

Reviews



Animal Encounters, Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini, eds. (Boston: Brill, 2009. 266 pages).

Reviewed by Etienne Benson, Harvard University

The animal spirits stimulating the academic field of critical animal studies to its current level of high ferment have much to do with a certain ethical uncertainty or unease arising from a conviction that the established model for negotiating otherness, which one might call liberal humanism, has done all it could, but that the nature of its replacement remains unclear. Human-animal encounters, even if they are far from exhausting the range of questions about a posthumanist ethics, provide rich material for working out what such an ethics might look like. This volume of essays, edited by Tom Tyler of Oxford Brookes University and Manuela Rossini of the Swiss Academies' td-net (Network for Transdisciplinary Research), both of whom also contribute chapters, takes a self-consciously agonistic and exploratory approach to the question of posthumanism as it is refracted through "the animal." The volume consists of an Introduction by Tyler and six sections of two chapters each, with brief editorial introductions to each section provided by Tyler or Rossini. Several of the chapters originated as presentations at the meeting of the Society for Science, Literature, and the Arts in Amsterdam in 2006; two, Tyler's and Donna J. Haraway's, have been published elsewhere in slightly different form. The six pairs of chapters are categorized by kinds of encounters or aspects of encountering: "potential," "mediate," "experimental," "corporeal," "domestic," and "libidinal."

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Few of the chapters fall neatly or exclusively into these categories, and one of the mixed pleasures and frustrations of this volume is trying to determine why the editors placed any two essays together and experimenting with alternative permutations. Tyler's introductory essay centers on the camel as animal and metaphor. Along with the brief introductions to each section, it provides a pair-by-pair summary of chapters that will not be repeated here. Extending Tyler's metaphor, the volume itself could be seen as a sort of caravan of headstrong two-humped camels, generally traveling toward the same destination but only occasionally following the same path there. As Tyler suggests, structuring the volume agonistically highlights the diverse and often conflicting approaches of animal studies as a field and encourages a comparative or dialogic approach not only between chapters in each section but among the sections. As is to be expected, some of the humps on these camels are more substantial than others. Moreover, the nature of the agonism within each section varies widely. Sometimes a particular camel's two humps point in the same direction, sometimes in opposite directions, and sometimes with no immediately apparent relation to each other at all. In a few cases it is glancing encounters among the different camels (sections) that generate the most sparks, as when Jonathan Burt, in the section on "corporeal encounters," offhandedly dismisses scholarship that uncritically adopts "Berger's much cited thesis . . . of the replacement of the 'real' animal by its image in late capitalism" (159), the very thesis which is adopted by both the essays in the section on "mediate encounters." Such antagonistic encounters seem almost accidental, however, and despite a few scattered references to other chapters and a few common theoretical anchors, there is little attempt to explicitly engage with alternative approaches. These camels mainly lead by example.

Rather than assessing each agonistic pairing, this review will assess the chapters according to their theoretical debts to thinkers who have had an important influence on posthumanist thinking or animal studies: Donna J. Haraway, John Berger, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. To the extent there is unity among the different approaches taken by the authors of this volume's chapters, it is in their interest in a variety of "posts," not just posthumanism (and the posthumanities) but also postmodernism, poststructuralism, post-anthropocentrism, "post-



meateating,” and so forth. The proliferation of “posts” generates an overall mood of exploratory dissatisfaction; something is gone, but its hoped-for replacement is defined as yet mainly by what it is not: not modern, not anthropocentric, not humanist. Despite their methodological and theoretical differences, the authors often propose the same constellation of interim solutions to the current problems of human-animal relations, academic and otherwise: a suspension of distinction or judgment, an abandonment of dichotomization, an ecologism or a holism, an irreductionism, an openness, or a “not-knowing.” We have been too quick, they suggest, to see one big difference (between human and animal, rational and irrational, mind and body, and so forth) where there are many small differences, or to see one absolute difference where there are many relative differences. None go quite to the extreme of Giorgio Agamben’s messianic-utopian dream of a posthistorical suspension of the distinction between man and animal as expressed in *The Open: Man and Animal* (2003)—and, in fact, somewhat surprisingly, Agamben’s name does not appear in the index—but they share his conviction that political and ethical advance is shackled by received language.

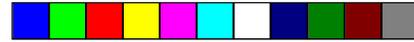
Thus this is “critical” animal studies, questioning the basic concepts in play in the hope that new ways of speaking and writing that do not rely on the old (modernist, humanist, anthropocentric) divisions will open the way to better human-animal relations. As a whole, the volume represents a search for a provisional posthumanist ethic in which the autonomous, self-willed, rational individual no longer takes center stage, and, therefore, in which liberal understandings of ethical responsibility no longer hold, leaving us in an uncertain, undecidable, or incalculable “open.”

The particular way in which these chapters examine or perform their “posts” differs. A small plurality takes Donna J. Haraway’s work as implicit or explicit model. In her chapter here, which centers on the concept of “non-mimetic” sharing and which appeared in slightly different form in her *When Species Meet* (2008), Haraway argues that laboratory scientists and animal caretakers have a responsibility to share the conditions of knowledge-producing labor, including pain and suffering, with their animal subjects, even though such sharing will be unequal and even though no amount of surrogacy or analogy can fully justify the suffering involved. Haraway argues that the key to a posthumanist ethics (although she does



not use the term) is refusing to allow calculation to be the whole story, or, in other words, refusing to designate certain creatures as “killable” even as one kills them. The problem with certain laboratory practices is not, in Haraway’s view, that animals are killed or suffer, or even that such killing or suffering is judged acceptable on the basis of a calculation of costs and benefits, but that such calculation is seen as sufficient justification, obviating the need for further concern.

Haraway’s interest in “non-mimetic sharing” is pursued in Susan Squier’s chapter (“domestic encounters”), which provides a feminist account of American chicken farming across a century and a half through the stories of two chicken farmers, a female slaughterhouse worker, and the author. Squier argues that industrial chicken farming in the twentieth century eliminated the opportunities for “fellow-feeling” between chickens and farmers, a term she draws from Adam Smith to describe non-instrumental aspects of economic production. Aside from its Harawayan overtones, Squier’s account also has resonances with Berger’s writings, about which more below. Following paths established in Haraway’s *Primate Visions*, Jonathan Burt’s chapter locates one of the origins of posthumanism in mid-century primatology, particularly the work of Solly Zuckerman, and questions whether the “dissolution” of boundaries between human and non-human is the “ideal end point” for any repositioning of the human (169). Burt sounds a note of caution about the tendency to view the “suspension” of categorical distinctions as an unmitigated good, a point that Haraway has also made in her discussions of hybrids and monsters of various kinds—cyborgs, vampires, companion species, and so forth. Through a close look at two artists who address human-animal sexual relations, as well as a number of writers who have sought to undermine or transcend that tabooed subject, Monika Bakke’s chapter (“libidinal encounters”) poses “zoosexuality” as a posthumanist relation that disrupts and reconfigures the individual subject, distinguishing it from “bestiality,” which replicates existing patterns of what has been called (though Bakke does not) heteronormativity. Like Squier’s “fellow feeling” and Haraway’s “non-mimetic sharing,” Bakke’s “zoosexuality” is a step toward a language that allows for humans and animals to participate in common, for their mutual benefit, as some kind of “partners,” whether in the laboratory, the farmyard, or the bedroom, without assuming that they

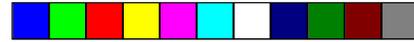


experience the exact same thing or exercise the same kind of power, or that such mutual participation can be ethical only if they do.

The work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), especially its concept of “becoming-animal” and its ontology of desire, has provided a resource for those seeking alternative understandings of human-animal relationships and ways of moving beyond the human. Robyn Smith (“experimental encounters”) frames her analysis of early twentieth-century nutritional experiments on rats in terms of Hans-Jorg Rheinburger’s Derridean description of experimental systems as a means of producing difference; however, it is Deleuze’s ontology of “zones of intensity” and desiring-machines, filtered through Brian Massumi, that most powerfully shapes her work. In this framing, agency is distributed throughout the experimental system rather than located in the heroic individual scientist; provisional and contingent affective connections, rather than rats and scientists, are the proper units of analysis. In contrast to most of the volume’s other chapters, but in line with most Deleuzian scholarship (including two other chapters in the volume), Smith leaves the ethical consequences of this redistribution of agency implicit. The chapter by Rossini, coeditor of the volume (“libidinal encounters”), analyzes a recent, sexually explicit SF novel, arguing that the trans-species metamorphoses and sexual encounters of the heroine provide a model of desire unbounded by human or humanist constraints. Steve Baker’s chapter (“domestic encounters”) focuses on a project by artist Lucy Kimbell involving pet rats; it highlights the importance of not-knowing, ambiguity, failure, open-endedness, and experimentation in our relationships to non-human animals. Baker’s chapter might fit just as well with the Harawayan chapters of this volume, except that it shows little concern for the animals involved in Kimbell’s projects per se, whether in the mode of “non-mimetic sharing” or any other mode; instead, it focuses on the creative process and the becoming-beyond-the-human of the human artist. In doing so it betrays the vulnerability of Deleuze and Guattari’s language, despite its inherent critique of the centered, rational, autonomous, male subject of humanist tradition, to being used to retell the old humanist fable of the human as the only creature without givens, the only essentially essence-less animal, capable of infinite “becoming.”

In light of Jacques Derrida's critique of the humanism of the concept of "the animal" in his 1997 lecture series, published in English under the title *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), the humanism of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming-animal" should not be surprising. Of the theorists writing about animals, Derrida did the most to call attention to the importance of language, notably the humanist implications of the very term *animal* and the non-human aspects of language. The chapters by Tyler and Pamela Banting in the "potential encounters" section both follow largely in Derrida's tracks, although in both cases perhaps not quite far enough, and in Banting's case despite herself. Tyler's essay focuses on the question of anthropomorphism. Rather than arguing for or against its use in human descriptions of animals, Tyler argues, drawing on Heidegger, that the term and the concept are pernicious since they place humans "first and foremost," thereby enacting a kind of anthropocentrism. Tyler's reliance on *anthropocentrism* as a critical term, however, seems to raise the same questions as the use of "anthropomorphism" by the authors he critiques. There is a similar issue, of course, with *posthumanism*, and this is why Derrida, following in Heidegger's tracks, refused to jettison altogether the terms he critiqued, instead placing them *sous rature* or playfully distorting them, as in his use of *différance* rather than *différence* to highlight the nonreducibility of writing to speech or the use of *animot* rather than *animaux* as a reminder of the importance of naming in the distinction between those who call themselves human and those who are called animals.

Banting's chapter provides an illuminating discussion of the connections between human and non-human signification, particularly through tracking and the making and reading of signs as described by two Canadian nature writers, Andy Russell and Sid Marty. Banting's critique of poststructuralism for failing to consider non-human signification, while perhaps correct in the main, seems misguided. As Cary Wolfe has elaborated upon in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003), however, and as Banting admits in a footnote, Derrida's conception of signification was not limited to human cultural productions; his idea of "text" had less to do with literary texts than with Maturana and Varela's second-order cybernetic theories of autopoiesis, which make room for animal signification and many other



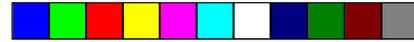
kinds of signification besides. Banting's main difference from Derrida is her valorization of wild animals over domestic animals, which leads her to trivialize Derrida's autobiographical account of coming under the gaze of a cat in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. For Banting, "Thinking the animal . . . depends very much on whether or not that animal can or cannot, may or may not, eat you alive—not just whether it might see you naked in your bathroom" (39). Banting argues in favor of opening up to more-than-human signification by suspending the distinction between human language and non-human semiotics, but she then inscribes a new master distinction between the wild and the domestic. Out of the frying pan, into the fire. While the evident agency and power of large carnivores is, as Val Plumwood, Brett Walker, and others have argued, a useful challenge to scholarship that would deny animals all agency whatsoever, no theory of human-animal relations that dismisses domestic or non-carnivorous relations as second-class will or should find much purchase among scholars of animal studies.

John Berger's impressionistic essay, "Why Look at Animals" (in *About Looking* 1980), remains widely cited in animal studies, perhaps in part because of its straightforward title, but more importantly because—although Berger's influence is less significant than the other theorists discussed here—it captures an important strain of thought in critical animal studies relating to what Berger described as the disappearance of "real" animals in favor of their images. Nigel Rothfels, Gregg Mitman, and others, writing in implicit or explicit defense of the real and authentic animal, have made important contributions to a body of work critiquing what the "fantasies" about animals promulgated through modern or postmodern media, including notably zoos and wildlife films. Both of the chapters under the rubric of "mediate encounters," written by Carol J. Adams and Randy Malamud, are thoroughly Bergerian, although Adams is avowedly so and Malamud only implicitly. This Bergerianism is aptly captured by the term *mediate*, which implies the existence of an alternative, "immediate" form of encounter. Adams diagnoses the postmodern condition as one in which signs that once referred to animals now refer to cultural representations of animals, but in which the exploitation and suffering of animals at human hands continues unabated. She accepts the kinds of posthumanist claims advanced elsewhere in the volume as an



accurate diagnosis of the postmodern condition, but without those chapters' hope for a more promising successor to liberal rights discourse, and with one major exception that evinces a kind of gastronomic foundationalism: "The autonomous, unitary human fades in the presence of postmodernism, *except* at a meal. At that time, there is only one mouth, one stomach, one tongue performing the act of feeding one body" (70). Malamud, too, decries what he sees as the postmodern emphasis on performance and mass consumption, under the title "Americans Do Weird Things with Animals." The concept of "weird," which Malamud admits is perhaps juvenile, provides the grounding for his normative critique of a "corrupted" modern American mass consumer society (77). Even though he concludes by calling for a "posthumanist rejection of the fantasy of human omniscience with regard to animals" (95), Malamud seems more concerned with the establishment of ethical "boundaries or guidelines" (79) for the human treatment of animals, on the basis of gut judgments of "weirdness." In their contempt for a fallen world, their interest in prohibitory ethics, their reliance on intuition for ethical guidance, and their conviction that animals can anchor us in the real, both Adams and Malamud strike strongly conservative tones, as did Berger's own Marxist critique, with its avowed humanism and its nostalgia for a prelapsarian peasant past of worship and sacrifice (a past that is not entirely unlike the ideal of pre-industrial chicken farming proposed by Squier).

Michel Foucault wrote little about animals per se; however, his historicization of the "human," summed up in the concluding line of *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970), in which he described humanity as a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea, is foundational to many posthumanisms, including those who take the human/animal distinction as their focus of critique. In the section on "corporeal encounters," Laurie Shannon writes in a Foucauldian mode about early modern anatomy, especially the work of Andreas Vesalius, who she argues focused anatomists' attention on the distinctiveness of the human body, and William Harvey, whose interest in the physiology of the heart crossed species boundaries. She also touches on later seventeenth-century commentators who suggested that the uniqueness of the human could not be proven through comparative anatomy, which, she argues, "forces claims for 'the human' more overtly into the category of sheer



assertion” (155). Shannon’s account complicates histories of animals in early modern science that focus solely on René Descartes, and it provides a welcome counterpart to Derrida’s analysis of philosophical humanisms. Inasmuch as it illustrates a key stage in the emergence of the modern “anthropological machine,” Shannon’s piece might also be called Agambenian, although it thankfully avoids the obscurantism of that school. In the context of the volume, the chapter is a reminder that posthumanists and those who wish to understand them could profitably look back to the pre- and proto-humanists of the early modern period.

Animal Encounters largely accomplishes its goal of presenting to readers the variety of approaches to animal studies currently circulating in the field, in a format that highlights their commonalities and differences and lends itself to critical engagement. It is a useful addition to the growing list of such collections, which includes *Representing Animals*, edited by Nigel Rothfels (2002) and *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, edited by Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (2005). Perhaps more than those earlier volumes, *Animal Encounters* clearly focuses on the critical humanities, with Shannon’s historical piece being the only chapter that approaches the social sciences. It is too much to ask for any one volume of this sort to cover the field in its entirety, and students of animal studies can turn elsewhere for volumes that focus on history, sociology, anthropology, political theory, law, and so forth. Still, given the importance of anthropology in particular to animal studies, the volume would have been enriched by, for example, what one might call an “Ingoldian” chapter that examined indigenous or non-Western relations to animals, many of which might be called ahumanist, along the lines of Tim Ingold’s work with Saami reindeer herders or Rane Willerslev’s more recent work, *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (2007). Doing so also might have helped broaden the volume beyond its focus, with only a few exceptions, on the kinds of relationships or encounters with animals that are had by writers, academics, artists, scientists, hobby farmers, and pet-keepers—that is, the kinds of encounters had by the urban middle class. It might also have helped maintain a useful sort of methodological discomfort. As Cary Wolfe, Harriet Ritvo, and others have argued, even though the institutional strengthening of animal studies is to be welcomed, there is a danger of the



field setting too quickly into the mold already poured for other “studies.” One of the promises of animal studies, as Tyler notes in his introductory essay, is the bringing together of diverse methodological and theoretical approaches, and it would be a shame if the field became simply a branch of cultural studies that attended particularly to animals, rather than the more capacious arena for encounter it has the potential to become.



This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida, Leonard Lawlor (New York: Columbia UP, 2007. 171 pages).

Reviewed by Brooke Rollins, Louisiana State University

Jacques Derrida spoke emphatically about the significance of the animal in the Western philosophical tradition, arguing in a 2001 interview that the question of animality “represents the limit upon which all the great questions are formed and determined, as well as the concepts that attempt to delimit what is ‘proper to man’” (qtd. in Lawlor 7). What Derrida alludes to here is the crucial role animals play in the philosophical project of determining the essence of the human, an essence that is not only defined by but also set over and against the animal. Speaking out against this tendency to appropriate animals to establish human difference and distinction, Derrida insists that animals suffer; he insists that they are subjected to violence in the name of humans. This is the case, on one level, in the work of Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan, whom Derrida holds accountable for maintaining the distinction between the human and the animal despite these theorists’ challenges to autonomous subjectivity. It is also the case in daily life—in our homes, on our farms, and in our communities—where animals must often endure “conditions that previous generations would have found monstrous” (qtd. in Lawlor 12). We are at war with animals, Derrida says, and because of this, we are at war with ourselves. It is in the midst of this violent scene that Leonard Lawlor intervenes. In *This is Not Sufficient*, he takes up Derrida’s charge to