

## SMART Animals, University of Amsterdam, 6-8 December 2017

### Workshop “Animal Minds between Narrative and Cognition” (Dec 6)

University Library, Singel 425, Doelenzaal, 9:00-16:00

#### Schedule

9:00 – 9:15	Welcome and introduction
9:15 – 9:40	Alexa Weik von Mossner (University of Klagenfurt), “Feeling Animals? Narrative, Anthropomorphism, and the Intricacies of Trans-Species Empathy”
9:40 – 10:05	Jon Hegglund (Washington State University), “Transmedial Anthropomorphism, Canine Minds, and the Limits of Experientiality”
10:05 – 10:35	Discussion
10:35 – 10:50	BREAK
10:50 – 11:15	Hans-Johann Glock (University of Zurich), “Toads, Dogs, and Apes: Intelligence and Reasoning in Non-Human Animals”
11:15 – 11:40	Simone Pollo (Sapienza University of Rome), “The Clock and the Patient: Philosophical Animals as Fictional Characters”
11:40 – 12:05	Eva Meijer (University of Amsterdam), “The Politics of Animal Languages”
12:05 – 12:50	Discussion
12:50 – 14:00	LUNCH
14:00 – 14:25	Tirza Brüggemann (Free University of Amsterdam), “The Poetry of a Horse’s Mind”
14:25 – 14:50	Marco Caracciolo (Ghent University), “Flocking Together: Embodiment and Fictional Engagements with Collective Animal Minds”
14:50 – 15:20	Discussion
15:20 – 15:30	BREAK
15:30 – 16:00	Wrap-up

## Workshop description

Psychologists working in the wake of Jerome Bruner (1991) have argued that narrative is a key tool for constructing human selves and identities. This workshop confronts the challenges involved in engaging with nonhuman animals' selves in narrative form. Through what stylistic and formal strategies can narrative encapsulate the lived experience of animal bodies and minds? What are the differences between fictional narratives (in literature and film) that feature animal protagonists and accounts of animal experience and behavior in scientific writing or nonfiction (such as Charles Foster's *Being a Beast*)? What interpretive strategies are readers likely to adopt when engaging with these animal narratives? How, and to what extent, can narrative shape people's beliefs and ethical views about animal life? Finally, what is the epistemological value of animal-centered narratives? How, if at all, can they contribute to the scientific understanding of animal minds? These are questions that have been raised, more or less explicitly, in multiple areas of the humanities and the social and natural sciences: from David Herman's (2014) "narratology beyond the human" to Bernaerts et al.'s (2014) account of "nonhuman narrators" to work on the phenomenology of human animal-interactions (Warkentin 2012). But these remain scattered and fragmentary approaches; no head-on attempt has been made so far to interrogate the potential and the limitations of animal narratives from a perspective informed by the mind.

## Abstracts

### **Feeling Animals? Narrative, Anthropomorphism, and the Intricacies of Trans-Species Empathy**

*Alexa Weik von Mossner (University of Klagenfurt)*

How do literary texts and films invite us to care for nonhuman characters? Is our emotional engagement with imaginary animals comparable to our feelings for human protagonists? And does it make any difference whether we engage with fiction or nonfiction? My talk will use evidence from narratology, affective neuroscience, and cognitive ethology to address these questions. The narratologist David Herman has argued that insights from critical animal studies can be helpful for the analysis of narrative representations of nonhuman minds. I will suggest that research in cognitive ethology can complement such humanistic inquiries in important ways.

One aim of my talk is to investigate the role of anthropomorphism in our engagement with nonhuman animals in literature and film. I will also explore the issue of trans-species empathy, which allows us to feel with others across species boundaries, and address the question of why we tend to inhibit that capacity at times. Finally, I will differentiate between an *outsider* and an *insider* perspective on animal minds and discuss whether offering (or pretending to offer) an insider perspective on a nonhuman

consciousness can have any ethical dimensions that go beyond the pure entertainment value of crude anthropomorphism.

Alexa Weik von Mossner is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Klagenfurt in Austria. Her research explores the theoretical intersections of cognitive science, affective narratology and environmental literature and film. She is the author of *Cosmopolitan Minds: Literature, Emotion, and the Transnational Imagination* (U of Texas P, 2014), the editor of *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2014), and the co-editor of *The Anticipation of Catastrophe: Environmental Risk in North American Literature and Culture* (with Sylvia Mayer, Winter 2014). Her most recent book, *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* was published by the Ohio State University Press in 2017.

### **Transmedial Anthropomorphism, Canine Minds, and the Limits of Experientiality**

*Jon Hegglund (Washington State University)*

My paper challenges the notion that different narrative mediums offer contrasting affordances for representing animal experientiality; rather, I propose that we look at medial differences for the ways in which they prompt different cognitive processes of anthropomorphism with respect to animals. Drawing on cognitive psychological studies of anthropomorphism, I complicate notions that anthropomorphism is a voluntary, binary choice that speaks to epistemological (and consequentially ethical) “bad judgements.” Rather, I distinguish between “first-order,” or implicit, and “second-order,” or reflective, anthropomorphisms: the former is the instinctive, evolutionary essentialism we use to distinguish between anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic entities, while the latter involves higher-level cognitive processes that exist on a spectrum from “subjectomorphic” to “objectomorphic” (which can operate variably and functionally *within* a given narrative). My paper focuses on the relative anthropomorphism cued by two narratives that feature dogs as focalizers: Jack London’s 1908 short story “To Build a Fire” and Kornél Mundruczó’s 2014 film, *White God*. London, using the affordances of free indirect discourse for both his human and canine protagonists, cues an anthropomorphism that works primarily on the second order: we assess the thoughts, responses, and actions of the canine character in relation to those of the human protagonist while never changing our first-order assessment. *White God*, on the other hand, uses the audio-visual resources of film—including optical points-of-view, close-ups that suggest facial expressions, and the depiction of physical pain—that cue viewers to anthropomorphize the canine characters in a more implicit, immediate way. I conclude by speculating that a renewed focus on the cognitive complexities of anthropomorphism, rather than a desire to interpret animal experientiality, more productively addresses the role that narrative plays in understanding the porous and flexible boundaries between human and other animals.

Jon Heggland is Associate Professor of English and Director of Undergraduate Studies at Washington State University.

## **Toads, Dogs and Apes: Agency, Intelligence and Reason in Animals**

*Hans-Johann Glock (University of Zurich)*

My general topic is agency in non-human, non-linguistic animals (henceforth simply 'animals'). In this context I address the following questions:

- a) Can animals act or do they merely behave?
- b) Can animals act *intelligently*?
- c) Can animals act *intentionally*?
- d) Can animals act *for a reason*?
- e) Can animals *reason*?

I shall answer these questions in the affirmative, albeit with an increasing number of qualifications and caveats. My target is *lingualism*, a popular position that answers all of these questions resolutely in the negative, on general *a priori* grounds. It maintains that, for conceptual reasons, that various types of (rational) agency require language. In the course of engaging with lingualism I shall dwell on four main points. The first is the need to distinguish not just inanimate and animate activity, but also plant activity from animal behaviour. The second is the unduly neglected notion of intelligence and its connection to various notions of rationality/reason. The third is that the revisionist move from a subjectivist to an objectivist conception of reasons eliminates a substantial obstacle to the idea that animals can *act for reasons*; instead of requiring a second-order awareness of their own mental states, all they need to be able to do is to act in the light of objective states of affairs. Finally, I shall consider conceptual challenges to crediting animals with theoretical and practical reasoning in animals.

The presentation will draw on the following publications of mine:

Glock, H.J. 'Can Animals Act for a Reason?', *Inquiry* 2010.

-- 'Non-Human Knowledge and Non-Human Agency', in S. Tolksdorf (ed.), *Conceptions of Knowledge* (de Gruyter, New York 2012).

-- "Animal Belief and Rationality", in K. Andrews and J. Beck (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Animal Minds* (Routledge, London 2017), pp. 89-99.

Hans-Johann Glock is Professor of philosophy at University of Zurich.

## **The Clock and the Patient: Philosophical Animals as Fictional Characters**

*Simone Pollo (Sapienza University of Rome)*

One main target of contemporary animal ethics is Descartes's famous description of non-human animals as *automata*, that is clocks able to perform sophisticated behaviors but without any subjective experience. Descartes' denial of animal capacities to feel pleasure and pain is regarded as one of most influential justification of the exclusion of non humans from the circle of moral respect. On the contrary, after Darwin and thanks to darwinian biology real animals capacities can be recognized and animals can be admitted into the dominion of morals. The notion of "moral patient" is the theoretical tool used by standard ethical theories to include animals into the moral circle. Notwithstanding their incapacity to be moral agents, non humans have the basic capacities that grant them the status of "receiver" of duties and responsibilities of moral agents, that is human beings. The description of animal as "clocks" is now proved to be false, but is the definition of animals as "patients" more realistic? My claim is that both the animal *automata* and animal patients are fictional characters "narrated" by (some) philosophers into different theories and with different normative purposes. As a matter of fact, if the animals could tell their own lives and stories, they would play neither the role of the clock nor that of the patient. Animals are agents and the best way we have to listen to their stories is the ethological study of their behaviors. I will try to sketch how animal ethics should adopt the view of animals as agents listening to stories of animals told by classical and cognitive ethology. Listening to these stories entails many important outcomes for the reflection on ethics of human/animal relationships.

Simone Pollo is researcher and aggregate professor of *Bioethics* at the Department of Philosophy of Sapienza University of Rome. He also teaches *Ethics of human/animal relationships* at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Turin and serves as secretary of the Bioethics Committee of the College of Veterinary Surgeons of the Province of Rome. He is author of three books: *Scegliere chi nasce. L'etica della riproduzione umana tra scelta, libertà e responsabilità (Choosing who will be born. The ethics of human reproduction: choice, freedom and responsibility, 2003)* *La morale della natura (The morals of nature, 2008)*; *Umani e animali: questioni di etica (Humans and Animals: Issues in Ethics, 2016)*. He is among the organizers of the Snellius Workshop "Fellow brethren, slaves and companions. Human/non-human animals relations in transformation" that will take place at the Lorentz Center in Leiden from 11th to 15th September 2017.

## **The Politics of Animal Languages**

*Eva Meijer (University of Amsterdam)*

In political philosophy, the ability to speak is usually considered a necessary condition for being a political actor and for membership of the political community. Speaking is seen as a

human enterprise, one that is clearly distinct from the way that other animals express themselves and use their voices. However, recent researches in biology and ethology show that many non-human animal species have their own complex and nuanced ways of communicating with members of their own and other species, including humans. These studies ask us to reconsider the cognitive, social, and linguistic capacities of other animals, and they also ask us to reconsider what language is. They also force us to think differently about non-human animal culture and subjectivity, and perhaps more importantly, about how we interact with other animals and how we can find out their standpoints about the questions that concern their lives. Non-human animals have their own distinct perspectives on life which cannot be reduced to species-specific templates. In my presentation I discuss the connection between language and political participation in relation to new research about nonhuman animal languages, and ways of moving forward with other animals.

Eva Meijer recently defended her PhD-thesis in philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, titled 'Political Animal Voices'. She teaches (animal) philosophy at the University of Amsterdam and is the chair of the Dutch study group for Animal Ethics, as well as a founding member of Minding Animals The Netherlands. Recent publications include a book on nonhuman animal languages and the question of what language is, *Dierentalen*, and a fictional biography of bird scientist Len Howard, *Het vogelhuis*, both of which will be translated into Arabic, English, French, German and Polish. More information can be found on her website: [www.evameijer.nl](http://www.evameijer.nl).

## **The Poetry of a Horse's Mind**

*Tirza Brüggemann (Free University of Amsterdam)*

Thomas Nagel's critique on a reductive materialist view on consciousness in his seminal article "What Is It Like to Be a Bat" (1974) and in his monograph *Mind and Cosmos* (2012) has given a profound impulse to re-evaluate our thinking on the mind and science. Nagel shows that a materialist view on the mind cannot account for an inner point of view, which, Nagel stresses, is a reality and should thus be of scientific interest. Critics, however, have argued that Nagel's position echoes the old Cartesian dualism of the *res cogitans* versus the *res extensa*. This assumed division has had consequences for the ways humans understand themselves and others.

Humans still perceive their selves as thoughts and feelings that take place in a closed off mind. Because these thoughts and feelings have no place in a materialistic scientific account we have become used to reflect on them through, for instance, works of art. An art form like the novel, in which thoughts and feelings are the main subject, then, seems to be the apt medium to learn about our own and others' selves: we get, as we say, an insight into other minds through dialogue or interior monologue.

When the others are nonhuman animals, however, we hesitate whether novels are the apt medium to get to know them. We wonder whether the nonhuman animal protagonist is an anthropomorphised hero and we raise the problem of animal minds.

In this paper I argue that these hesitations are partly an outcome of Descartes' legacy. Following researchers like the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau Ponty and, more recently, the biosemiotician Wendy Wheeler, who understand mind and body as undivided and consciousness as intentionality of the body, I argue that instead of only focussing on novels to get to know other minds, we should read poetry as well. Interpreting the tropes, metaphors, rhyme and rhythm in poems asks of us to read with an embodied mind. Poems show us that in order to understand selves, be they human or nonhuman animal selves, we need to pay attention to our and their bodies in a phenomenological sense. To substantiate this view, I compare a biologist' description of a horse to an excerpt from the novel *Black Beauty* by Anne Sewell and to the poem *Inventing a Horse* by Meghan O'Rourke.

Tirza Brüggemann (1975) completed her Masters degree in Philosophy in 2000. In 2013 she finished her Bachelors degree in English with a thesis on the animal poetry of Elizabeth Bishop. In 2015 she received a PhD grant from The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for her project Flashes of Understanding. Animal Poetry and Empathy. In 2017 she published an article in Humanities, special issue Animal Narratology, "Animal Poetry and Empathy", <http://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/6/2/18>. Tirza combines her PhD research with teaching Philosophy and English at a high school in Amsterdam.

## **Flocking Together: Embodiment and Fictional Engagements with Collective Animal Minds**

*Marco Caracciolo (Ghent University)*

The remarkable coordination displayed by animal groups—such as ants or birds in flights—is not just a behavioral feat. For Iain Couzin, one of the leading specialists in animal groups, these behavioral patterns reflect a full-fledged form of “collective cognition.” In this paper, I'll build on work in narratology and animal studies to explore how fictional narrative can implement strategies to capture the social minds of herds, flocks, and packs.

Narrative tends to probe animal consciousness by focusing on individual protagonists: Jack London's *White Fang* and Virginia Woolf's *Flush* come to mind, but there are countless other examples. This reflects a well-known bias, in narrative practices but also in human empathetic skills, which—it is often claimed—favor individuality over collectivity. My paper focuses on narratives that counter this tendency, by foregrounding patterns of collective coordination in embodied terms. I will investigate three contemporary fictional works that explore different aspects of animal groups: animals that communicate a shared mind through dance-like movements (in Lydia Davis's *The Cows*); animals that function as a collective agent (in Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker*); and animals that embrace a collective “we” to critique the individualism of contemporary society (in Peter Verhelst's *The Man I Became*). I will argue that, when individuality drops out of the picture of human-animal encounters in fiction, empathy becomes more abstract: a matter of quasi-geometrical

patterns that are experienced by readers, first and foremost, through a mechanism of embodied resonance.

Marco Caracciolo is Assistant Professor of English and Literary Theory at Ghent University in Belgium, where he leads the ERC Starting Grant project “Narrating the Mesh.” Marco's work explores the phenomenology of narrative, or the structure of the experiences afforded by literary fiction and other narrative media. He is the author of three books: *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach* (De Gruyter, 2014); *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters* (University of Nebraska Press, 2016); and *A Passion for Specificity: Confronting Inner Experience in Literature and Science* (co-authored with psychologist Russell Hurlburt; Ohio State University Press, 2016).