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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. gender forum also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of gender forum.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

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There are no submission or page charges, and no colour charges.

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Editorial

The Question of the Animal and the Promises of Postanthropocentric Feminisms

By Dominik Ohrem, University of Cologne, Germany

1 Some we love, some we hate, some we eat. Such, in a nutshell, is psychologist Harold Herzog's assessment in his popular book of the same title regarding the obvious inconsistency and ambivalence of human relations with other animals – an ambivalence so ubiquitous and pervasive that it sometimes seems as if we were merely witnessing different historical and cultural inflections of the same underlying anthropological principle. Indeed, one might well argue that human-animal relations have always been a troubled and troubling compound of intimacy and violence, longing and detachment, affection and abjection. While it is, for example, no longer a rarity that people – affluent Westerners in particular – spend small fortunes on those animals classified as 'pets' (from the most absurd accessories to expensive state of the art medical treatment), at the same time every year billions of other nonhuman beings, designated 'vermin', 'livestock' or scientific 'specimens', are in for a very different treatment. In "The Animals: Territory and Metamorphoses," a chapter in his *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard rather bleakly summarizes the history and present of humans' treatment of other animals:

> Beasts of burden, they had to work for man. Beasts of demand, they are summoned to respond to the interrogation of science. Beasts of consumption, they have become the meat of industry. Beasts of somatization, they are now made to speak the 'psy' language, to answer for their psychic life and the misdeeds of their unconscious. Everything has happened to them that has happened to us. Our destiny has never been separated from theirs, and this is a sort of bitter revenge on Human Reason, which has become used to upholding the absolute privilege of the Human over the Bestial. (133)

2 The differential treatment associated with the above classifications of nonhuman beings is testimony to the way discursive constructions of animals and animality are intricately interwoven with the (inter)corporeal practices and material realities of human-animal relations. As studies of gender, race or (post)colonialism have long shown, our material relations with other groups and individuals are inseparable from the concepts we impose on them. There is a violent potential in the names we give, just like the names we give often bear the imprint of the violence that brought them into existence. And in the case of nonhuman others, as Jacques Derrida so famously argues in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the very term 'animal', a word so unquestioningly used by all of us to epistemically capture a bewildering multiplicity of earthly beings and nonhuman modes of being-in-the-world, betrays a more fundamental involvement in what for Derrida amounts to no less than a

"veritable war of the species" (31). In the last seminar before his untimely death in October 2004, Derrida once again addresses this issue of the grotesque asymmetry inherent in the distinction between 'humans' and 'animals'. While the former "are supposed to belong to the same species or the same genus, the human species, the human race," the term animals (or 'beasts') "designates a set with no other unity […] than a negative one […]: namely that of not being a human being. But there is no other positively predicable unity between the ant, the snake, the cat, the dog, the horse, the chimpanzee – or the sperm whale" (*Beast II* 8).

3 An implicitly or explicitly hierarchical juxtaposition of a uniform conception of animality with what is supposed to count as the genuinely and exceptionally human has been, since ancient times, a major obsession of Western humanity and in particular those human beings we like to call scientists and philosophers. Over and over again throughout the history of Western thought, some concept of the distinguishing "'properties' of man" (Derrida, *Animal* 5) has been defined against a supposed lack of some kind on the part of 'the animal' – the incapacity for language or reason, morality, tool use, tool making, humor, the inability to lie, the inability to pretend to pretend – the list goes on. However, because at least since the 'Darwinian revolution' the cherished fantasy of the human as not-animal has become untenable even for the more radical proponents of human exceptionalism, the focus has increasingly shifted to the alternative notion of the human as not-*really*-animal as a last-ditch effort to prevent humanity's absorption into animalkind. 'Man' might indeed be an animal, the argument goes, "but one with at least one added category – a rational animal, an upright animal, an embarrassed animal – that lifts it out of the categories of all other living beings and marks man's […] movement beyond the animal" (Grosz 12).

4 While the historical and contextual mutability of the human-animal boundary indicates how constructions of the human, the animal and the difference between them can be employed in various social, political or historical contexts, the persistent obsession with the question of human-animal difference also points to something else. An undercurrent of anxiety runs beneath the metaphysics of humanism and the smug triumphalism often implicit in (Western) human attempts at self-definition. This is because the irresistible meta-figure of the animal does not lend itself as a negative foil for 'what is proper to man' in any simple and straightforward way but inevitably provokes troubling questions – not only regarding the supposed fixity, or even the reality, of a boundary perennially under (re-)construction but also regarding the definition of the human as such. Indeed, as Akira Mizuta Lippit puts it, the animal inhabits "a phantom world that has haunted, throughout its long history, the domain of human subjectivity" (8) and continues to "accompany the crisis in human ontology" (20). It is

in this sense that the question of the animal is inextricably bound up with the question of the human – so much so, in fact, that articulating the one always already, in a mode of inevitable co-articulation, also evokes the other.

5 Arguably, the crisis in human ontology is also a crisis caused by the enigma of nonhuman ways of being and inhabiting the world, the unknowability of which poses a problem for constructions of human identity, dependent as they are on an animal otherness always eluding human definitions and appropriations. The deployment of a veritable scientific and philosophical machinery of knowledge production notwithstanding, humans remain unable to comprehend the lives of other animals in their unique experientiality and modes of being-in-the-world – and this goes not only for Thomas Nagel's oft-cited bat but even for those creatures with a perceptual apparatus more similar to that of *Homo sapiens.* Animals, though "familiars of our existence", as Luce Irigaray puts it, "inhabit another world, a world that I do not know. Sometimes I can observe something in it, but I do not inhabit it from the inside – it remains foreign to me" (195). Observations like these point to the paradox that humans both *do* and *do not* share the world with other animals. On the one hand, both humans and animals are obviously bound to *earth*, a place characterized by the multifarious relational dynamics of "creaturely cohabitation" (Oliver, "Earth Ethics"; Oliver, *Earth and World*), and their lives intersect in myriad ways – routinely, daily, in concrete relationships, but also indirectly in ways we remain largely or even entirely unaware of. On the other hand, however, as Irigaray indicates, earthly beings nonetheless live in different worlds that comprise different forms of inhabiting and relating to the same earth. We might thus recognize something of a productive tension in ecofeminist Val Plumwood's characterization of nonhuman beings as "earth others" (*Mastery* 137). Creaturely life is 'earthbound' and in this sense all creatures are fellow 'earthlings' (whether this is acknowledged or not, and no matter the ethical implications we do or do not draw from this). But beyond this existential commonality, the notion of earth others also points to the fact that the multiplicity of beings with whom we share earth as a home will always remain, at least to a certain degree, strange and foreign to us. As familiar strangers and strange familiars, as earth others, animals eschew simplistic epistemologies and ontologies of either sameness or difference.

6 In contrast and response to the longstanding exclusion (or anthropocentric 'inclusion-appropriation') of 'the animal' in Western thought, throughout the last decades and most significantly in the last couple of years the study of animals, animality and human-animal relations has garnered increasing scholarly attention across the disciplines. As a result, what is now often referred to as 'human-animal studies' or simply 'animal studies' is no longer

confined to a frowned upon existence at the margins of academia (for introductions to the field, see, for example, DeMello; Gross and Vallely; Weil; Waldau; Marvin and McHugh). In a nutshell, animal studies can be characterized by its interest in the manifold intersections of human and animal lives, the role of animals in human cultures and histories, and the way human societies can be understood as multi- or interspecific co-constructions involving a wide range of interactions between humans and nonhuman species. Especially in its more posthumanist vein, animal studies are also crucially interested in interrogating dominant notions of human-animal difference and their decisive role in constructions of human identity and exceptionalism – what Aaron Gross refers to as "the phenomenon of human self-conception through animals" (4).

7 From its inception, the question of interdisciplinarity was a decisive one for an emergent field that not only sought to move beyond the anthropocentric confines of established cultural, literary or historical studies and other disciplinary frameworks but also intended to reach across the 'great divide' that has traditionally separated the humanities and the natural sciences into discrete – and often mutually hostile – (imagined) academic communities. Accordingly, many works in animal studies by scholars from the humanities draw on the insights of disciplines such as biology, anthropology, on zoological studies of animal behavior (ethology) as well as other non-humanities perspectives. In turn, however, animal studies reject the deeply ideological assumption that disciplines such as biology and zoology constitute the 'natural' and/or the only authoritative field of knowledge production in this regard and that, in order to approach the question of the animal in all its complexity, this question needs to be addressed with the combined insights of a variety of academic disciplines. Or, to put this differently and more pointedly: Not least because the question of the animal requires a distinctly 'naturalcultural' perspective (see Haraway), animal studies scholarship potentially challenges the very concept of academic disciplinarity as such. This is because animal studies not only incorporates different disciplinary perspectives, it also has a transformative potential of its own. It 'speaks back' to and challenges the boundaries of the very disciplines it integrates into its interdisciplinary framework and thus evokes the question "how the internal disciplinarity of history or literary studies or philosophy is unsettled when the animal is taken seriously not just as another topic or object of study among many but as one with unique demands" (Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human" 566–567).

8 These unique demands of 'the animal' are not merely of an epistemological or ontological but also, and crucially so, of an ethical nature. Perhaps more so than other academic fields, animal studies requires a critical attentiveness to what Karen Barad refers to

as the "intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being" (185), and a constant awareness that 'the animal' of animal studies is not merely "a theme, trope, metaphor, analogy, representation, or sociological datum" (Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human" 567) but an embodied, experiencing, living creature that imposes a particular ethical responsibility on the practices and politics of academic knowledge production. As philosopher Matthew Calarco argues in his seminal *Zoographies*, "There is no doubt that we need to think unheard-of thoughts about animals, that we need new languages, new artworks, new histories, even new sciences and philosophies" (6). Calarco thus forcefully emphasizes the inadequacy of our concepts, our forms of knowledge and our epistemologies, steeped as they are in a long and dominant tradition of anthropocentrism, to rethink and reinvent human relationships with other animals and with nonhuman life more generally. Much of the recent work pursued or discussed in animal studies effectively challenges this dominant tradition: The study of animal cultures and societies (see, for example, de Waal and Tyack; Nimmo), the 'philosophical ethologies' of scholars like Vinciane Despret and Dominique Lestel (see the recent special issues of *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*) or the perspectives of zoosemiotics and zoopoetics (Wheeler; Tüür and Tønnessen; Moe) are only a few examples of such attempts at articulating – or at least approaching – the 'unheard-of thoughts about animals' that Calarco refers to.

9 How might we understand the specific role of feminist thought in the face of this challenge of rethinking animals, animality and human-animal relations? Despite the diversity of and tensions between various forms of feminist thought and politics, what different feminisms have arguably always had in common is a commitment to the articulation of new forms of knowledge that question, challenge or point beyond the frameworks of a patriarchal and/or heterosexist status quo. This includes a critical awareness of the complex ways in which our modes of seeing and knowing are woven into the materiality of our lives and the ethics and politics of our equally material lived social relations. Of course, as postcolonial, black feminist and other critiques have shown, Western mainstream feminism has had (and in some ways continues to have) a number of problematic blind spots of its own, and its Eurocentric imaginings of a 'global sisterhood' have been prone to impose the perspectives and experiences of Western white middle-class women as the normative framework of feminist critique. The more complex epistemologies of contemporary feminist theory with their stronger sensibility for the many intersections of gender and sexuality with other categories of difference and inequality such as race, class and dis/ability can in part be understood as a reaction to this. It is perhaps particularly this feminist commitment to the

articulation of new emancipatory forms of knowledge that might also be able to assist us in our endeavors to re-encounter animals beyond the hegemonic forms of relating authorized by established anthropocentric conceptual and discursive frameworks (also see Ohrem and Calarco; Ohrem and Bartosch).

10 Indeed, not only are there obvious historical parallels between the emergence of feminist theory out of the political activism of the women's movement on the one hand and the emergence of animal studies out of animal rights activism on the other (see, for example, Birke), there are also, and perhaps more importantly, broader historical interconnections and intersections between anthropocentrism and androcentrism/patriarchy that require further scholarly investigation. Feminist theory and historiography is uniquely suited to address these complex historical entanglements and the ways in which they reach into the present. In this light, as Claire Colebrook points out, feminist attention to and concern for animals and nonhuman life "should not appear as an addition or supplement but as the unfolding of the women's movement's proper potentiality" while, in turn, feminist "criticisms of man would not be add-ons to environmentalism but would be crucial to any reconfiguration of ecological thinking" (Colebrook 72). Animals and animality as well as the nonhuman more generally are not something against which feminism should be defined – or even *has to be* defined – in order to demarcate its ethico-political involvements. Rather, as Elizabeth Grosz argues in *Becoming Undone*, human as well as nonhuman animal life – both the particular forms of being(s) it allows for as well as its mostly imperceptible (biological) processes – is something that should be positively embraced as an important aspect of a form of feminist theory and politics that does not leave "questions about the rest of existence […] untouched" (84), that does not limit itself to questions of human subjectivity and identity but embraces the non-, the other-, the more-than-human as one of its core interests. "What would a humanities, a knowledge of and for the human, look like if it placed the animal in its rightful place, not only before the human but also within and after the human?," Grosz ponders:

> What is the trajectory of a newly considered humanities, one that seeks to know itself not in opposition to its others, the "others" of the human, but in continuity with them? What would a humanities look like that does not rely on an opposition between self and other, in which the other is always in some way associated with animality or the nonhuman? What kind of intellectual revolution would be required to make man, and the various forms of man, one among many living things, and one force among many, rather than the aim and destination of all knowledges, not only the traditional disciplines within the humanities, but also the newer forms of interdisciplinarity? (13–14)

As Grosz's own work amply demonstrates, feminism is of major importance in this process of reinventing the humanities. And it is surely not a naively optimistic interpretation to argue that what Grosz in 2010 imagined as feminism's postanthropocentric horizons is now well on its way of becoming a much more widely acknowledged aspect of feminist theory and politics. Without a doubt, feminist thought plays a key role in recent attempts at reorienting the humanities, "those disciplines that have affirmed and even constituted themselves as beyond the animal" (Grosz 12), in the direction of an "ecological" or "environmental humanities" (Rose and Robin; Hutchings) or a "posthumanities" (Badmington; Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*; Herbrechter) , which is also, crucially, a *feminist* posthumanities.

11 Grosz's work not only testifies to the broader potential of feminist thought to effectively address the question of the animal, it is also a good example of what might be referred to more specifically as 'postanthropocentric feminisms' – feminist perspectives and approaches that take into account the relations between the human and the nonhuman, the importance and agency of nonhuman beings and non- or more-than-human environments, but also the more-than-human nature of the human itself. In fact, as the work of Donna Haraway, Lynn Margulis, Stacy Alaimo and others demonstrates, interspecies relations are not limited to the various interactions *between* the human and nonhuman species but already begin with (what we like to call) the 'human' body, which is why "*[h]uman nature is an interspecies relationship*" (Tsing 144, emphasis in original). Postanthropocentric feminist thought comes in a variety of forms, under different headings and with different emphases and priorities. While, for example, a strong focus of ecofeminism, a rather heterogeneous field in itself, was and is the dualism between human life and nature/animality, its violent consequences, and its interconnections with patriarchy and forms of gender(ed) oppression (see, for example, Plumwood, *Mastery*; Gaard, *Ecofeminism*; Warren; Sturgeon), feminist technoscience and early feminist posthumanism were primarily interested in the human-machine/technology nexus – evident, for instance, in the prominence of Haraway's figuration of the cyborg – as a way of challenging the metaphysical subject of humanism and traditional notions of human identity (see, for example, Halberstam and Livingston; Lykke and Braidotti; Hayles; Wajcman). Today, ecofeminism and feminist technoscience are accompanied by, or have given rise to, a range of other fields or approaches of postanthropocentric feminist critique, such as "feminist post-constructionism" (Lykke, "Timeliness"), "material feminisms" (Alaimo and Hekman; also see Alaimo), "posthumanist gender studies" (Åsberg, "Timely Ethics"), "feminist ecocriticism" (Gaard, Estok, and Oppermann) or "queer ecology" (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson; Morton; Seymour; also see Roughgarden), all of which

are not limited to perspectives on animals and animality but for the most part share a focus on the nonhuman and on nonhuman material or corporeal agency. Throughout the last years, such feminist perspectives have accompanied the wider acceptance of 'the animal' into academia and the heightened interest in the non- and more-than-human in traditional humanities disciplines.

12 A particular interest animal studies scholarship shares with feminist, gender or queer perspectives lies in the ways in which various constructions of otherness and modes of othering underpinning the violent and oppressive epistemologies and material realities of speciesism, sexism or racism are to be understood as intersecting logics of domination (see Adams and Gruen). From the perspective of an intersectionally oriented feminist theory and politics, this means that the role of discourses of species and the figure of 'the animal' have to be taken into account with a specific focus on how they – at times subtly, often explicitly – inform gendered and racialized constructions of animality and humanity that function to exclude both nonhuman animals and particular groups of humans from the sphere of ethical and political consideration. In fact, already in her groundbreaking 1993 *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood points out that nonhuman life constitutes the "missing piece" (2) of intersectional feminist analytics and that the inclusion of nature and earth others into an extended framework of feminist theory would allow us to more fully address the complex intersectional dynamics informing a larger logic of domination that encompasses and affects both human and nonhuman life.

13 The contributions to this issue of *Gender Forum* serve as examples of the many possibilities for transdisciplinary collaboration between animal studies and intersectional feminist, gender and queer studies. Among other things, what the specific analyses in this issue demonstrate is that rethinking human relations with other species (and, by extension, with nonhuman life more generally) remains inseparable from rethinking human relations with other(ed) groups of *humans* – one of the more important reasons why animal studies needs feminism and feminism needs animal studies. Megan Condis analysis of Disney films, for example, emphasizes how representations of animality and nonhuman animals in seemingly 'innocent' works of popular culture often function to reinforce not only the established anthropocentric hierarchies between human and animal life but also relegate nonwhite people(s) to an 'inferior' in-between position of semi-humanity that is informed by the more explicit discourses of racist animalization in Western history. With a similar awareness of such problematic intersections, both Miranda Niittynen's and Peter Le Couteur's articles are interested in the ways in which animal bodies traverse the discursive, imaginary

and material landscapes of Western culture and how the animal functions as a focal point and nexus of intersecting discourses of gender, sexuality, race and species. Niittynen's article discusses the queer potentials of the 'rogue taxidermy' movement to articulate a critique of the violent masculinist, racist and heteronormative framework of traditional taxidermy, its colonialist 'exhibitions' of both nonhuman animal and racialized human bodies, and the anxieties about human, animal and interspecies sexuality that inform its productions. Discussing a body of folklore centered on the figure of the 'selkie', a mythical hybrid of human and seal, Le Couteur's article addresses similar anxieties about gender/sexual, racial and species difference and hierarchy. A particular focus of his analysis is on the topos of the Seal Wife which, as he argues with reference to Plumwood's arguments about the 'network of dualisms' pervading Western thought, "superimposes gender, race, and species onto a progressively cross-linked and hyperseparated binary". Concluding this issue, Jacqui Sadashige offers a range of insightful reflections on her experiences in Northern Thailand's Elephant Nature Park (ENP), a sanctuary and rehabilitation center for rescued elephants. While ENP's departure from and reform of traditional practices of elephant management may be and indeed has been characterized as 'ecocentric', Sadashige points out that ENP's approach also resonates well with the tenets of ecofeminism. Collectively, the articles in this issue of *Gender Forum* demonstrate that grappling with the 'question of the animal' offers a productive lens for a decidedly postanthropocentric form of feminist critique and that, in turn, feminist, gender and queer perspectives open unique avenues for 'imaginings otherwise', for the reinvention of our understanding of both human and nonhuman life.

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