

Empathy, Animals, Film

Workshop with Prof. Lori Gruen (Wesleyan University, USA)

Convenors

Prof. Markus Wild, Friederike Zenker, Livia Boscardin

Venue

University of Basel, eikones NFS Bildkritik, Rheinsprung 11 (Forum), 4051 Basel

Program

Monday, June 19, 2017

20:00–21:30 Film-screening “Bestiaire” (2012)

appr. 21:30 Dinner and/or drinks at Restaurant tibits, Stänzlergasse 4, 4051 Basel. Vegan and gluten free options available

Tuesday, June 20, 2017

10:00–11:30 Session 1

- Prof. Lori Gruen: “Entangled Empathy”

Coffee break

11:45–12:45 Session 2

- Tobias Rein, Basel (CH): “From (Entangled) Empathy to (a Critique of) Ideology”
- Dr. Philipp von Gall, Hohenheim, (DE): “Documenting Subjectivity – Does ethology have to be empathetic? And what does that mean for its political role?”

Vegan lunch break at workshop venue offered to all participants, there are gluten free options

14:15–15:15 Session 3

- Maude Oulette-Dubé, Philosophy, (Fribourg CH): “What moral worth for empathy?”
- Dr. Federica Basaglia, Konstanz (DE): “Compassion, Duties to the Self and Duties towards Animals”

Coffee break

15:30–17:00 Session 4

- Katharina Swoboda, Graz/Hamburg (A/DE): “Double Framed: Architecture For Animals – Contemporary Examples in The Arts”
- Dr. Jessica Ullrich, Erlangen (D): “A Dog’s Death: Video Art as Work of Mourning”
- Sina Knoll, Lisbon (PT): “Blind Men And An Elephant – On Narratives in Animal Documentaries or How We Speak And Think Animals”

Coffee break

17:15–18:00 Final discussion

18:30–19:00 Short evening performance by HORA. Location: Department of English (Englisches Seminar), Nadelberg 6. Please visit empathies17.com for further information.

19.00–open Food and drinks

Abstracts of Presentations

From (Entangled) Empathy to (a Critique of) Ideology

Tobias Rein, Department of Social Sciences, University of Basel (CH)

Empathy does not have a good stand in the western tradition of philosophy. As for ethics, empathy was and is accused of being unreliable, irrational, unevenly spread – in short: to be too instable to build a moral foundation on it. On the other hand, a new thinking of especially feminist thinkers and the backing of anthropologists and evolutionary biologists shifted the focus from (male based) rational thinking to our human conditions and our daily relations.

In my presentation I want to make the point for empathy as strong as possible. I want to show that empathy has as good an ethical foundation as any other ethical approach, if not even the most plausible one. The common prejudices towards empathy rest on false assumptions and misunderstandings. With regard to Lori Gruen's theory of entangled empathy I want to confront these misunderstandings.

In a second step, I want to consider the social conditions in which empathy is bedded. We live in a capitalistic society and the main principles of capitalism hinder the development of empathy. In a world of competition and profitmaking, where individuality is defined as the absence of others rather than the outcome of solidarity, empathy does have a bad stand. A special role thereby plays the concept of ideology. Ideology is the system of belief incorporated into the institutions and structures of our society. One example of ideology is the presentation of animals via movies. On the other hand: If it is true that we cannot escape ideology: What does this mean for empathy?

I also want to discuss the ambivalence of empathy with respect to visual media: On the one hand, media is a way to trigger empathy, on the other hand, too much visual input leads to a (necessary) distance from the pictures we see. In this sense, empathy is always possible, but always in danger to be repressed.

Documenting subjectivity – does ethology have to be empathetic? And what does that mean for its political role?

Dr. Philipp von Gall, Institute of Social Sciences in Agriculture, University of Hohenheim (DE)

In legal and other political contexts, ethologists act as neutral advisors: they document data, facts and infer causal relations concerning the quality of life of animals in different contexts, e.g. the welfare and suffering of farmed animals: do chicken feel distressed in battery cages, are five square meters living space per pig appropriate? Such and similar questions are directed at scientists analyzing the body reactions and behavior of animals. Many influential animal ethologists showed either no interest in or explicitly distanced themselves in their methodology from empathy. In the classical schools of ethology, distancing from empathy became a paradigm, which lost some force only with the establishment of the rather young school of cognitive ethology. According to this paradigm, empathic understanding is unscientific: Lay people watching TV-programs about cute baby pandas or endangered whales may be empathetic, but this emotionality should not impact the scientific findings about the welfare and other psychological conditions of animals. It can be argued that the account of entangled empathy that Lori Gruen proposes is principally not restricted for application by lay people, but may also serve to inform scientific findings about emotions and other mental states of animals. The question then becomes in which way and at what stages empathy may impact the work of those ethologists and veterinarians.

In my presentation, I start with presenting ethological accounts that disallow or at least neglect the relevance of empathy. I will look at the work of David Broom, Bernard Rollin and scientific analyses which have been used to inform decision-making in the German animal protection law. I will look at how the account of Lori Gruen on entangled empathy relates to these ethological accounts and what makes it difficult to integrate both. In the second part of the presentation, I then propose an understanding of ethological work that would allow scientists to base their analysis partly on empathic understanding of other animals, reached both via films and personal live-observation. I conclude with discussing a

constructive role for empathy – enabled via films, photos or live observances – within the ethological and veterinarian expertise informing political decision making.

What moral worth for empathy?

Maude Oulette-Dubé, Department of Philosophy, University of Fribourg (CH)

In recent years, a lot of attention has been given to empathy in moral philosophy. In the field of animal ethics, one prominent voice is that of Lori Gruen, who suggests, in her work *Entangled Empathy*, an ethics of empathy for our relations with animals (human and nonhuman). However, while empathy certainly has some virtues, the concept remains equivocal, so much so, that it can become difficult to see what empathy can contribute to ethics at all. In this workshop presentation, I suggest that only a certain kind of empathy will have significant moral worth. That is, only a certain kind of empathy will have worth to guide our actions and better our relations with animals (human and nonhuman). First, I suggest that empathy, when considered to be a process whereby one takes another's perspective to try to understand her point of view, has limited moral worth. That is, while I think we could say that it has epistemic moral worth, I think it is unclear how this kind of empathy can guide our action and it remains questionable how one can formulate an ethics of empathy based on this process. This is why I then suggest that when discussing of empathy in the moral sphere we should rather turn to the kind of empathy called "empathic concern" (Denham, forthcoming). I will clarify what empathic concern consists in and argue that it is the kind of empathy that can do the heavy moral lifting, especially when it comes to our relation to nonhuman animals. Lastly, I want to say a word about the implications of my view for Gruen's entangled empathy.

Compassion, Duties to the Self and Duties towards Animals

Dr. Federica Basaglia, Department of Philosophy, University of Konstanz (DE)

For Immanuel Kant, humans have moral obligations only to other human beings or to themselves. However, when we treat animals in a violent and cruel way, we weaken our ability to feel compassion – a crucial natural disposition in our moral life – and gradually eradicate it completely. Respect for animal sensitivity and gratitude towards animals for assistance in carrying out strenuous work for us are, first of all, perfect duties to ourselves and, secondly, indirect duties regarding animals ("in Ansehung der Tiere", *Tugendlehre*, TL AA 06:443.10-25). Kant's theory represents a compelling option for the justification of a coherent and rigorous animal ethics, the potential of which has not been fully appreciated yet. On the other hand, Kantian argument can play a role in the contemporary animal ethics debate only if it is possible to support the existence of duties to the self. Whereas most contemporary philosophers think that there are no duties to the self, some contemporary authors agree with Kant: far from being contradictory, the concept of duty to the self points to the ground of validity for each and every type of moral duty, i.e. the moral autonomy of the rational being.

In my paper I will analyse the possibility of duties to the self, concentrating on those characteristics of these duties, which are in my opinion required in order to provide the Kantian argument for indirect duties regarding animals with a solid foundation. Duties to the self should not be in fact simply prudential principles, but strict moral obligations. Moreover, they should have, as moral obligation, a specific content and not simply indicate the right kind of motivation in bringing about a commanded action. It should also be made clear if they are necessarily related to the idea that the rational being has an intrinsic and absolute value that must be respected in all circumstances. The systematic connection between compassion and existence of duties to the self will play a central role in my paper. Against the traditional interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy as a strict rationalist, logocentric and formalistic theory, I will show that feelings – especially sympathetic ones and compassion – play a much more important role in his ethics than traditionally acknowledged. I will argue that the close connection between the autonomy of moral agents, their intrinsic value and their compassionate feelings makes possible a non-metaphysical and non-religious justification of the duties to the self.

Double Framed: Architecture For Animals – Contemporary Examples in The Arts

Katharina Swoboda, Media artist & University of Fine Arts of Hamburg (DE)

The zoological garden and the cinema are both invention of modernity, that work with “living images”. I presume, that zoological gardens produce ideas of “nature” and present them in certain, “anthropo-centric” way. The talk focuses on architecture in zoos and it’s representation in film. Architecture in the zoological garden, in my opinion, structure the view on animals and therefore establish cultural ideas about them. Comparable to cinematic procedures like shot sizes and montage, which are used to construct an image and therefore a significant view about the animal, the architecture in zoological garden directs the gaze of the visitors and therefore creates certain ideas of species. Gregory Bateson coined the term “double framed” to explain, what happens when “psychological frames” which contain concepts of the animal, hit the constructed frame of the animal cage in the actual zoological garden. In my talk, I will expand the notion of the “double frame” from the psychological notion to a cinematic and audio-visual one: In the moment, the camera captures zoological architecture, the cinematic “frame” encloses the architectural cage “frame”. Using examples from contemporary video artists and examples from films, I will show visually and conceptually, what happens, is these two frames overlap. And I will show artistic strategies, how the cage can be opened up, for example through war or escaping animals. Art works to be discussed include contemporary video artist Anri Sala work about an empty zoo in his home town Tirana and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s film about the modern architecture from the “Tecton Group” from 1934. Ever since I have been interested in architecture for animals, the “Penguin Pool” in London zoo, designed by Tecton group and its mastermind Bertholt Lubektin, has become a central reference point in my artistic work. This building from the 1930s is one of the most important buildings for early modernist building in Great Britain. Today, there are no more penguins inside, they were removed because of animal welfare concerns. A film by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), commissioned by the museum of Modern Art New York (MOMA) in 1935 shows the “New Architecture in London zoo” with a closing sequence depicting the Penguin enclosure. Today a heritage monument and not an animal enclosure anymore, I offer an additional reading of Moholy-Nagy’s film in relation to my own video, “Penguin Pool” from 2015. This relationship between two section of audio-visual material promote an inter-relation between past and present perception of modernism. Since Moholy-Nagy’s work was commissioned by Museum of Modern art, it has not been regarded as an important work in his practice and therefore neglected.

A Dog’s Death: Video Art as Work of Mourning

Dr. Jessica Ullrich, Department of Media Studies and Art History, Friedrich-Alexander University Nuremberg-Erlangen (D)

I want to ask if film can be a way to cope with the loss of a nonhuman companion in empathic terms. For my research project I investigate several artist videos that can be considered as works of mourning over the death of a dog. I want to investigate how these artistic eulogies raise empathy (for the dead dog as well as for the surviving human), how they visualize the interconnectedness of all creature lives and how they bear witness to the singularity of lost canine lives.

Blind Men And An Elephant – On Narratives in Animal Documentaries or How We Speak And Think Animals

Sina Knoll, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities: Communication Sciences, Universidade Nova de Lisboa (PT)

Mass media documentary formats are the main source of factual information about nonhuman animal life. Suggesting "the real" by way of their stylistic coding these films or clips entertain and inform about other animals. The conventionalized documentary narratives apply significations of a number of different concepts of animals and human-animal relationships. Especially their descriptive statements, analogies and terminologies reflect human beliefs about other animals, replicate and manifest them. In my research project I am going to evaluate specific animal documentary narratives. Analytical focus will be

put on their potentials to emotionally connect or distance viewers to/from the portrayed. Which role does language applied in animal narratives play when it comes to our emotional connection with other animals including our classification of them in deserving physical and mental integrity or not? And which concepts of animal life and human-animal relationship are signified through the latter that – intended or unintended by producers- may hold capacities to manifest practices of animal exploitation?

Further Info

- All participants are invited to also visit the SLSAeu conference *Empathies*. Please register fee-waived via www.empathies2017.com (Registration): 1) Tick “fee-waived ...” 2) Tick dinner options (not for free) if you’d like to join. 3) Tick all the “additional registration” options that apply 4) Fill in the credit card details even if the sum is zero
- Please contact Friederike Zenker if you have any further questions: friederike.zenker@unibas.ch or + 49 151 211 872 5

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