

Panel 17

IVSA Conference 2009

Appreciating the views: How we're looking at the social and visual landscape

Panel Title	
Representing non-human 'animals'	
Description	
<p>Animal Studies is an emerging field of visual culture that can be seen as the latest in the series of 'other histories' that have come to prominence during post-modernity.</p> <p>In <i>The History of Animals</i> Erica Fudge argued that 'animals may not have a sense of self-in-the-world that is easily accessible to or recognizable by us, but they can certainly have an impact on the ways in which humans live, think, and represent in that world.' Fudge also cites Anderson who suggested in <i>Agents of Empire</i> that 'the history of North America was shaped as much by animals as by humans (and) it is the human history that becomes, as she notes, a contingent one. If animals can shape the landscape, of the New World as well as of the past itself, then human control over that landscape is limited and subject to animal actions.</p> <p>Today most people are directly exposed to a only a small number of species, yet encounter all manner of animal representations that saturate our culture through advertising strategies, cartoons, museum displays, wildlife documentaries etc. This panel welcomes papers that consider or explore any aspect of this discourse, and/or the environments where they are created, received, or consumed.</p>	
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Final Selected Papers

Name:	Sonja Haywood-Britz , University of Cumbria
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Paper Title	
Silent portraits	
Description	<p>It is generally presumed that historical narratives are informed by human decision making and agency. However, recent critical writings by environmental historians and animal studies scholars promote the idea that animals can play a major role in the unfolding of human events</p> <p>In this paper I wish to explore how three related, yet in some ways, diametrically opposed methods of representing wild animals - habitat dioramas, trophies and botched taxidermy, impact on our conduct towards and the manner by which we perceive animals. These modes of representation share taxidermy as practice - a craft embedded in colonial history and cultural engagement But, their varying approaches point out not only the effect animals have on human agency, but also how animal representation can either change or remain unaffected by social change. Such insights allow for a re-assessment of how we view humans, other animals and the environment.</p>

Name:	Ann Marie Tully, Greenside Design Centre, Johannesburg
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Paper Title	
The transparent animal: the collapse of the animal sign into allegory	
<p>In Erica Fudge's recent book <i>Pets</i> (2008) she states that "pets are good to think with".¹ In saying this Fudge points directly to a philosophical continuum that has defined and constructed what it is to be <i>animal</i>, and by dialectic relation: what it is to be <i>human</i>. Aristotelian and later Cartesian thought, reduces the non-human creature to a mere automata. Operating within this frame of reference Heidegger's <i>animal</i> is "poor in the world".² There is no empathy in this contention, only an indictment of the linguistic poverty of non-human creatures in a logo-centric world. Derrida in a counter assault to these humanist positions asserts that the domination of animals is encoded in the very structure of language; that in naming the non-human creature <i>animal</i> and prizing language as the keystone of our domination of the natural world we have created the <i>animetaphor</i>.³ This is a state whereby the myth and prejudice surrounding non-human creatures overpower, distort and diminish their presence and agency. It is important to note here that this alienated condition is not purely textual or linguistic but is also embedded in visual signs. I will propose in this paper that the visual representation of animals as signs tends to render them transparent; seen but simultaneously unseen; never particular; never fully present; always dissolving [disappearing] into myth, metaphor and allegory. Put plainly this is the collapse of the animal sign. When looking at representations of non-human creatures it is seldom the being that stands alone as an iconic sign of itself. Particularly in art and its historical discourse non-human creatures are indexical signifiers attaching affect or moral allegory to the humans they accompany or merely emblematic stand-ins for virtue or vice.</p> <p>In keeping with recent philosophical interest in pets [cats that look and the like] this paper will discuss representations of dogs, long hailed as "mans best friend" and without a doubt the most anthropomorphized and colonized of all animals; strangely familiar and yet completely alien. The transparency and mutability of the canine sign will be discussed in relation to three art works: the fifteenth century artist Piero di Cosimo's <i>The Death of Procris</i> (1500) and two photographic works by the contemporary South African artist Jo Ractliffe. Her moody apocalyptic series of images entitled <i>Nadir</i> (1988) depicting savage dogs in a junked wasteland as well as her intensely intimate and revealing work about the nature of animal love entitled <i>Love's Body</i> (1999) will be central to my argument. In discussing these images I will propose something that particularly interests me as an artist: the possibility of representing non-human creatures as intractable signs; as particular and individual creatures.</p>	

¹ Fudge, E. 2008. *Pets*. Stocksfield: Acumen, p. 13.

² Heidegger cited in Lippit, A. M. 1998. Magnetic animal: Derrida, wildlife, animetaphor. *MLN*, Vol. 113, No. 5, Comparative Literature Issue (December). John Hopkins University Press, p. 1113.

³ *ibid*.

Name:	Mark Haywood, University of Cumbria,
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Paper Title	Graphic Representations of Humanoid and non-Human Animals at the Johannesburg Zoo
Description	<p>The discipline of animal studies draws on earlier concerns for 'otherness', including post-colonial theory. The public zoological garden was a nineteenth century European product of imperialism and modernity, as were the phenomena of rural population drift and estrangement from Nature. Present day sub-Saharan Africa is now experiencing much that northern hemisphere countries underwent in previous centuries and the zoo has become the principal means by which African city dwellers, who are usually too poor to visit game reserves, can experience indigenous animals.</p> <p>The paper investigates a varied series of representations of animals in the Johannesburg Zoo from the past hundred years, which evidence its passage from colonial zoological garden to post-colonial edutainment centre.</p>

Name:	David Wilson, University of Cumbria,
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Paper Title	
Performing animals and illusions of nature	
Description	
	<p>This paper deals with the representation of non-human animals in a specific area of early popular visual culture, that of the music hall and circus in 1920s Britain. Following organized public protests and press interest, a parliamentary Select Committee was formed in 1921 to investigate the degree to which animal performance depended on cruelty in the training and exhibition. Questions were then raised about the human - non-human animal relationship, especially concerning wild animals and affronts to the dignity of nature.</p>