/eternity, thereby erasing individual feelings and experiences.

Ontological emptying reduces animals to bodies, substances or relics, leaving no moral addressee. Ironisation and distancing aesthetics deprive criticism of its urgency by labelling seriousness as naive or dogmatic. Ritualisation and

naturalisation shift responsibility to supposed, securely hierarchical history, culture or presumed primevalism.

Scientific-aesthetic hybrid forms lend objectification the appearance of neutrality and rationality. Finally, market-based embedding completely depoliticises the practice by using marketability and market value as legitimation.

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These mechanisms do not operate in isolation, but form an aesthetic infrastructure that stabilises speciesist practices. It ensures that violence does not appear as violence/a problem, objectification is not named, and criticism is either integrated or rendered invisible.

It is striking that normalisation does not work despite criticism, but often because of it. Relativising arguments – such as references to ambivalence, differentiation or openness to interpretation – transform injustice into mere questions of perspective. Invited criticism typically serves to legitimise the system without fear of structural consequences.

Radical anti-speciesist positions, on the other hand, remain ignorable because they question the fundamental availability of animal bodies, which reflects the norm in our societies. Speciesist art never allows itself to be abstracted into questioning the social norm of animal objectification.

The core structural problem for animal rights activists and anti-speciesists is that there are hardly any recognised spaces outside their own movement in which the fundamental rejection of art that objectifies animals is considered a legitimate position. Criticism may analyse, historicise or interpret – but it must not refuse. Rejection is discredited as anti-artistic, not recognised as ethically justified. Public discourse therefore does not accurately reflect the problem, but distorts it in favour of aesthetic self-immunisation.

Anti-speciesist criticism rejects this aesthetic exception. It insists that non-human animals are not carriers of meanings, but carriers of life, interests and vulnerability.

In a speciesist world, it is alarmingly easy to normalise speciesism – especially when it appears in the form of art. What is considered an aesthetic liminal experience proves, on closer inspection, to be the cultural continuation of a violent relationship that is constantly being re-established: as a ritual, as a symbol, as daily life.

The visual and cultural refinement of practices that objectify animals is therefore not a side effect of speciesism, but its cultural cradle. As long as there are no spaces that recognise the fundamental rejection of such practices as a legitimate standpoint, speciesism remains aesthetically secure – and socially untouchable.

Impressum

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Erscheinungsdatum: Februar 2026
Kontakt Daten: www.farangis.de
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