

Introduction to Special Issue

Figuring the Animal in Post-apartheid South Africa

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This special issue, which constitutes the first Human-Animal Studies edited collection in southern Africa, includes vibrant, creative and theoretically far-ranging articles. Even as these attest to the transdisciplinary nature of Human-Animal Studies (HAS), the influence of such core narratives as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* resonate, with literature anchoring not only the historical research by Sandra Swart included here but also the article and artwork by Wilma Cruise on the figural animal. All the articles in this edition have been gleaned from the HAS colloquia which have their own narrative. Held at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, the first colloquium, "Figuring the Animal in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in 2011 was followed by "Animal Vulnerabilities" (2012) before reprising "Figuring the Animal in Post-Apartheid South Africa II" (2013). This year the theme was "Animal Absence/Animal Presence".

The articles included in this special issue constitute a representative glimpse of the literary, historical and figural debates at these events, but other non-represented discussions also contributed substantially to making the colloquia vibrantly transdisciplinary. Don Pinnock and Adam Cruise delivered papers on effective strategies for elephant activism. Duncan Brown discussed the indigeneity of trout in the postcolony. Sharyn Spicer asked: "What's Race Got to Do with It?" in her investigation into the pet-keeping practices of a sample of township residents. Shirley Brooks and Dayne Botha presented research on a project to locate owls in a number of townships, and critiqued the discrepancy between "discursive constructions and practical consequences". Brooks also co-presented a paper with Mahlatse Moeng on the social-nature divide in relation to flamingos at Kamfers Dam, Kimberley.

The terms Animal Studies (AS) and Human-Animal Studies (HAS) have been used almost interchangeably in this fairly recent, burgeoning field. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely entitle their edited collection *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies* (2012), whereas

Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh call their collection the *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies* (2014). Either way, AS or/and HAS challenge accepted beliefs as their basic theories, and subsequent research undermines the dualism of anthropocentric thought underpinning the humanities. HAS as a term has the edge for us, as it suggests the intertwining of human and non-human animal and the belief that animals cannot exist in isolation in our research or imaginations. Critical Animal Studies, which has become more visible locally in recent years, has its provenance in social justice concerns.¹

Since roughly 2000, the “animal turn” in the humanities has drawn heavily from Ur theorists Jacques Derrida via *The Animal That Therefore I am* and J.M. Coetzee via *The Lives of Animals* both of whom connect animals and humans. Both texts insist on the presence of the live, embodied non-human animal. While Derrida opens a philosophical space for the animal to be empowered to respond (rather than merely reacting), Coetzee has Elizabeth Costello focus on representations of animals through philosophers and poets and maintain that poets are more primed and equipped to imagine and represent animals.

If the essays in this special issue engage with international theorists and philosophers, all evince a deep sense of the embodied animal in southern Africa (and within a broader political context). In “The Post-humanist Gaze: Reading Fanie Jason’s Photo Essay on Carting Lives”, Woodward discusses Fanie Jason’s photographs of carthorses and humans on the Cape Flats in the class-based carting industry. In his article “Touching Trunks: Elephants, Ecology and Compassion in Three Southern African Teen Novels”, Wylie stresses the pedagogic urgency of teaching children about the future of elephants within the environment of southern Africa. Cruise describes her own artworks and the intersections between self and animals here in South Africa in her article “Revisiting *Alice*”. Swart critiques “de-extinction” projects and their nationalist motivations including revivifying the quagga in “Frankenzebra: Dangerous Knowledge and the Narrative Construction of Monsters”. Fuller, in her contribution “Representations of the ‘Other’ in Southern African Art Praxis”, shows how the birds in artworks by Legae and Mgudlandlu are both protests against apartheid ideologies and rooted in local fauna, even if Legae draws his images from chickens. Tully’s essay “Figuring the Animal Autobiography: Animals and Landscapes in Daniel Naudé’s Exhibition ‘African Scenery & Animals’” locates Naudé’s images in their actual geography while paying attention to the “imperial legacy” of landscape paintings. All the articles, significantly, engage very directly with

1. As we are writing, The Institute for Critical Animal Studies at Fort Hare is about to host its second conference in September 2014, avowing that “this conference seeks to examine the relevance of Animal Rights and Liberation to Africa today and its intersection with other struggles, both on the continent and internationally” (<icasafrica.wordpress.com/>. 4 September 2014).

animal bodies from representations of novelistic elephants, to Naude's photographs of dogs, mules and bulls, to Jason's images of carthorses, to the Frankensteinian sense of engineered animal bodies, to artistic renditions of Carroll's animal bodies, to paintings of birds.

In South Africa, animals have historically been regarded by autochthonous people as sacred and/or sacrificial, as source of food and as a spiritually privileged link with the ancestors, as part of originary myths. The very title of Melissa Boyde's collection *Captured: The Animal within Culture* (2014) reminds us that animals, whether represented or embodied, are always located within particular cultures even as they might be trapped within them. Njabulo Ndebele, in "The Year of the Dog: A Journey of the Imagination", writes of the damage that deploying "dogs" as metaphors wreaks on the live animals themselves, particularly in this country where "dogs" have been used as a key term of abuse in colonial and apartheid discourse.

The concern for this objectifying construction of animals recurs throughout many of the articles. However, a third way pertains beyond this binary. Cruise engages with what she terms "the space between" in her transposition between the real and the represented animal. For Fuller, analysing Ezrom Legae's "Jail Series" and "Chicken Series" which deploy chickens as metaphors of human suffering, subject and object are not easily differentiated. Gladys Mgudlandlu (rather than having birds as expressions of her own history) always regarded herself as a bird, with the aerial perspective of one of her vibrant crows, for example. Tully considers Naude's photographs through the strategy of "transpositional analysis" in which the viewing self interchanges with the represented (other) animal.

While postmodernism and postcolonial theories might have made similar moves to reach beyond binary thinking, post-humanism – a concept, which ripples throughout this collection – features most specifically in Woodward's essay, and is surely more radical than the other theories in its recognition of mortality and vulnerability being shared by both human and non-human animals. In foregrounding embodied vulnerabilities and embodied commonalities, humans are no longer lauded as exceptional. If we consider human and animal embodiment without valuing one over the other, this "makes for a different sort of ethics and aesthetics" (Pick 2011: 6). The significance of the well-worn categories of language and consciousness so tirelessly brought out as evidence of human-animal difference can be minimised within a post-humanist framework. For Woodward trans-species affiliations are inherently ontological as human identities may be constructed in relation to those of non-human animals. Both she and Wylie incorporate Acampora's notion of "symphysis" in which "cross-species compassion is mediated by somatic experiences" (2006: 23).

A concern for the future of the planet and its non-human denizens loops through a number of articles. Wylie asks how teen novels can be useful in teaching our children compassion towards non-human animals so that the

future of wild animals does not have to incorporate certain extinction. Swart, in her article “Frankenzebra: Dangerous Knowledge and the Narrative Construction of Monsters” shows how the future engages with the past in “de-extinction” projects of the mammoth, the thylacine and the quagga, and precisely how “dangerous” the acquisition of this “knowledge” can be. In the Frankenstein complex, humans rival God in their creations which they are subsequently unable to manage – a myth deployed by both scientists and the popular media to publicise their experiments. Sinisterly, such experimentation may be harnessed by extremely nationalistic projects; animals are regarded as a malleable species lacking the imperative for ethical consideration in the service of human endeavour.

The awareness of non-human animals’ trauma is repeatedly acknowledged in this collection, but Fuller considers how art itself can be a “transcriptum” of trauma, representing the past trauma of apartheid and the present trauma of the post-apartheid state. If artwork on animals could be regarded as a reminder of political horrors for human animals, we would need to address to what extent artworks on animals promote animal advocacy for animals themselves. Yet Cruise’s “Revisiting *Alice*” suggests that to distinguish between the effect of Peter Singer, the animal rights activist, and that of Jacques Derrida, as animal philosopher, is a false dichotomy. Ethically, she argues, both are concerned about non-human animals irrespective of whether the solicitude is manifested through a battle for their rights or through a philosophical treatment of the ethics of human-animal politics.

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INTRODUCTION

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