

Minding Animals

Editorial

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In this and subsequent issue of *Relations* you will find twelve papers first presented at the second *Minding Animals Conference* held in July, 2012, in Utrecht, The Netherlands. Universiteit Utrecht was selected to host the conference which was subtitled *Building Bridges between Science, the Humanities and Ethics*. The conference was convened by Dr. Tatjana Višak who was ably supported both logistically and financially by her peers in the Ethics Institute (Faculty of Humanities) and Faculty of Veterinary Sciences. The conference was indeed fortunate in that it was also supported financially by several organisations (other than by the university). Of note, the World Society for the Protection of Animals, the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture and the European Commission provided support, amongst others. 690 delegates from 42 countries attended the conference, and over 450 papers were selected for presentation. Held over three long days, delegates were set a cracking pace and were delighted with a depth of academic insight rarely to be experienced at any one event.

Subsequently, over 100 of these papers were presented for consideration for publication in this and the next special issue of Volume 2 of *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism*, with just 12 papers finally chosen. The editorial team, ably supported by several others who painstakingly assessed which authors would be successful for publication, have been able to assemble what could be labelled a most representative snapshot of what was presented at the conference.

The six papers presented in this first issue takes us from learning about the emotional lives of animals, to donkeys in the landscape, to a clinical perspective of a theory of mind, to electrocution of an elephant, to the interaction of music and birdsong, and to zoos, circuses and cinema marketing. The second issue will examine urban wildlife, the cow and agriculture in Finland, hybrid creatures inspired by experimentation, animal transport regulations, impacts of the poetry of Lucretius, and the art of a chimpanzee named Alpha.

In this issue, we are firstly presented with a paper by Barbara Creed who considers the cinematic representation of animal death in relation to questions of ethics. Among the films she discusses are early documentaries like Thomas Edison's *Electrocuting an Elephant* and Georges Franju's *Le Sang des Bêtes* as well as Robert Bresson's classic *Au hasard Balthazar* and Werner Herzog's more recent *Grizzly Man*. Informed by the theories of André Bazin, Akira Lippit and Anat Pick, Creed contributes fruitfully to an underrepresented topic in writings on cinema arguing that spectators often displace their own fear of death and dying onto the animals represented in films. She reads the space between spectator and the cinematic image of actual animal death as an ethical space that makes possible a creaturely gaze that may break down boundaries between the human and the non-human animal.

In their paper, *Learning about the Emotional Lives of Kangaroos, Cognitive Justice and Environmental Sustainability*, Steve Garlick and Rosemary Austen propose an alternative approach to sustainability, based not only to the ethic of care but also to encounters with real animals. In this sense, the kangaroos that live in the rehabilitation centre near Canberra, Australia, offer important hints for the study of environmental integrity. Looking at the scientific research on wildlife emotions and to encounters, the authors offer a way to transcend the often impersonal and remote scientific knowledge.

Tanja Schwalm reads Yann Martel's bestselling book *Life of Pi* with a Critical Animal Studies approach to uncover that the novel's commercial success relies on the same strategies that zoos use to promote themselves. Rather than analysing the plot, the Indian boy, Pi Patel, whose family owns a zoo gets stuck on a lifeboat with a tiger and other animals and struggles for his survival, Schwalm looks closely at the exotic book's cover, at interviews with the author and at reader's comments on the book in order to point to the novel's arguments in favour of zoos as an important and necessary institution. Schwalm's convincingly critical appraisal that the reinforcement of the obsolete mythology of a "good zoo" reassures readers that visiting a zoo serves animal welfare, conservation and education but fails in relation to animal ethics.

The deep bond connecting animal care to human care is well presented by Stephen Blakeway. In his research, *The Multi-dimensional Donkey in Landscapes of Donkey-Human Interaction*, it emerges how the work of the Donkey Sanctuary, especially in developing countries, has not only a strong impact on the wellbeing of animals, but also of people. By eliciting case studies, the author also makes the point for the need of knowledge among people who handle a donkey: very often, in fact, poor animal conditions are due to poverty and ignorance, more than to mere cruelty.

Susanne Heiter looks at the work of two contemporary musicians who both propose a participation of birds in music making. Her first example is a recording by Wolfgang Müller in which the composer suggests that particular starlings are imitating Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*. The other example is David Rothenberg's musical encounter with the lyrebird George where the performance is interpreted as the jam session of two musical agents. Müller and Rothenberg both support and legitimate their suggestions of musical capacities in birds by referring to scientific knowledge in order to convince their audience of the possibility of interspecies music. Heiter reveals the hypothetical, playful and provocative character of their claims as very fruitful when it comes to unsolved questions in human non-human animal relations.

The closeness of mental processes in both human and non-human animals is well questioned in Jean Michel Le Bot's work, *A Clinical Perspective on "Theory of Mind", Empathy and Altruism*. Here the author, by means of a number of experiments performed with chimpanzees, shows that they are able to understand what other perceives. By means of a human case study, the author shows that this ability suggests they also have the ability of somasia – a condition that makes it possible to understand another's mental state.

In Volume 2, Issue 2 of *Relations*, you will read the second set of six challenging essays. They commence with a paper by Taija Kaarlenkaski who examines the close interconnection of the female human and animal gender. In her work, *Of Cows and Women: Gendered Human Animal Relationships in Finnish Agriculture*, she discusses the gendered representation of animal husbandry. As she points out, cattle tending in Finland has been regarded as a feminine work because of a social separation of labour. By selecting some of the writings that have been collected in a public writing competition, she finds the deep reason of this separation both in the bodily relationship with cows and, especially, because of gender and embodiment.

In her article, Juliet MacDonald challenges the notion of drawing as an exclusively human activity. Her text – which can also partly be seen as the biography of a historical non-human person – focuses on the chimpanzee

“Alpha” who was born in 1930 as part of a breeding program established by Robert Yerkes. She was raised by humans in their home and then moved to a laboratory environment where she was the subject of several scientific behavioural and physiological studies. In her empathetic account of Alpha’s tragic life and her ongoing desire to draw in different *umwelten*, MacDonald considers Alpha’s “scribbles” as meaningful performances of subjectivity and agency. They could maybe even be read as acts of resistance to the experiments she was subjected to, as well as to her caged environment.

In her analysis of the poem *De rerum natura* by Lucretius, Alma Massaro reveals the pluralistic, non-anthropocentric perspective of the Latin poet. Focussing on two passages – one about a human and one about an animal sacrifice – she shows how the simplicity of animals who just follow nature and who understand themselves as part of the universal force of nature, reach serenity and become a model for moral behaviour. In the cited passage, a cow is presented as morally superior to humans because she stays faithful to her pact with her offspring as well as with humans whereas, in an analogously structured passage, humans violate the laws of nature and are compromised by impious religion. With her insightful rereading of Lucretius, Massaro also calls for new understanding of ancient wisdom as solid ground for modern animal ethics.

The different treatment humans often deserve to similar animal species is the object of Siobhan O’Sullivan, Barbara Creed, and Jenny Gray essay, *Low down Dirty Rat*. Here the authors analyse the different conceptualisation of rats and possums inside Australian legislation and offer insights from science and popular culture in order to find a justification of this difference. Their point is that “human cruelty to animals is contradictory and irrational and that when another species potentially threatens human lives and human self-interest we react brutally and without due consideration”.

In her essay, *Animal Perceptions in Animal Transport Regulations in the EU and in Finland*, Outi Ratamáki investigates the issue of the long distance transportation of horses to slaughter inside the EU. The author offers an interpretation of the regulatory texts used in the EU and in Finland on the base of both the market driven and animal centric point of view. In trying to answer the question “What kind of animal perceptions are predominant in the legislation concerning animal transportation and what is their institutional basis?”, Ratamáki offers a deconstruction of the current conceptualisation of animals inside.

Finally, Evelyn Tsitas investigates the relationships between scientific experiments on the human animal chimera, the representation of those experiments in science fiction, and the literary trope of the mad scientist.

She points to the speciesism in biotechnology that aims at augmenting and altering the animal body as well as in the fictional responses to recent scientific developments. The depicted human animal hybrids in books like *Frankenstein*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* or *Dog's Heart* where animals are considered disposable, clarify the human hubris in the biotechnological age. Tsitas understands the depicted liminal creatures as cyborgs in Donna Haraway's sense and shows how there are used to speculate on long held assumptions about the difference between human and non-human species, and to display the anxiety about a fragmented modern identity in the 21st century.

We hope you enjoy this *Minding Animals* Special Edition of *Relations*. We are sure that the papers selected will challenge you, inspire you and give you hope for a more compassionate and respectful interrelationship with our non-human animal kin. We also hope that this and the next issue will entice you to join us at the next *Minding Animals Conference* which will be held between 13 and 20 January, 2015, in New Delhi in India. For further information on the next conference, please visit www.mindinganimals.com.