

ANIMALS IN HISTORY

Conference at the Literaturhaus Cologne, May 18–21, 2005. Conveners: Dorothee Brantz (GHI) and Christof Mauch (GHI). Co-sponsored by the GHI, the Anglo-American Institute of the University of Cologne, and the Literaturhaus Cologne.

Participants: Anne Alden (Alliant National University), Sofia Åkerberg (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences), Greg Bankoff (University of Auckland), Stefan Bargheer (University of Chicago), Mark V. Barrow (Virginia Tech), Marcel Boldorf (University of Jena), Renate Brucker (Dortmund), Jonathan Burt (London), Peter Edwards (University of Roehampton), Amanda Eisemann (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign), Pascal Eitler (University of Bielefeld), Kelly Enright (Rutgers University), David Allen Feller (University of Hawaii), Bernhard Gissibl (International University, Bremen), Susanne Hehenberger (University of Vienna), Oliver Hochadel (University of Vienna), Kathleen Kete (Trinity College), David Lazar (GHI), Garry Marvin (University of Roehampton), Susan McHugh (University of New England), Clay McShane (Northeastern University), Scott Miltenberger (University of California, Davis), Robert Mitchell (Eastern Kentucky University), Brett Mizelle (California State University, Long Beach), Susan Nance (University of Guelph), Tillman Nechtman (University of Southern California), Amy Nelson (Virginia Tech), Carl Niekerk (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign), Johannes Paulmann (International University Bremen), Susan Pearson (Northwestern University), Helena Pycior (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), Harriet Ritvo (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Mieke Roscher (University of Bremen), Nigel Rothfels (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), Aaron Skabelund (Hokkaido University, Sapporo), Julie A. Smith (University of Wisconsin, Whitewater), Jessica Ullrich (University of the Arts, Berlin), Martin Ullrich (University of the Arts, Berlin), Mary Weismantel (Northwestern University), Anna-Katharina Wöbse (University of Bielefeld).

Reading most history books, one is left with the impression that the world was only inhabited by humans; however, when thinking about the everyday lives of people, one must ask if history really would have taken the same course without the presence of many non-human actors, whose labor and products supplied much of the material wealth upon which human prosperity is based. Would the sciences and arts have been able to advance in the same manner without the ability to experiment on animals, depict them visually, or employ them for entertainment purposes? In short, would human cultures and societies be the same without the

domesticated and wild animals that have shared our space in the past and in the present?

In recent years, a growing number of scholars are turning their attention to the place of the non-human in history. That this type of historical investigation is quickly gaining prominence was demonstrated by the fact that the call for papers for this conference garnered over 180 proposals from across the globe. Paying tribute to the mission of the GHI, the final program centered primarily on Europe and North America, which was nevertheless a crucial step toward the internationalization of this emerging field because thus far most work had been done in the United States and Great Britain rather than continental Europe.

For four days in May, this interdisciplinary conference brought together a diverse group of scholars, including anthropologists, historians, literary scholars, musicologists, psychologists, and sociologists, as well as members of the press and the general public. Participants debated conceptual, historical, and methodological questions concerning the role of animals in human society. While each panel centered on particular case studies, the overall goal of the conference was to develop common themes and questions about what a more animal-centered view can add to historical scholarship and our concrete understanding of the past. The conference sought to address the following key questions, among others: Why bother to study the role of animals or human-animal relations in history? What are some of the major conceptual and methodological questions arising from such a focus? What are the potential gains as well as limitations of a more animal-centered perspective for the wider study of history?

The Wednesday night keynote address by Harriet Ritvo opened the conference with an overview of the many arenas where animals have been present in human history, starting with their domestication, which arguably marked the beginning of history, up to contemporary debates about biotechnology. Ritvo also offered her thoughts about the newly emerging field of "animal studies." While she welcomed the growing interest in animal-related topics, she also cautioned against the formation of yet another insular sub-discipline where scholars only communicate among themselves rather than engaging larger audiences and already-existing academic and real-life discourses. Ritvo's thought-provoking remarks set the tone for many of the discussions that followed.

The first panel laid some of the conceptual foundations regarding how animals might be integrated into the study of the human past. Questioning the convention that all we can know about animals is their representation in historical texts, Nigel Rothfels turned to the quotidian historical praxis of those who professionally worked with animals, in this case elephants, in order to ask if a shift from emphasizing "looking at

animals" (as John Berger did) toward more "tactile" engagements might offer a different, more direct way to access human-animal relations. Susan McHugh, in turn, focused on the connection of animal histories and aesthetic theories, arguing that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of "becoming-animal" might be a particularly useful way of reconceptualizing the place of animals in human society. In their presentation, Mary Weismantel and Susan Pearce began by lamenting the inadequate theorizing of animals, particularly with regard to notions of the social, to propose that a closer focus on conceptions of space might help us recognize both the cultural and the social significance of animals. Finally, Julie Ann Smith insisted that scholars must distinguish more carefully between representations of and actual encounters with animals, a distinction that was repeatedly taken up in subsequent discussions.

Turning to more empirically driven case studies, the second panel focused on the changing human perceptions of specific animals throughout history. Peter Edwards examined the treatment of horses in early modern England to show that class relations played a significant role in how horses were treated. He also addressed the problematic of finding and interpreting primary sources in early modern history. Shifting to the United States in the nineteenth century, Kelly Enright discussed the place of the rhinoceros in the American cultural imagination, arguing that this exotic creature revealed "the American preference for myth over science, as well as a predilection for locating savage wilderness abroad rather than at home." The third paper, by Marc Barrow, focused on the multiple, often contradictory perceptions of alligators in American society. Demonstrating that alligators have been viewed as fierce predators, emblematic symbols of the Florida landscape, tourist attractions, and commodities, Barrow argued that American attitudes were not only driven by fear but also by the desire to tame this beast and profit from it.

The third panel focused on moral concerns surrounding the relations between humans and animals. Naturally, such concerns centered on human rather than animal morality; however, it was interesting to hear how discourses about rights, social class, and sexual aberration were frequently projected onto animals. For instance, Susanne Hehenberger's paper about bestiality cases in early modern Austria showed that animals, the "instruments of sin," were supposed to be burned at the stake alongside the human perpetrators. Examining specific court cases, Hehenberger showed that sodomy was particularly severely punished (usually with a death sentence), primarily because it threatened the assumed boundary between humans and beasts. A different kind of boundary crossing was addressed by Stefan Bargheer, who focused on debates about civility and animal protection in mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth-century England in order to demonstrate that emerging discourses about

the need for animal protection legislation attested to shifting notions about honor, namely from a concept of warrior honor to more civilized concepts of virtuous honor, particularly among the upper classes; but he also showed that early animal protectionists were often ridiculed rather than revered for their activism. Turning to more explicitly philosophical debates, Renate Brucker investigated the historical linkages between the peace and animal rights movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Claiming that most scholars have overlooked the fact that many peace activists were also strong advocates of animal rights, Brucker showed that already some 1848 revolutionaries, especially Gustav von Struve, and later Magnus Schwantje, insisted on the link of pacifism and discourses about animal rights.

Turning even more explicitly to the question of politics, the fourth panel featured two papers, one by Pascal Eitler, who offered a rather cautionary tale by applying a genealogical approach to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about vivisection and vegetarianism to argue that discourses about animal protection can also have potentially dangerous effects, opening the gates for problematic conceptions of life and biopolitics, which found their most radical expression in Nazi Germany. Anna-Katharina Wöbse, in contrast, centered on the growing significance of animals in international politics by tracing debates about animal protection, particularly with regard to livestock, whales, and birds, in the League of Nations, which, according to Wöbse, should be viewed as a forerunner of contemporary global environmental movements.

The fifth panel shifted away from an emphasis on politics. Instead, the four presenters concentrated on a range of scientific discourses. Carl Niekerk looked at a number of eighteenth-century scientific, philosophical, and artistic texts and how their depictions of apes shaped contemporary discourses about the relationship of humans and anthropoid apes. Turning to the correspondence and personal papers of Charles Darwin, David Allan Feller's presentation contextualized the place of dogs in Darwin's personal life and his work on natural selection to show that scholars have thus far overlooked the importance of these canine influences on his thinking. Robert Mitchell offered a self-critical analysis of the use of anthropomorphic concepts in psychology and the behavioral sciences. Highlighting some of the key debates, he maintained that many of the discourses against anthropomorphism today have not taken into account new scientific data about the relationship of human and animal behavior. Looking at a very different type of anthropomorphism, Martin Ullrich posed the provocative question "do birds sing" to address the aesthetic relevance of the musical actions of animals. Offering numerous audio examples ranging from Beethoven to Messiaen, Ullrich examined

how composers have used bird sounds in their music, thus transforming animal chants into human art.

The problematic of exhibiting wild animals was the focus of panel six. Brett Mizelle opened the discussion with a presentation about the exhibition of wild animals and public market culture in the early American Republic. He also used the specific example of Pinchbeck's "pig of knowledge" to show how animal exhibitions were affected by changes in popular culture. Oliver Hochadel also focused on the public exhibition of animals, in his case apes in nineteenth-century zoos. He argued that zoos functioned as a medium to transpose Darwinian ideas to a general audience. As Hochadel demonstrated, this did not always generate the anticipated results because encounters between apes and zoo visitors often led to an anthropomorphization of the animals rather than a deeper scientific understanding. Finally, Susan Nance discussed the question of animal agency through the example of elephant behavior in nineteenth-century American circuses. She insisted that acts of aggression, docility, and resistance demonstrated that human authority over animals even in settings as controlled as circuses is never as complete as it might seem and consequently that we need to take their agency into account when studying the place of animals in human society.

The seventh panel centered on the multivalent histories of dogs in twentieth-century popular culture. Anne Alden looked at the changing representations of dogs in *The New Yorker* magazine cartoons throughout the twentieth century. Viewing these cartoons as a mirror of American culture, Alden argued that they attested to varying notions of anthropomorphism, reflecting not only the changing position of dogs in American society but also the shifting representations of human activities, particularly the rise of the computer age. Helena Pycior explored the cultural significance of "first dogs" in American political culture to show how pets like Harding's Laddie Boy and Roosevelt's Fala have become political props in the White House in order to add a human face to the American presidency. Looking at the other end of Cold War politics, Amy Nelson examined the use of dogs in the Soviet space program. As Nelson demonstrated, dogs like Laika also gained celebrity status, although in this case not so much to add a gentle touch to communism, but to underscore the technological and scientific superiority of the Soviet Union in the space race and also to distract from the more secretive aspects of these operations.

Panel eight turned to the issue of gender, which has always been closely linked to the treatment of animals and the politics of animal protection. Mieke Roscher looked at the involvement of three generations of women in the British debates about animal welfare and vivisection in

particular in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Arguing that each of them represented a specific mode of engagement, she demonstrated how Francis Power Cobbe stood for motherly protection, Anna Kingsford chose a more emotionally driven tactic many labeled hysterical, and Louise Lind-af-Hageby insisted that only a rational, scientifically oriented approach could lead to tangible results. Amanda Eisemann provided a different interpretation of some well-known early modern images of horse stables by focusing on how masculine identities manifested themselves in relation to equestrian trades. She insisted that the equestrian trades functioned as a means to distinguish between different social and economic orders. Kathleen Kete in turn explored the connection between animals and another often-neglected group of historical actors, namely children. Maintaining that contemporary notions about the loving relations between children and animals are by no means “natural” but rather historically conditioned, Kete traced the changing cultural links between animals and children from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century. She argued that the connection between animals and children reflected most of all adults’ need to define their social relationship with children and animals.

The connection of colonialism and animals was the focus of panel nine. Tillman W. Nechtman studied various forms of encounters between the British population and the wild and exotic animals that Britons imported from South Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. He argued that these “imperial animals”—elephants, tigers and hyenas—became living fables in British society while they also threatened the structured world of domestic Britain. In his paper on German East Africa, Bernard Gissibl explored diverse ways in which humans related to elephants before World War I. Back in Berlin, the fear of the extermination of elephants and other African wild animals was a major concern of zoologists and scientists. In East Africa, on the other hand, the colonial administration was not only concerned with declining wildlife numbers but also with the waning ivory trade. In individual encounters of big game hunters and elephants, yet another aspect of human-animal relations in the colonial context emerged: the symbolic claim of white superiority over African nature. In his paper on disasters in the Spanish Philippines, Greg Bankoff reflected on the much-ignored impact that floods had on domestic animals. He analyzed the effects that the loss of livestock and poultry had on the livelihood of farmers in the Philippines, and he argued that the notion of vulnerability was a viable concept in studying the exposure of animals to natural hazards.

Panel ten turned to the hunting of animals and some related issues. In her paper on the moose and moose hunting in Sweden, Sofia Åkerberg

argued that balancing moose populations has been a goal throughout the twentieth century even though this has never been entirely achieved. Åkerberg discussed conflicts between hunters and forest companies over moose populations and pointed out that notions of moose hunting had changed considerably over the last hundred years. In earlier times, moose hunting was seen as a "glorious and manly sport"; today, in contrast, administrators are more likely to discuss moose-hunting in such profane terms as "production-adapted culling." Like Åkerberg, Gary Marvin analyzed changing social and cultural constructions of an animal. At the core of his paper on wolves, he asked why this particular species has been viewed by some groups with loathing, and by others with awe and reverence. The German Shepherd dog was seen as the epitome of a colonial dog, according to Aaron Skabelund. He demonstrated that this dog became an "ideal creature of metaphor" in numerous different cultural settings. German Shepherds became icons of imperial militarism in 1930s Japan, for instance. Much more recently the same dog came to signify American imperial savagery in the Islamic world, since U.S. troops supposedly used German Shepherd dogs to torture prisoners in Abu Ghraib.

In a panel titled "Animal Urbanity," Clay McShane, Marcel Boldorf, and Scott A. Miltenberger discussed the place of animals in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German and American cities. McShane argued that the presence of horses, their size, and their speed was related to the size and population density of cities. City administrations changed the width of streets and their surface, for instance, in order to accommodate horse-drawn traffic. McShane also pointed out that the modification of horses by man, through breeding and castration, was a prerequisite for deploying horses in cities. Turning to a case study about cats in the city, Marcel Boldorf discussed the fate of stray cats in southwestern Germany's Mannheim. Boldorf emphasized the important role that the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals played over the course of the twentieth century. In the final paper of the conference, Scott A. Miltenberger applied the concept of the "anthrozootic city" to nineteenth-century New York. In the middle of that century, discussions about public health heightened concerns of New Yorkers about encounters with animals in the city. It was feared that encounters of humans of all classes, "promiscuously mixed together" with animals, might increase the risk of disease or even create social disorder.

In a final roundtable, chaired by Christof Mauch, panelists Dorothee Brantz, Jonathan Burt, and Harriet Ritvo summarized some of the major themes of the conference and asked "where animal historians should go from here." They discussed issues of audiences, national cultures, and the institutionalization and organization of the field of animal studies. In the

debate that followed, conference participants discussed ways and methodologies in which animals as actors could be integrated into larger historical narratives. The fact that this conference, unlike many other GHI conferences, had been open to the public had attracted a number of journalists. As a result, several articles and reports about “animals in history” appeared in the press as well as in local, national and international radio programs. The conference organizers plan to publish both an English and a German collection of essays based on some of the papers.

Dorothee Brantz and Christof Mauch