



Minding Animals  
2009

**Animal & Society  
(Australia) Study  
Group Forum  
Abstracts**

## **ASG01**

### **Developing a Human-Animal Studies Research Network**

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The Minding Animals conference is a testimony to the aspirations and enthusiasm of human-animal studies scholars in Australia. In this paper we report on the origins of the Animals & Society (Australia) Study Group and some of its successes in bringing together researchers working in this country. A national conference in 2005 initiated contact between animal studies researchers, practitioners and students, while a second conference in 2007 demonstrated a dramatic growth in interest and participation in the field. Based on the outcomes of the Group's initiatives, which include a quarterly bulletin and the publication of conference papers, we identify a number of significant themes in the research. Our paper also comments on the difficulties in maintaining the Group's profile, sustaining activity in regional areas, and consolidating links between participants. Conscious of a need to adapt to changing and difficult financial and environmental circumstances, we discuss potential aims for the Group in Australia. These include the development of strategies for raising awareness of the present status of nonhuman animals among a wider audience, both within and outside academia, as well as the value of pursuing human-animal studies.

## **ASG02**

### **Critical Animal Studies**

Carol Gigliotti

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Critical animal studies takes shape in awareness of historically-constructed ideologies and systems of power and domination in which humans have oppressed and exploited animals. Critical animal studies is informed by a normative commitment -- grounded in ethology, ecology, and the moral philosophy of animal rights -- to animal liberation. Critical animal studies has a broad and holistic understanding of hierarchical power systems and their intricate interrelationships, explores the systemic destructive effects of capitalism and the acceptance of a technologically driven future on all life and the earth, and views animal liberation and human liberation as inseparably interrelated projects. Most generally, critical animal studies uses theory as a means to the end of illuminating and eliminating domination. It is a radical, critical, and oppositional discourse that engages and politicizes the many profound theoretical, environmental, and political issues embedded in animal studies.

## **ASG03**

### **Thinking Across the Boundaries**

Erica Fudge

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The British Animal Studies Network, under the directorship of Erica Fudge, ran for 2 years from March 2007 to February 2009. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Council of Great Britain and Middlesex University, the network centred on a series of ten meetings with speakers from the UK and beyond. The audiences likewise hailed from across the UK, and from continental Europe as well as from North America and Australia. Members were academics established in the field of animal studies; established academics, new to the field; postgraduate and sometimes undergraduate students; visual artists; and activists. This paper will offer an overview of the aims of that network and attempt to think about what its lasting achievements might be in relation to the development of animal studies. The paper will not be suggesting that BASN should stand as exemplary, but rather will use the experience of BASN as a way of thinking about what role other networks might have in the future. In particular, the paper will make the case for the importance of networking in animal studies in relation to questions of inter- and trans-disciplinarity.

## **ASG04**

### **The New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies**

Annie Potts, Philip Armstrong

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Please note: This abstract pertains to an invited presentation on the Animals and Society Forum.

The New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies brings together scholars from the humanities and social sciences whose research is concerned with the conceptual and material treatment of nonhuman animals in culture, society and history. The Centre includes [members and associates](#) from throughout New Zealand who have expertise in cultural studies, literary studies, political science, sociology, architecture, the visual arts and Māori studies. Our [international associates](#) include many of scholars recognized as world leaders in human-animal studies, and the Centre has [links](#) with the primary overseas institutions and networks in this field.

Among the many lines of inquiry pursued by HAS researchers are the following:

- (i) exploring how notions of animality are fundamental to a range of concepts that play an important ideological and intellectual role in modern Western thought: for example “nature”, “culture”, “society”, “civilization”, “the human”, “the native”, “the exotic”, “the primitive”;
- (ii) examining the place, treatment and actions of animals in science, farming, industry, tourism and other human practices;
- (iii) analyzing the representation of animals in literature, film, television, the visual arts, and other cultural forms;
- (iv) researching the history of humans' changing attitudes towards and treatment of animals;
- (v) developing new paradigms in philosophy, the arts and the sciences for thinking about animals and their relationship to humans.

NZCHAS has as its fundamental philosophy that this kind of research and scholarship in HAS brings with it a responsibility to challenge anthropocentrism and to account for the interests and agency of animals.

In this presentation, NZCHAS Co-Directors Annie Potts and Philip Armstrong discuss the founding objectives, current operations and future goals of the Centre. We also explain the various hurdles and resistances that were encountered during the establishment of the Centre, and the implications of such obstacles for other similar Centres and scholarship in HAS.

## **ASG05**

### **Current Issues about Animals: Social Sciences Perspectives and the Social Debate in Switzerland**

Claudine Burton-Jeangros, Annik Dubied Losa

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Animals are not a standard topic in social science literature. They tend to be evocated through various topics, for example in relationship to risk, to transformation of social relationships, in the context of media, but more rarely for their own sake. However, in the recent debate over the impact of human activities on nature, animals have more often been considered in research. In the framework of our research project 'animal representations in the Swiss information media', funded by the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office, we reviewed the social science literature and established contacts with researchers working on this topic. This contribution will therefore describe some of the main issues currently discussed in the social science literature regarding animals, with a focus on the literature in French.

In a second part, the presentation will attempt to link the issues debated by researchers with the broader social debate about animals. First, we conducted 10 focus groups with Swiss citizens all over the country which provide important insights on the agenda of the interviewees, reflecting the preoccupations of the public in regards to animals. Second, the adoption in 2008 of a new law on animal protection - very detailed and fairly restrictive - in Switzerland generated a large amount of social reactions. These elements of the social debate can provide important cues for the development of further research.

## **ASG06**

### **The Development and Future of Human-Animal Studies**

Kenneth Shapiro

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The development of the field of Human-Animal Studies is one of three programs of the Animals and Society Institute. I will describe ASI's efforts to date and future plans, highlighting both academic and political obstacles encountered. In the United States, publication venues, devoted courses, and dissertations are increasing apace. However, the field is widely scattered, with few if any established strongholds at any university or research centre.