

Closing press release of the 2009 edition of "Les Estivales de la question animale"

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The 2009 edition of the Estivales de la question animale has just come to its end, confirming the success of these annual encounters: 67 people, most of them but not all animal activists or sympathisers, participated in the programmed events and debates and in the shared moments of conviviality within the relaxing settings of the Parménie Centre.

Despite a slight slump in the number of participants [for last year, see below] - presumably due to our delay in announcing this year's edition and to an overlap with the vegan festival "Le Cri de la Carotte" - the enthusiasm of the participants was as high as in last year's edition. Different generations and nationalities, varied experiences and heterogeneous knowledges were blended and combined. In this pluralistic atmosphere, the animal question was explored in new and multiple ways. The reflections concerned not only different activist practices (presentation of the Italian coalition against vivisection in universities, of the collective Lausanimaliste (Lausanne, Switzerland), of the campaigns of the Austrian association VGT...), but also artistic expression (performance of drawing on sand, slam performance...), the relations of each of us with her- or himself (analysis of the issue of personal identity), with society (discussion about children choosing to become vegetarians) and with other cultures (introduction to the philosophy of India, informal discussions between participants from different countries: Ethiopia, Germany, Switzerland...).

Thus once again the Estivales confirm their project as a place of exchange. It is of utmost importance to the organizers to preserve the openness and pluralism of this project and to avoiding any dogmatic evolution. The Estivales are not a party school aimed at transmitting an unifying ideology; rather, they are a democratic agora. They belong to all citizens who reflect on the common animality of sentient beings and on the ethical and political consequences, whatever their positions may be.

This year particularly, this openness came under strong criticism, through attacks against one participant who had expressed himself elsewhere on issues unrelated to the animal question. Many times various techniques were used to intimidate the organizers and to pressure them into cancelling the intervention of that participant. As is affirmed on the site of the Estivales: "The Estivales (are) open to all who are interested by the animal question" and "The participants express their opinions freely and are sole responsible for them". This attempt impose censure on the Estivales confirms the organizers in their belief that their project is necessary in order to encourage exchanges in settings that allow opinions to be expressed freely, appreciated and debated through the instruments of reason.

The organizers of the Estivales 2009

Report on the Estivales 2008

Organizers' report on the 2008 Estivales

The 2008 Estivales de la question animal took place from the 16th to the 23rd of August at the Parménie center in the Isère département in France. Seventy-five people participated in this seventh edition.

The Estivales is an open gathering for all persons interested in the animal question whatever their positions. The animal question is the set of ethical, political, cultural and other issues that face society as a whole due to the fact that animals are sentient beings.

Twelve presentations and debates were scheduled for the Estivales 2008 covering a large spectrum of subjects. The list of these events is on the Estivales website (in French) with for each an abstract or short introduction, and for some the complete text or audio recordings.

In comparison to the previous editions this seventh edition marks progress towards several of the objectives of the Estivales:

— By the diversity of the participants as to their opinions, their practices, their ages, and their social classes. Like in previous years there were a number of antispeciesist and animal protection activist. Others came out of plain intellectual interest. The low fees made the event affordable to all, and at the same time the quality of the facilities provided at the Parménie center allowed the elderly, the disabled those who expect a certain level of comfort to attend.

— By the markedly increased number of participants. A total of 75 people came to listen and exchange ideas, some for a single debate and others for the whole week. The average daily participation was 46 people; 36 people stayed 5 days or more.

— By the diversity of subjects that were addressed, reflecting a large spectrum of problems and approaches, ranging from the concrete description of the fate of animals in slaughterhouses to an historical presentation on the notion of instinct, and including presentations and debates about practical approaches and the work of specific associations, and of course discussions more directly related to activism... There were several presentations by associations, reflecting a growing interest on their part in the event.

— By the diversity of the speakers, representing academics as well as grassroots activist. A particular effort was made to encourage the participation of women, who were underrepresented in previous years.

— By the media coverage of this event, that we hope will be greater still next year.

Among the points to improve upon, we note of the following issues concerning this edition and the future of the Estivales:

— Much progress still needs to be made concerning the diversity of the participants and the presenters, particularly by the involvement of more persons opposed to the ideas of animal liberation. The Estivales plan to continue their efforts to bring presenters and participants from other points of view, other countries and other social groups.

— Several of the debates were dominated by a few recurrent controversies, to the detriment of the actual issues of the debates. This may justify a more organized moderation to keep the debates

focused.

— The debates had tended to stretch out several hours, adding to the accumulated fatigue of the participants. The organizers propose to limit the total length of events to two and a half hours.

— The meals prepared in common benefited from the kitchen of the facilities, but their quality suffered from lack of organization, the effort to maintain a low price (4 euros a day), and the general fatigue. It might be a good idea to organize the meals more thoroughly in advance, with preestablished appetizing and nutritionally balanced menus, and with one or more individuals in charge of supervising their preparation.

— There is also the question of whether it would be possible to organize several events at the same time to favor diversity in the presentations.
