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American Beasts

**Perspectives on Animals,
Animality and U. S. Culture, 1776–1920**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Dominik Ohrem

A Declaration of Interdependence. American History and
the Challenges of Postanthropocentric Historiography 9

I. ANIMAL LIVES AND THE CONTOURS OF AMERICAN MODERNITY

Katherine C. Grier

“To the Admirers of the Feathered Creation”:
The Birth of the Pet Industry and the Trade in Songbirds in
Nineteenth-Century America 51

Roman Bartosch

Ciferae in the City 75

Olaf Stieglitz

Horses, Cameras, and a Multitude of Gazes:
Visualizing Animal Athletes, 1890s–1930s 101

Michael Malay

Modes of Production, Modes of Seeing:
Creaturely Suffering in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* 123

II. ANIMALITY AND ITS INTERSECTIONS: THE POLITICS OF HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS

Brigitte Fielder

Black Dogs, Bloodhounds, and Best Friends: African Americans
and Dogs in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionist Literature 153

<i>Keridiana Chez</i>	
Man's Best and Worst Friends: The Politics of Pet Preference at the Turn of the Twentieth Century	175
<i>Aimee Swenson</i>	
"Sheep is Life": The Navajo, Cultural Genocide, and the Animal as Cultural Property and Historical Witness	201

III. EXPLORATION, EXPANSION AND MANIFEST DESTINY: CONTEXTS AND LEGACIES

<i>Neill Matheson</i>	
Ardent Creatures: William Bartram and the Limits of Compassion	225
<i>Dominik Ohrem</i>	
The Ends of Man: The Zooanthropological Imaginary and the Animal Geographies of Westward Expansion in Antebellum America	245
<i>Andrew Howe</i>	
The Passenger Pigeon and Its Role in Perceptions of Manifest Destiny	279

TABLE OF FIGURES	300
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS	302

INTRODUCTION

A Declaration of Interdependence

American History and the Challenges of Postanthropocentric Historiography

Dominik Ohrem

[O]ur thinking gets nowhere without the presupposition of the interdependent and sustaining conditions of life.¹

Declaring In(ter)dependence

“It has been well known for some time in certain circles,” the humorous lead article of the January 1857 issue of *Harper’s Magazine* informs us, “that a movement was on foot for the emancipation of the brute creatures (so called) from the thralldom of man.” Years of correspondence between animals from different parts of the world – “Africa, the Rocky Mountains, the Jungles of India” as well as “the various Menageries” – have shown that there was a unanimous desire for freedom, the logical consequence of which had to be a concerted effort of rebellion on the part of those creatures so unjustifiably made subject to the will and whims of Man.² It is decided that “the first blow should be struck in

1 Judith Butler: *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 2015, p. 119.

2 The Animal Declaration of Independence. In: *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 14,80 (January 1857), pp. 145–163, here p. 145. Throughout this chapter, the

America”³ while its human inhabitants are preoccupied with the presidential election, and so the insurgent animals, after freeing some of their fellow nonhumans from P. T. Barnum’s American Museum and Isaac van Amburgh’s traveling menagerie, hold an assembly in Hoboken, New Jersey consisting of delegations from all over the world and of “members of nearly every respectable family in the Animal Kingdom.”⁴ The purpose of the assembly, we are informed, is the election of a president of animalkind and a declaration of independence from oppressive humanity. A general awareness about “the importance of the work in hand” suffuses the assembly, with “exclamations of friendship on every side” and the “noblest spirit of conciliation” prevailing over various interspecific difficulties as well as the more meaty complications of predator-prey relations, and thus, while “an enthusiastic Wolf did strangle a Lamb, and a Fox, in a fit of absence of mind, choked a fat Duck, these accidents were rightly ascribed to the force of habit, and did not mar the harmony of the proceedings.”⁵

Nonetheless, parliamentary professionalism is frequently put to the test by the diversity of perceptions, motivations and expectations tied to the debating creatures’ respective lifeways and their relations both to each other and to the human species, a problem which also complicates the choice of candidates for the presidency. The Buffalo, acting as chair of the assembly, begins by emphasizing the illegitimacy of human sovereignty, for “[h]ad not one of his own race described him as a biped without feathers? And should a biped command quadrupeds?”⁶ – a rather thoughtless remark, from which the Eagle naturally takes offense. The Lion and the Monkey are proposed as candidates for the presidency, while the Horse raises his voice in support of the Dog, stressing his leadership qualities – “coolness, watchfulness, bravery, skill, and strength” –, important qualifications given the uncertain times ahead. But the Hyena objects: had the Dog “not notoriously taken the side of their oppressors from time immemorial?” How could this willingly

capitalized ‘Man’ will be used to refer to the hegemonic concept of the human that both emerges from and underwrites the historically specific intersecting discourses of (not only) race, gender, class and species in the West.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 148.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid. The Buffalo’s remark is a reference to Plato’s definition of the human being.



Fig. 1

“The Lion entreats the assembly to believe that it is not vanity or ambition which induces him to solicit their suffrages.”

Illustration in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 14,80 (January 1857).

obedient “slave of man” be competent to lead them? Instead, admitting that tyrannical Man had at least “given them a hint of which they should profit” by referring to one animal as “the King of Beasts,” he supports the candidacy of the Lion.⁷ After some back and forth, it is the rather inconspicuous Penguin, however, who wins the nomination and, in a monarchical twist somewhat unexpected given the hitherto republican outlook of the proceedings, is crowned king of animals.

While the Penguin’s initial proposal for the overthrow of human rule envisions a policy of “masterly inactivity,”⁸ we soon learn that the assembly has been adjourned to reconvene in Nebraska Territory for the purpose of organizing a much less passive form of resistance: a war of independence. The meeting begins with a number of resolutions read by the Magpie, the most important one emphasizing all nonhuman creatures’ right and duty to challenge human dominion and “assert our paramount claims to the exclusive enjoyment of the earth; to resume our freedom in the forests, or the plains, or the swamps, as we please, and to lead the life which is best suited to our instincts.”⁹ Further resolutions are read which, among other things, pronounce that “all things shall be in common between us,” that, in the interest of the community, carnivores “are earnestly solicited to try a vegetable diet,” and that,

as we may not succeed in exterminating the human race for some time to come, a prize of \$ 500 be offered to the human creatures for the best poem descriptive of our declaration of independence [...] for the best essay on the Rights of Brutes [...] [and] for the best argument to show, from Grotius, Puffendorf [*sic*], and other authorities, that we are entitled to our independence.”¹⁰

After some further squabbles, debates and developments, among which are the founding of the newspaper the *Daily Barker and Biter*, a duel between the Cock and the Hare, the short-lived appointment of the Cock as commander-in-chief, and a passionate speech by the Crocodile lamenting his fellow creatures’ seeming indifference towards the degraded condition of the Turtle, the account of the proceedings ends abruptly – not without the author ominously informing us, however, that, according to “an old acquaintance among the beasts, [...] the

7 The Animal Declaration of Independence, p. 151.

8 Ibid., p. 153.

9 Ibid., p. 154.

10 Ibid., pp. 154–155.

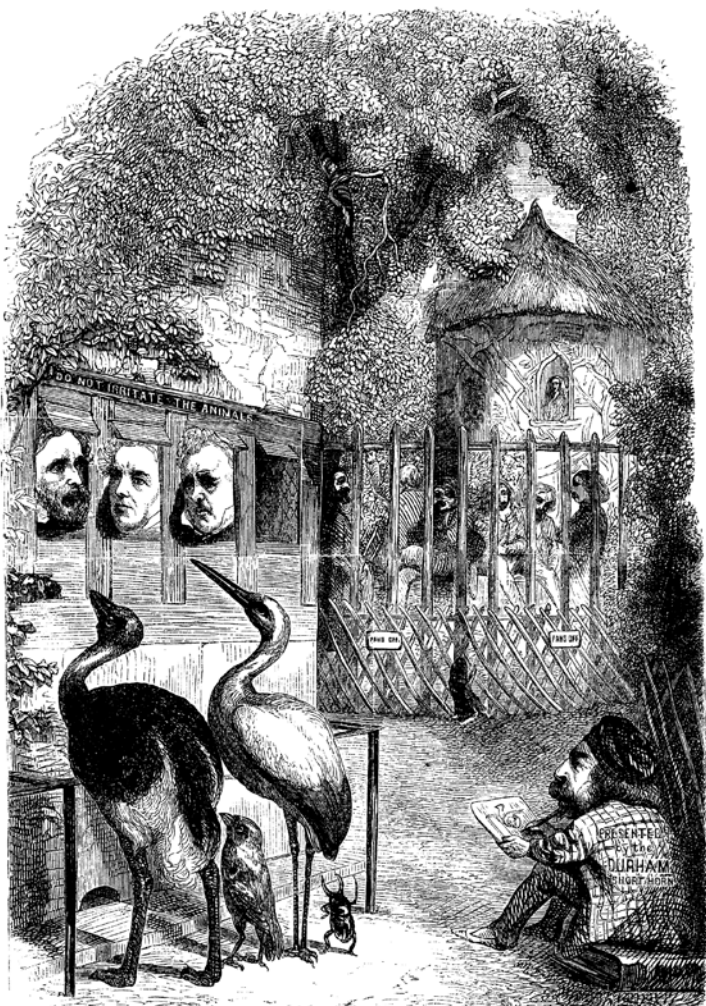


Fig. 2

"The Menagerie."

The writing above the human heads reads
"Do not irritate the animals".

Illustration in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 14,80 (January 1857).

animals may shortly be expected to act on the offensive, and that they intend to establish zoological gardens for the accommodation and exhibition of various specimens of men.”¹¹

In its mode of tongue-in-cheek lightheartedness, the *Harper's* article envisions the (im)possibility of a world in which humans not only have to respect the autonomous lifeways of other animals but, much more radically, are forced to submit to the animals' claim to an “exclusive enjoyment of the earth,” a world in which humans find themselves crammed into cages for the enjoyment and ‘education’ of creatures at best superficially concerned with their well-being, helplessly exposed to their gazes. The article, in other words, imagines a fundamental inversion of the power relations between humans and animals – an idea which is, of course, humorously dispelled in the very moment of its articulation. A short note in the *Western Literary Messenger* mentioning recently published magazine issues praises *Harper's* lead article as “ingenious,” promising that “[e]verybody will read it and laugh over it.”¹² The humorous effect of the article is obviously achieved through its depiction of the animals' peculiar mimicry of human politics and its allusions to contemporary (human) political affairs, such as the struggle between proslavery and abolitionist forces,¹³ – transposed onto, and frequently derailed by, the vicissitudes of animal life, interspecies relations and species-specific behaviors – and by the “honorable brutes”¹⁴ scrupulous adherence to the polite formalities of political rhetoric and ritual. The general absurdity of animals engaging in political thought and interaction (using human language) – a capacity that has since Plato and Aristotle figured as one of the decisive markers of the supposed uniqueness

11 The Animal Declaration of Independence, p. 163.

12 *Western Literary Messenger* 27,5 (January 1857), p. 239.

13 More specifically, the article alludes to the conflict brought about by the *Kansas-Nebraska Act* of 1854 and its violent eruption in the events of ‘Bleeding Kansas.’ We learn, for example, that a monkey, passing through Missouri, is apprehended because he is accused of being a Free Stater on his way to Kansas, while two baboons share a similar fate because the Free State Committee suspects them of having pro-slavery designs. In another scene, the Woolly Horse, supporting the Crocodile's intervention with regard to the deplorable condition of the Turtle, echoes abolitionist rhetoric when he criticizes that some members of the very same assembly which came together to fight for the “natural liberty of brutekind” were so shamefully indifferent to the actual plight of one of their own: “Was [the Turtle] not a beast and a brother?” (Animal Declaration, p. 160).

14 Ibid.

of the human *zoon politikon*¹⁵ – is further accentuated by the article's more specific topic: Given that the actual – human – American *Declaration of Independence* has been widely regarded as the political embodiment of Enlightenment rationality, with its emphasis on human dignity and natural law reaffirming the conviction that humans surpassed all other earthly creatures, and that, qua their being human, they deserved unique moral and legal consideration, an *animal* Declaration of Independence must seem particularly oxymoronic.¹⁶ Of course, as is the case with the dominant strands of Enlightenment thought more generally, the universal figure of Man so prominent in the rhetoric of the Declaration was in fact a violently particularized type of being that only encompassed those humans who found themselves safely within the bounds of the hegemonic normative framework of humanity. For many if not most contemporaries, it was thus among the self-evident truths that the unalienable rights demanded by natural law and supposedly inseparable from the very condition of being human not only stopped short of considering nonhuman life in any capacity but also, and much more glaringly, the lives and rights of 'animalized' humans, in particular the hundreds of thousands of enslaved black people whose degraded condition remained unchanged by solemn proclamations of human equality. While animals, lacking reason, unable to rise above their own instincts and passions, supposedly existed for the use and benefit of humans, similar arguments were brought forward in defense of slavery and of the fundamental inequality of whites and people of color as well as men and women in order to perpetuate existing relations of power in American society. 'Naturally' *dependent* beings such as women, children, enslaved people and, of course, animals were not supposed to declare independence, a status rightfully belonging to that specific class of humans – white, property-holding men – uniquely capable of rational, autonomous self-government. As the racialized, gendered and classed metaphysics of Man at the center of the American *Declaration*

15 See Christopher La Barbera: *States of Nature. Animality and the Polis*. New York: Lang 2012; Richard Sorabji: *Animal Minds and Human Morals. The Origins of the Western Debate*. Ithaca: Cornell UP 1993.

16 It might serve as an interesting side note that Wesley J. Smith, in the preface to his polemic *A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy. The Human Cost of the Animal Rights Movement*. New York: Encounter 2012, cites the *Declaration of Independence* to defend the 'self-evident truth' of human exceptionalism against the idea that the "human being is merely another animal in the forest" (ibid., p. xvi).

of *Independence* forcefully suggests, any concept of ‘human’ independence is thus always already challenged by the differential operations of power that inform the relations of inequality between different groups of humans, an inequality that not only complicates any such universalist rhetoric but arguably points to its strategic function in the perpetuation of these relations.

The example of the discourse of reason and the way it was woven into the fabric of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racism, sexism and speciesism points to the similarity of their mechanisms of exclusion and to the fact that the power asymmetries they sustained were, although in different degrees of visibility, premised on a dominative and exclusionary concept of the human. It is this concept – Man – which, albeit not always in an unproblematic fashion, also constituted an important implicit or explicit focus of abolitionist, women’s rights and early animal rights discourse, explaining the frequent intersections between these social movements in and beyond the antebellum era.¹⁷ With its copious use of the language of rights, the *Harper’s* article thus also alludes to the animal rights debates emergent at the time. In 1865, one year before he founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), former diplomat Henry Bergh had already acquired a substantial number of signatures for his *Declaration of the Rights of Animals*, establishing a clear connection between his own animal advocacy and the rhetoric of the *Declaration of Independence*. But American animal advocacy discourse, including the language of rights, in fact dates back much further to the early national period. In September 1791, Brown University graduate and prospective minister Herman Daggett delivered a speech on “The Rights of Animals” – a title clearly alluding to Thomas Paine’s famous *Rights of Man*, published in two parts in March 1791 and February 1792 in London – “in favor

17 For histories of American animal advocacy and its interrelations with other social movements, see Diane L. Beers: *For the Prevention of Cruelty. The History and Legacy of Animal Rights Activism in the United States*. Athens: Ohio UP 2006; Brigitte Fielder: *Animal Humanism. Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionism*. In: *American Quarterly* 65,3 (2013), pp.487–514; Susan J. Pearson: *The Rights of the Defenseless. Protecting Animals and Children in Gilded Age America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2011; Janet M. Davis: *The Gospel of Kindness. Animal Welfare and the Making of Modern America*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2016. For a transatlantic perspective on the interrelations between abolitionism and animal advocacy, see Kevin Hutchings: *Romantic Ecologies and Colonial Cultures in the British Atlantic World, 1770–1850*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP 2009, chapter 4.

of a certain class of beings, whose rights have seldom been advocated.”¹⁸ Because, Daggett explains, the ethical consideration humans extend to others always manifests itself “in proportion to the nearness of the relation,” the plight of those “who belong to a different class, or circle in society” is seldom of any relevance to us, and this is particularly true with regard to the “lower order of sensible beings,” who “are considered as moving in a very different sphere, and belonging to a community of a far different nature from that of ours.”¹⁹ But there is no reason to assume, Daggett continues in obvious reference to the *Declaration of Independence*, that

the UNALIENATED rights of a beast, are not as sacred, and inviolable, as those of a man: or that the person, who wantonly commits an outrage upon the life, happiness, or security of a BIRD, is not as really amenable, at the tribunal of eternal justice, as he, who wantonly destroys the rights and privileges, or injuriously takes away the life of one of his fellow creatures of the HUMAN race.²⁰

Humans, even though, or perhaps precisely because, they are seemingly superior to nonhuman beings, “owing to education, and to certain contracted habits of thinking and acting,”²¹ often fail to recognize other earthly beings as fellow creatures towards whom they have an ethical obligation. But, he argues emphatically, that animals “are sensible beings, and capable of happiness, none can doubt: That their sensibility of corporeal pleasure and pain, is less than ours, none can prove: And that there is any kind of reason, why they should not be regarded with proportionable tenderness, we cannot conceive.”²²

While Bergh referred to his *Declaration of the Rights of Animals* as “a species of Declaration of Independence”²³ that would eventually be mentioned alongside Thomas Jefferson’s original, such a comparison

18 Herman Daggett: *The Rights of Animals. An Oration, Delivered at the Commencement of Providence-College, September 7, 1791*, p.3. The published version of the speech is available online here: <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N18673.0001.001> (accessed September 26, 2016). Biographical information about Daggett can be found in Samuel Bradlee Doggett: *A History of the Doggett-Daggett Family*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill 1894, pp. 151–152.

19 Daggett: *The Rights of Animals*, p.4.

20 Ibid., p.9.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., pp.6–7.

23 Quoted in Roderick Frazier Nash: *The Rights of Nature. A History of Environmental Ethics*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1989, p.46.

indicates (besides an obvious overconfidence) a certain lack of awareness about the irony that any such declaration could only ever be articulated in the mode of an *in behalf of*, pointing to the fundamental dependence of animals' independence on the paternalistic benevolence of human spokespersons like Bergh. After all, Bergh's declaration was signed neither by paw nor hoof but by human hand, relying on the established authority of a human John Hancock.²⁴ It is in a similar sense, then, that the aspirations towards independence articulated by the *Harper's* creatures are made a mockery of by their obvious dependence on human systems and modes of (linguistic and political) representation, on established human cultural institutions, and on the human politics of naming. This dependence becomes evident with particular irony in the animals' decision to commission the philosophico-juridical services of humans to substantiate their claims to independence from them and to do so by consulting the works of precisely those early modern theorists of natural law who not only often lent ideological support to European colonialist endeavors and their concomitant exploitation of natural resources and destruction of indigenous environments, habitats and species, but who also reiterated, now with the authority of early modern juridical discourse, the concept of human dominion over all other creatures. As Samuel Pufendorf – who, in contrast to other thinkers such as Hugo Grotius or John Locke, actually critiqued European colonial practices – asserts in *Elements of Universal Jurisprudence*, “[natural] law is to be derived from man's own nature alone and not drawn from brutes or inanimate things,”²⁵ and it does, indeed, not apply to them: “anyone may when he pleases [...] kill any animal or compel it to render services to him, [...] because there is no community of right between man and brutes.”²⁶ However, if the idea of an animal *Declaration of Independence* suggested by the *Harper's* creatures seems absurd, this is not simply because animals are supposedly purely instinctual, non-rational, non-cultural beings of a ‘lower order’ but because any form of

24 As the motto of the prominent ‘animal advocacy’ magazine *Our Dumb Animals*, founded in 1868 by Boston lawyer George T. Angell, reads: “We Speak For Those Who Cannot Speak For Themselves.”

25 Samuel Pufendorf: *Elements of Universal Jurisprudence*. In: Id.: *The Political Writings of Samuel Pufendorf*, ed. by Craig Carr, trans. from the Latin by Michael J. Seidler. New York: Oxford UP 1994, pp. 29–92, here p. 62.

26 Ibid., p. 82.

‘animal’ declaration would be a near impossible political feat given the often conflict-ridden diversity of nonhuman ways of being and inhabiting the world the article itself frequently alludes to. In the way it is premised on and reproduces the general singular of ‘the animal,’ Jacques Derrida would no doubt identify this idea as a *bêtise*, an asininity, thus indicating its unmistakably human origins.²⁷

As a point of departure for the present volume and as an alternative to the problematic aspects of the ideas of both human *and* animal independence, I would like to focus on a notion of creaturely *interdependence* that offers both a conceptual-analytical perspective for postanthropocentric historiography and articulates a normative claim and challenge. Such a perspective would constitute an attempt at thinking in broad and inclusive terms about the complex webs of relations weaving together living beings on earth, but it would also have to be shaped by an awareness about the inadequacy of both the concepts of ‘the human’ and ‘the animal’ to address the ontological and political differentiality of the phenomena these terms refer to. Positioning itself in the midst of these tensions and contradictions, it would have to be shaped by a firm alliance with the perspectives and politics of other academic fields to which the question of the animal is, or should be, of importance – such as the study of race, gender or sexuality. A critical discussion of the question of the animal can thus never be a solipsistic endeavor, because the very concept of animality is characterized by an intersectionality that accounts for both its ambiguity and elusiveness and its historical efficacy. Inseparable from this critical engagement with animality, one of the important tasks of postanthropocentric historiography is to articulate a critique of the concept of Man, which, just like its conceptual counterpart, needs to be considered not only in its species but also in its racial, gender and other dimensions, because it is only through their interpenetration and dynamic co-articulation that Man is able to sustain itself and its hegemonic status.²⁸ What this also means is that an

27 See Jacques Derrida: *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. from the French by David Wills. New York: Fordham UP 2008, pp. 31–32.

28 Ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood, for example, have long emphasized this intersectional nature of the Western ‘master model’ of the human. See, for example, Val Plumwood: *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge 1993. In her guide to (feminist) intersectionality studies, Nina Lykke argues that animals and the more-than-human “ought to be much more integrated into explicit feminist theorizing of intersectionality.” (Nina Lykke: *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectional*

ontology and ethics that foregrounds the idea of interdependence in an attempt to think creaturely life beyond anthropocentric dichotomies needs to be careful not to ignore the very different realities of exposure to violence, oppression, inequality and marginalization that shape *human* life on earth. It needs to be careful, in other words, not to reintroduce the concept of Man through the backdoor in the very attempt at thinking beyond it.

“We are dependent on animals,” Kelly Oliver writes in *Animal Lessons*, “and animals are dependent on their environments and one another.”²⁹ Oliver’s rather uncontroversial statement points to a problem that troubles the notion of creaturely *interdependence* as it is used here: While it is obvious that human life has in many ways and from its very beginnings always depended on the lives of animal others, it is not entirely clear how this also applies the other way around. Part of the problem is, of course, the inevitable undercomplexity of thinking in terms of ‘animals’ in the first place. Different species have (had) different relationships with different groups of humans, with different degrees of proximity and intensity of interaction, and with different potentials for conflict and conviviality. But beyond this, doesn’t the idea of creaturely interdependence itself constitute an act of epistemic violence in the way it conveniently glosses over the fundamental power asymmetry that has allowed humans to *force* other creatures into this kind of relationship? Have humans not, either directly (for example, through processes of domestication) or indirectly (through the massive transformations of or intrusions into their habitats), *made* other species dependent on them throughout the historical and deep historical process? While this is no doubt a valid argument, the idea of creaturely interdependence I would like to suggest here is based on an acknowledgment of, and takes as its analytical framework, the historically evolved status quo in which human and animal lives are interwoven in often unprecedented and

Theory, Methodology and Writing. London: Routledge 2010, p.81.) It should be noted, however, that the concept of intersectionality is not without its problems. See, for example, Jasbir Puar: “I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess”. *Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory*. In: *philoSOPHIA* 2,1 (2012), pp.49–66.

29 Kelly Oliver: *Animal Lessons. How They Teach Us to Be Human*. New York: Columbia UP 2009, p.44. Also see id.: *Earth Ethics and Creaturely Cohabitation*. In: Dominik Ohrem/Roman Bartosch (eds): *Beyond the Human-Animal Divide. Creaturely Lives in Literature and Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming).

highly intricate ways, the extent and implications of which are not yet fully within our grasp.³⁰ While the relationship between humans and domesticated species as it has evolved over the centuries is today characterized by a “cooperative dependence from which neither can escape,”³¹ the complexity of human-animal interdependence in the Anthropocene cannot be limited to such more obvious examples. This is because in an era in which the intended or collateral effects of human agency extend to the most remote spaces of the earth, even wild creatures, not to mention the many synanthropic species living in human-created and human-dominated environments, are rarely able to escape their influence. In a sense, the lifeways or survival of many species is thus increasingly dependent on what humans do *not* (allow themselves to) do, that is, on the ways in which they regulate (or fail to do so) the expansive and destructive operations of capitalist modernity.

On the other hand, thinking in terms of creaturely interdependence also means that human societies and histories must themselves be understood as *more-than-human* down to the very core of their existence. Human beings are not apart from but a part of what philosopher Roberto Marchesini has termed the “theriosphere,” and this is not limited to aspects of biological life and evolutionary kinship with other species but also includes the ‘loftier’ realms of thought and imagination, which have traditionally been regarded as an “emanation of the anthroposphere.”³² As Marchesini reminds us, nonhuman creatures have always functioned as “great sources of fervid creativity for our species” and their influence reaches into even the deepest recesses of what is supposed to be uniquely human and exclusively associated with the possibilities of the human mind and forms of human intersubjectivity.

30 Even our ‘human’ bodies – “porous ecosystems swarming with bacteria, fungi, protozoa, and viruses” (Edmund Russell: *Coevolutionary History*. In: *The American Historical Review* 119,5 (2014), pp. 1514–1528, here p. 1515) – are expressions of continuous processes and relations of creaturely interdependence, even if the kinds of microorganisms involved in these relations are rarely thought of as ‘creatures’ and in many ways pose unique challenges for creaturely ontologies.

31 Juliet Clutton-Brock: *Animals as Domesticates. A World View through History*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP 2012, p. 133.

32 Roberto Marchesini: The Theriosphere. In: *Angelaki* 21,1 (2016), pp. 113–135, here p. 114. With regard to my above remarks, however, I want to add that we would have to think in more detail about the extent to which the *anthropos* inhabiting the “anthroposphere” is always already defined by more than its species identity.

Animals

inform our ideas through an infinity of models, thematic variations, existential possibilities, and exemplifying arguments [...]. They also give life to new ways of interpreting the world and acting on it. Animality is therefore the archetype that permits, through the non-arbitrariness of its sign, the grammar of the processes of abstraction. [...] Our life as humans is surrounded by animal knowledges, is sustained on hybridization with animals, is founded on animal signs.³³

If in Western philosophical discussions of animality the “heart of the matter” for the most part hasn’t been “the animals outside but rather our own immanent animal nature, lived as both an origin and an ongoing inheritance, as our immemorial past as well as what we must transcend in order to be human in the present,”³⁴ the “animals outside” – their bodies, lifeways and behaviors as well as the (lack of) interiority to which these exterior expressions supposedly testified – have nonetheless served as constant points of reference for delineations of human specificity. In this sense, even the many historical manifestations of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism remain unwillingly but inevitably expressive of a human dependence on animal life that is also *conceptual* and *epistemological* in character, that involves not only the human’s evolutionary deep history but also the cultural history of human self-knowledge and subjectivity.

A postanthropocentric historiography of creaturely interdependence takes as both its central premise and its analytic focus the fact that neither humans nor nonhumans can be understood as fully autonomous history-making subjects, thus underscoring the constitutive importance of the relationality of human and animal historical becomings. In tandem with the various forms of net- or ‘meshwork’ thinking that have shaped interdisciplinary debate throughout the last decades, relationality might indeed be characterized as something of a postanthropocentric core concept or *episteme* that reaches well beyond the specific concerns of animal studies – and this includes a shift in perspective from the dominant idea of relationality as a result of (intentional) processes of relating to an affirmation of its ontological “primacy.”³⁵ Relationality lies beyond the frustrating impasse of sameness or difference; it allows

33 Marchesini: *The Theriosphere*, p. 115.

34 Ted Toadvine: *The Time of Animal Voices*. In: *Konturen* 6 (2014), pp.22–40, here p. 23.

35 See Andrew Benjamin: *Towards a Relational Ontology. Philosophy’s Other Possibility*. Albany: State University of New York Press 2015.

us to cope with the problem that humans and other species both *do* and *do not* inhabit the same world, that they are animate, embodied, earthly beings in lived relations with other creatures whose ways of being-on-earth can nonetheless vary significantly in their adherence “to multiple and discordant spatio-temporal rhythms,”³⁶ in terms of their sensorimotor makeup and skills, and in many other ways. While, as Marchesini points out, the “unknowable animal” may indeed be a “humanistic invention,”³⁷ given the fact that human ‘access’ to nonhuman ways of being must at least to some extent always remain indirect, mediated or partial, most animal historians would probably agree that, however translated into actual animal historical practice, relationality represents something of a conceptual and methodological *sine qua non*. After all, their work is not so much focused on writing an “impossible”³⁸ history of animals but on writing the history of human-animal *relations* – and this includes the ways in which historical human-animal relations have been shaped by a *disavowal* or marginalization of this relationality in human cultural, philosophical, scientific and other discourses, including the discursive practices of Western historiography itself.

Historiography’s Animals

As history [...] relates to human conduct, it must begin to exist as soon as man begins to act or to extend his ideas beyond his mere animal existence.³⁹

It is one of the enduring legacies of the Western historical tradition that its conceptions of human historicity have always been based to a significant extent on the philosophical ‘handling’ of animals as humans’ non-historical others. In keeping with the dominant strands of Western thought, historians and philosophers of history have mostly relied on, and often aggressively reaffirmed, the essential ahistoricity of animal life, with ‘the animal’ (in the Derridean general singular) functioning as a crucial oppositional figure underwriting the emergence of Man

36 Jamie Lorimer: *Wildlife in the Anthropocene. Conservation After Nature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015, p. 5.

37 Roberto Marchesini: The Therioanthropic Being as Our Neighbour. In: *Angelaki* 21,1 (2016), pp. 201–214, here p. 204.

38 Erica Fudge: A Left-Handed Blow. Writing the History of Animals. In: Nigel Rothfels (ed.): *Representing Animals*. Bloomington: Indiana UP 2002, pp. 3–18, here p. 6.

39 The Philosophy of History. In: *North American Review* 39,84 (July 1834), pp. 30–56, here p. 32.

as a distinctly historical being – as both the agentic subject of history proper and the proper object of historical inquiry. The work of the influential British historian and philosopher of history, Robin George Collingwood, is one of the more recent examples in which the question of animal (a)historicity implicitly informs, and is sometimes explicitly contrasted with, the notion of human historical life. In the posthumously published *Principles of History* Collingwood defines the “object of historical knowledge” as “*Res Gestae*, understood as the deeds, or past actions, of human beings not in their capacity as animals of a certain species but in their capacity as rational animals.”⁴⁰ While Collingwood concedes that not all humans are at all times equally successful at being rational animals and, indeed, that humans in general are never more than “feebly, intermittently, and precariously rational,”⁴¹ it is the supposedly uniquely human *capacity* for rational thought that renders *Homo sapiens* a cultural and thus historical being.

[I]t is in virtue of his [*sic*] rationality that [Man] not only eats but dines, not only copulates but marries, not only dies but is buried. On a foundation of animal life his rationality builds a structure of free activities, free in the sense that although they are based on his animal nature they do not proceed from it but are invented by his reason on its own initiative, and serve not the purposes of animal life but the purposes of reason itself.⁴²

His acknowledgment of human animality notwithstanding, Collingwood’s emphasis on reason as constitutive of human historicity (and, by extension, of being human more generally) is accompanied, or even enabled, by the presupposition of a fundamental discontinuity with the constraints of animal existence. The “free activities” which characterize human life – “free” because they are more than merely instinctual and predetermined by an organism’s biological makeup and environmental embeddedness, as is supposedly the case with all nonhuman animals – may be “based on his animal nature,” but they do – crucially – *not* “proceed from it.” Rather, “on its own initiative,” the capacity for reason gives birth to what seems to be an autonomous sphere of genuinely *human* existence in and of itself, and for Collingwood it is precisely this discontinuity with the merely animal, biological, natural

40 Robin George Collingwood: *The Principles of History*. In: Id.: *The Principles of History and Other Writings in the Philosophy of History*, ed. by William H. Dray / Jan van der Dussen. New York: Oxford UP 1999, pp. 3–115, here p. 48.

41 Ibid., p. 47.

42 Ibid., p. 46.

that makes possible, legitimizes and guides the work of the historian. In a passage from what is probably his most influential work, *The Idea of History*, Collingwood admits that the notion that humans are the only animals capable of thought “is no doubt a superstition,” a concession, however, which is then immediately qualified by the assertion that the human is the only animal who “thinks enough, and clearly enough, to render his actions the expressions of his [*sic*] thoughts” and not merely of “impulse and appetite.”⁴³ Distinguishing between the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside’ of historical events, Collingwood explains that while “[t]he processes of nature” are to be understood as “sequences of mere events,” the same is not true for historical processes: “They are [...] processes of actions, which have an inner side, consisting of processes of thought; and what the historian is looking for is these processes of thought.”⁴⁴ While the notion of human-animal difference Collingwood subscribes to is clothed in the Darwinian garb of a difference in degree rather than a radical difference in kind – what Leonard Lawlor calls “metaphysical separationism”⁴⁵ –, his defense of the sphere of historicity against the intrusion of natural and animal life processes and forms of being relies on the traditional emphasis on reason as a marker of human uniqueness. In fact, for Collingwood the rational agency of humans that lies at the heart of his conception of history as (only ever) the history of thought is based on a conception of the human as semi-transcendent, independent being defined by a self-enclosed interiority that remains largely unaffected by environmental factors and forms of nonhuman agency. As he puts it in one of his earlier essays,

Man is not confronted by changing circumstances outside himself; or if he is, that belongs to the mere externals of his life. The essential change is within himself; it is a change in his own habits, his own wants, his own laws, his own beliefs and feelings and valuations; and this change is brought about by the attempt to meet a need itself arising essentially from within. It is because man is not content to react automatically to the stimulus of nature that he is man, and not a plant or a mere animal.⁴⁶

43 Robin George Collingwood: *The Idea of History* [1946], ed. by Jan van der Dussen. Oxford: Oxford UP 1994, p. 216. Collingwood’s book was constructed from various manuscript sources after his death by his pupil Thomas M. Knox.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

45 Leonard Lawlor: *This Is Not Sufficient. An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*. New York: Columbia UP 2007, p. 24.

46 Robin George Collingwood: *The Theory of Historical Cycles* [1927]. In: *Id.: Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. by William Debbins. Austin: University of Texas Press 1965, pp. 76–89, here p. 86.

As is the case with other thinkers of the Western tradition, in Collingwood's thought the question of the (in)accessibility of nonhuman modes of being encompasses and interrelates epistemic and evaluative aspects. It may be a "superstition" that animals have *no* thoughts whatsoever, but if past actions are "only knowable to [the historian] as the outward expression of thoughts,"⁴⁷ the reason they are potentially accessible and thus lend themselves to historical inquiry is because they are not expressive of just *any* kind of thought but of a higher kind of thought that is clearly *recognizable as* thought. We might criticize Collingwood for half-heartedly attempting to fit animals into his rigidly rationalist historiographical framework, and for (unsurprisingly) finding them lacking instead of questioning the framework itself, but this would miss what I think might be the more crucial point: that the always already 'deficient' or 'lacking' animal is, in fact, the enabling precondition of this very framework and its 'exorcism' a crucial self-constitutive performance of Western historiography as such. Collingwood's philosophy of history, that is, relies on an a priori idea about one or several qualities which, in their absence, exclude animals as historical agents before actually considering how the past actions the historian is supposed to work with might also be interpreted in a way that testifies to nonhuman forms of historical agency.

But if Collingwood conceives of the historical process as something propelled forward by the workings of the human mind, the problems it encounters and poses to itself, and the solutions it is able to come up with, the intimate connection between humanity and historicity by means of the pivotal role of thought on which this bond so crucially hinges is haunted by a certain provisionality, a residue of undecidability. For as much and as stubborn as his philosophy of history is centered on the anthropocentric discourse of reason, Collingwood is careful enough to acknowledge that where exactly reason begins – and thus, according to his own philosophical framework, the possibility of history emerges – is not so easy for us to determine. "Perhaps rationality, in some very primitive shape, is as widespread as life itself," Collingwood writes in one of his unpublished manuscripts, which means that, ultimately, "any formula in which we try to define the minimum that we mean by thinking must be altogether arbitrary, and will define only a certain

47 Collingwood: *The Idea of History*, p. 115.

stage in its development.”⁴⁸ Despite the way it is tied to a hierarchization of thought processes from primitive (animal, ‘savage’) to higher (human, ‘civilized’), the question of the recognizability of thought as it is raised and frequently resurfaces in Collingwood’s philosophy of history also figures as an admission of the limitations of human understanding and as a hint towards the fact that to a certain degree animals’ ways of being-in-the-world remain enigmatic to us. If human rationality is more akin to an unstable potentiality than a consistent actuality, “flickering and dubious,” such a form of rationality “can certainly not be denied to animals other than men. Their minds may be inferior in range and power to those of the lowest savages,” Collingwood continues in a rhetoric symptomatic of the discursive intimacies of race and animality,

but by the same standards the lowest savages are inferior to civilized men, and those whom we call civilized differ among themselves hardly less. There are even among non-human animals the beginnings of historical life: for example, among cats, which do not wash by instinct but are taught by their mothers. Such rudiments of education are something *not essentially different* from an historic culture.⁴⁹

Interestingly, in *Principles*, when he briefly turns to the question of the possibility of animal history, Collingwood refers to the animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton, published around the turn of the twentieth century and widely read in the United States and elsewhere. Because of their allegedly sentimental or unrealistic portrayals of the natural world and the mental and emotional lives of animals, popular books such as Seton’s *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898) and similar works by other authors such as Jack London and (especially) William J. Long became the object of heated criticism in the context of the infamous ‘nature fakers’ controversy of the early 1900s.⁵⁰ Covered by high-profile magazines such as *Science*, at the heart of this from today’s perspective perhaps rather curious debate were crucial post-Darwinian questions about human-animal kinship and difference that in many ways became

48 W.J. van der Dussen: *History as a Science. The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*. The Hague: Nijhoff 1981, p. 176.

49 Collingwood: *The Idea of History*, p. 227, emphasis added.

50 For a historical discussion of the controversy and those involved, see Ralph H. Lutts: *The Nature Fakers. Wildlife, Science and Sentiment*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 2001; id. (ed.): *The Wild Animal Story*. Philadelphia: Temple UP 1998.

particularly relevant in the Progressive Era and its debates about the meaning of evolutionary theory.⁵¹ As we might expect, Collingwood is skeptical about the authenticity of Seton's and other animal stories and the way in which "[Seton] professed to reconstruct, from such evidence as that of their tracks, the processes of reason which had determined the actions of various wild animals."⁵² "If genuine, these were real history of *Res Gestae*," but, Collingwood continues in a relatively cautious phrasing that nonetheless veers in the direction of a 'nature fakery' accusation, "many readers must have doubted whether they were not sentimentalized portraits falsified by a desire to find in the wild animals he loved a resemblance to human beings closer than actually exists."⁵³ And yet, indicative of how, despite his anthropocentrism, the question of the animal ultimately remains unresolved for Collingwood precisely because he is a critical thinker, we should note the rather remarkable statement with which he concludes his short-lived foray into the (im)possibilities of animal history: that, in the end, "this is clear, that the question whether history of non-human deeds is possible is to be answered not by arguing, but by trying to write it."⁵⁴

Re-Encountering (American) Animals

The ancients, one would say, with their gorgons, sphinxes, satyrs, mantichora, etc., could imagine more than existed, while the moderns cannot imagine so much as exists. [...] We are as often injured as benefited by our systems, for, to speak the truth, no human system is a true one, and a name is at most a mere convenience and carries no information with it. As soon as I begin to be aware of the life of any creature, I at once forget its name.⁵⁵

When Progressive-Era Americans like John Burroughs and Theodore Roosevelt condemned the animal stories of Seton and others as misleadingly anthropomorphic 'nature fakery,' in their highly publicized

51 For an excellent discussion of the role of animality in the Progressive Era, see Michael Lundblad: *The Birth of a Jungle. Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2013; John Bruni: *Scientific Americans. The Making of Popular Science and Evolution in Early Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2014.

52 Collingwood: *The Principles of History*, p. 47.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Henry David Thoreau: *The Journal, 1837–1861*, ed. by Damion Searls. New York: New York Review of Books 2009, p. 605.

reactions to the works of these writers they exemplified the often unprecedented intensity of debate that surrounded the figure of the animal and the contested meanings of animality in nineteenth-century American culture. The controversy was complex enough and tackled a number of different issues, many of which had already been the subject of debate in the earlier decades of the century. Was it the rigorosity of scientific inquiry or the poetic creativity of imaginative literary writing that offered the most appropriate avenue to the interpretation of animal lives? To what extent were animals to be understood as endowed with the capacities for rational thought, emotion and morality? Were they “reasonable agents”⁵⁶ in Collingwoodian terms or more like instinct-driven body-machines, and what were the ethical implications of both views? Did animals have language, and, if yes, how did it ‘work’ and could it be understood by humans?⁵⁷ How could animal life and human-animal relations be conceived in Darwinian terms? The concept of human evolutionary kinship with animals that was anticipated to some degree by post-Enlightenment scientific endeavors in developing fields such as comparative anatomy and in the form of pre- or proto-Darwinian evolutionary thought meant that Western humanity found itself in an increasingly uncertain position on the Great Chain of Being, ushering in what Raymond Corbey has aptly described as a “cosmological sea-change.”⁵⁸ Because this emergent cosmology “no longer explained humans *metaphysically* [...] but traced their origin to the physics of lowly animals,” humans were forced “into reluctant retreats from, and renegotiations of, the notion of their own specialty.”⁵⁹ Indeed, few would have disagreed with him when, in an 1872 review of Louis Figuier’s book *The Human Race*, pioneering American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan claimed that “the special creation of

56 Collingwood: *The Principles of History*, p. 46.

57 For the question of animal language in nineteenth-century America, see Susan Pearson: *Speaking Bodies, Speaking Minds. Animals, Language, History*. In: *History and Theory* 52,4 (2013), pp. 91–108. As Seton argues, while animals such as rabbits “have no speech as we understand it,” they do have “a way of conveying ideas by a system of sounds, signs, scents, whisker-touches, movements, and example that answers the purpose of speech.” (Ernest Thompson Seton: *Wild Animals I Have Known*. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons 1898, pp. 93–94.)

58 Raymond Corbey: *The Metaphysics of Apes. Negotiating the Animal-Human Boundary*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2005, p. 34.

59 *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

man” was “the question of questions in modern science.”⁶⁰ Morgan’s assessment, formulated over a decade after the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and a year after that of *The Descent of Man* (1871), testifies to the gradual emergence of a Darwinian or post-Darwinian conception of human life in which the specificity of Man had to be reconfigured in a way that understood the human being as, above all else, a living creature defined by an evolutionary kinship with other animals. American botanist Asa Grey, with whom Darwin had already shared his thoughts on evolution in their personal correspondence in the years leading up to the publication of the *Origin*, became an outspoken proponent of Darwinism and – from his review of Darwin’s book in the *Atlantic Monthly* to the defense of Darwinian theory against famous Harvard biologist Louis Agassiz – played an important role in enabling Darwinism to gain a foothold in American science and society.⁶¹

Robert MacDonald has succinctly interpreted animal stories such as Seton’s as a “revolt against instinct.”⁶² But the critique these stories articulate of the determinist reduction of animal life to this vague category as well as the debate about (animal) instinct versus (human) reason more generally in fact reaches back well into the antebellum

60 Lewis Henry Morgan: The Human Race. In: *The Nation* 15,387 (1872), p. 354.

61 For the influence, reception and adaptation of Darwinian evolutionary theory in the U.S., see the contributions in Jeannette Eileen Jones / Patrick B. Sharp (eds): *Darwin in Atlantic Cultures. Evolutionary Visions of Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. New York: Routledge 2010; and in Tina Gianquitto / Lydia Fisher (eds): *America’s Darwin. Darwinian Theory and U.S. Literary Culture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press 2014. Darwin’s arguments about the biological continuity between animal and human life and in particular his arguments in *The Descent of Man* were widely (mis)interpreted in a way that, instead of challenging the hegemonic concept of Man, served to underpin and legitimize the widespread anthropocentric and racialized ideas of human civilizational progress. As historian Richard Hofstadter has argued in a seminal 1944 book on the topic, by the turn of the century social Darwinism had become the dominant form in which evolutionary theory exerted its influence on American social and political life. However, not only did many progressives (such as feminist reformer Jane Addams) reject this interpretation of Darwinian theory, as John Bruni points out in his study of Progressive-Era intersections of evolutionary thought and literary writing, the notion of a commanding influence of one particular variety of evolutionary thought is misleading and overlooks the polymorphism of the period’s ideas about evolution and its implications regarding the specificity of human life. See Bruni: *Scientific Americans*. For a revised version of Hofstadter’s book, see Richard Hofstadter: *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. Boston: Beacon 1992.

62 Robert H. MacDonald: The Revolt Against Instinct. The Animal Stories of Seton and Roberts. In: *Canadian Literature* 84 (1980), pp. 18–29.

period. Morgan's book on *The American Beaver and His Works* (1868), which at first glance might seem somewhat out of place between his early ethnographical studies of the Iroquois and his later work on systems of kinship and social evolution, is arguably as much a study of the lifeways of the industrious rodent as it is a detailed rebuttal of contemporary arguments against animal intelligence. This becomes all the more evident when we read his book alongside an article he published more than 20 years earlier in *The Knickerbocker* under the pseudonym "Aquarius," an article that anticipates many of the arguments of his later monograph. Discussing the various capacities of "the principle called instinct"⁶³ – which, he argues, is obfuscating, because what it refers to is in fact nothing other than mind – Morgan claims that animals "have a language by which they apprehend each other" and without which "[c]oncert of action and division of labor would be impossible," that they "exhibit the exercise of memory and abstraction,"⁶⁴ and that phenomena such as the beaver's dam must be understood as the material result of "deliberative reasoning process[es]."⁶⁵ While today's ethology might have a word or two to say about the examples and anecdotes he uses to support his arguments,⁶⁶ Morgan's critique of instinct, "a designation that prohibits inquiry, because it pretends to furnish an explanation of itself,"⁶⁷ is remarkably incisive in how it alludes to instinct's role not merely as a vaguely defined category that lacks scientific value but as a conceptual device in discourses of human exceptionalism. This insight is formulated most pointedly in his chapter on "Animal Psychology" in the *American Beaver*, where he implies an almost strategic function to instinct as "an invention of the metaphysicians to assert and maintain a fundamental distinction between the mental principle of the human species and that of the inferior animals."⁶⁸

63 Lewis Henry Morgan: Mind or Instinct. An Inquiry Concerning the Manifestation of Mind by the Lower Orders of Animals. In: *The Knickerbocker* 22,5–6 (1843), pp. 414–420, 507–515, here p. 417.

64 Ibid., p. 508.

65 Ibid., p. 509.

66 See, however, James L. Gould / Carol Grant Gould: *Animal Architects. Building and the Evolution of Intelligence*. New York: Basic Books 2007, who are among the supporters of Morgan's arguments and conclusions about beaver intelligence.

67 Morgan: Mind or Instinct, p. 514.

68 Lewis Henry Morgan: *The American Beaver and His Works*. Philadelphia: Lippincott 1868, pp. 275–276.

Though Morgan did not live to witness the ‘nature fakers’ controversy, Burroughs, for whom animals were beings devoid of any kind of complex interiority and “almost as much under the dominion of absolute nature [...] as are the plants and trees,”⁶⁹ would probably have been a viable target for his critique. For Burroughs, the problem with ‘nature fakery’ was not only that “the line between fact and fiction [was] repeatedly crossed” but that “a deliberate attempt [was] made to induce the reader to cross, too, and to work such a spell upon him that he shall not know that he has crossed and is in the land of make-believe.”⁷⁰ In a similar vein, zoologist and conservationist William T. Hornaday warned his readers in *The Minds and Manners of Wild Animals* that the ‘nature faker’ “is always on the alert to see wonderful phenomena in wild life, about which to write; and by preference he places the most strained and marvelous interpretation upon the animal act. Beware of the man who always sees marvelous things in animals, for he is a dangerous guide.”⁷¹ While Seton never directly participated in the public controversy, Long – whose animal books, to the dismay of the likes of Burroughs, were also used in American schools – did not stay quiet. Defending his portrayals of animals in the *North American Review*, Long questioned the authority of science as the sole arbiter of truth about animal life, claiming that

the study of Nature is a vastly different thing from the study of Science; they are no more alike than Psychology and History. Above and beyond the world of facts and law, with which alone Science concerns itself, is an immense and almost unknown world of suggestion and freedom and inspiration, in which the individual, whether animal or man, must struggle against fact and law to develop or keep his own individuality. It is a world of *appreciation* [...] rather than a world of *description*. It is a world that must be interpreted rather than catalogued, for you cannot catalogue or classify the individuality for which all things are struggling.⁷²

Long critiqued what he understood to be the ‘de-animating’ tendencies of the scientific gaze, which, by supposedly reducing individual

69 John Burroughs: *Ways of Nature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1905, pp. 77–78.

70 John Burroughs: Real and Sham Natural History. In: *Atlantic Monthly*, 03/1903, pp. 298–309, here p. 300.

71 William T. Hornaday: *The Minds and Manners of Wild Animals. A Book of Personal Observations*. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons 1922, p. 6.

72 William J. Long: The Modern School of Nature-Study and Its Critics. In: *North American Review* 176, 558 (May 1903), pp. 688–698, here p. 688, original emphases.

animals to rigid exemplars of a set of species characteristics, may well be more 'exact' with regard to their adherence to the requirements of scientific practice, but this did not necessarily make them more 'true'.⁷³ In Long's view, scientists indeed committed a kind of *bêtise*: while they divided 'the animal' into a variety of different species, they nonetheless tended to neglect the many forms of *intraspecific* difference that manifested themselves in expressions of animal individuality. And, for Long, a true appreciation of animal individuality could not rely on a scientific preoccupation with descriptive objectivity but, quite to the contrary, required an imaginative and affective investment – it required "not only sight but vision; not simply eyes and ears and a note-book; but insight, imagination, and, above all, an intense human sympathy, by which alone the inner life of an animal becomes luminous."⁷⁴ Almost a century before the 'nature fakers' were dragged into the national spotlight, Henry David Thoreau anticipated the kind of skepticism voiced by Long and his likeminded contemporaries about science's ability to adequately convey the true meaning and significance of animal life. Thoreau's relationship with science was complex and far from antagonistic,⁷⁵ and so he questioned not so much science itself but the rigid classifying practices of (post-)Enlightenment natural history in a way that echoes Long's defense of his animal stories. In his journal entries dated February 17 and 18, 1860, Thoreau reflects in some detail on the "very lively and lifelike descriptions of some of the old naturalists,"⁷⁶ reserving particular admiration for Conrad Gessner's five-volume *Historia Animalium* (1551–1558) and Edward Topsell's *Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* (1607), which relies heavily on, and in large parts is an English translation of, Gessner's earlier work. For Thoreau, the writing of naturalists like Gessner showed that they "sympathize with the creatures which they describe."⁷⁷ Commenting on the mythozoological character of these works, whose pages are populated by a colorful ensemble of

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., pp. 692–693.

75 For an excellent study of the relationship between Thoreau's transcendentalism and his engagement with contemporary science, see Laura Dassow Walls: *Seeing New World. Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1995.

76 Thoreau: *The Journal*, p. 603.

77 Ibid.

real and fantastical creatures in the tradition of the medieval bestiary, Thoreau writes that, though some of the animals presented there only roamed the wilderness of the imagination, these writers nonetheless had “a livelier conception of an animal which has no existence, or of an action which was never performed, than most naturalists have of what passes before their eyes.”⁷⁸ They had “an adequate idea of a beast, or what a beast should be [...], and in their descriptions and drawings they did not always fail when they *surpassed* nature.”⁷⁹ Most importantly, Thoreau laments the inability or unwillingness of his scientific contemporaries to capture and convey an idea of a creature’s “*anima*, its vital spirit, on which is based its character and all the peculiarities by which it most concerns us.”

If you have undertaken to write the biography of an animal, you will have to present to us the living creature, *i. e.*, a result which no man can understand, but only in his degree report the impression made on him. Science in many departments of natural history does not pretend to go beyond the shell; *i. e.*, it does not get to animated nature at all. A history of animated nature must itself be animated.⁸⁰

What should we make of these nineteenth- and turn-of-the-twentieth-century debates about the interpretation and representation of animal life? And what, more specifically, should we think of the sometimes rather extravagant claims and anecdotes presented by ‘nature fakers’ like Long and Seton? It is not too hard to imagine why, for Burroughs, Seton’s claim that in composing his animal stories he “freely translate[d]” from the ‘animal’ into the English language and in fact “*repeat[ed] nothing that they did not say*”⁸¹ was either the result of an excessive imagination or, even worse, consciously misleading (hence the accusation of ‘fakery’). But perhaps, I would like to suggest, we ought to look at Seton’s and Long’s animal stories from a different angle, one that resonates to an extent with some of the central issues with which animal studies and animal historiography still grapple today, issues such as representation and perspective, subjectivity and agency. These are, of course, neither ‘animal-specific’ nor exclusively associated with historiography, but they nonetheless bring into particular focus the limitations of both

⁷⁸ Thoreau: *The Journal*, p. 605.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 604–605, original emphasis.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 605–606.

⁸¹ Seton: *Wild Animals I Have Known*, p. 94, original emphasis.

the anthropocentric practices of historical writing and of the kinds of materials their truth claims are necessarily based on: How can we say anything about the past lives of nonhuman creatures given the fact that the sources we commonly (have to) rely on are both human-made and human-centered? Do we, perhaps, need to complicate the very idea that these human sources *are* in fact always solely and purely human? Can we identify animal presences or expressions of animal agency in the documents of the past that have been written by human hands? Is there a particular disciplinary approach, mode of thinking, genre of writing that allows us to make more reliable claims about historical animal lives? And so on.

When Seton laments the “fragmentary nature of the records”⁸² and tells his readers about how he “gathered, in a hundred different ways, the little bits of proof and scraps of truth that at length enabled me to write this history,”⁸³ he seems to identify with the work and the troubles of the historian. Similarly, in order to legitimize the historicity of his narratives and their protagonists, Seton frequently establishes a factual frame of reference for his stories, as is the case with the notorious wolf Lobo, who lived “from 1889 to 1894 in the Currumpaw region, as the ranchmen know too well, and died, precisely as related, on January 31, 1894.”⁸⁴ Elsewhere, however, even though he doesn’t address historiography directly, he questions the unthinking anthropocentrism which also informs (and constrains) the established forms of historical practice. “Those of you who would divide the world into human emotion and (on a far lower plane) animal impulse, have not dipped deep into the wells of truth,” he writes, but “barely skimmed those stagnant ponds, those abysms of ignorance, called dictionaries and encyclopedias,” comparing the impoverished conceptions of animal life prevalent among his contemporaries to the dogmatic ignorance of the sixteenth-century “church folk” who condemned the “blasphemous truths” of Copernicus.⁸⁵ “These stories are true,” Seton claims in *Wild Animals I Have Known*, and although he admits to have “left the strict line of historical

82 Ibid., p. 10.

83 Ibid., p. 93.

84 Ibid., p. 10.

85 Ernest Thompson Seton: *Great Historic Animals; Mainly about Wolves*. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons 1937, pp. x–xi.

truth in many places, the animals in this book were all real characters.”⁸⁶ Seton’s reference to the “strict line of historical truth” is perhaps as much an acknowledgment of the imaginative nature of his animal stories and the way in which they clash with the conventions of historiography as it is a critique of the historical method as such; the “strict line of historical truth,” that is, functions perhaps not only as a reference to the epistemic techniques used to separate historical truth from fiction but also as a critique of the dubious metaphysical threshold that *always already* disallows nonhuman beings from entering the domain of a historical – as opposed to a merely ‘natural’ – life. If Seton insists that his animals were indeed “real characters” in the sense that they actually existed and acted somewhere in space and time, his animals were also allowed to *become* “real characters” because his animal (re)imaginings endowed them with the very parameters – of subjectivity, intentionality, (rational) agency – that enable them to appear as such.

These remarks about Seton are obviously not intended as an implicit call to abandon all historiographical accountability and plausibility in favor of a mode of ‘wild thinking’ that loses itself in limitless animal imaginings. Rather, I want to suggest that we might also read Seton’s stories as a kind of ‘re-imaginative historiography’ that uses the subversive potential inherent to the question of the animal to challenge the boundaries of the historical imagination as such, and that it is in this sense that his stories (as well as the controversy surrounding them) might have some implications for our current forms of “trying to write” animal histories. While it is unlikely that Collingwood’s ‘challenge’ to (future) historians was indeed intended as one, we might argue that the kind of animal-oriented postanthropocentric historiography that has by now passed its formative period and managed to establish itself as a viable field of scholarly inquiry is, in a way, still being practiced in the mode of a “trying to write.” Perhaps, that is, postanthropocentric historiography is something that is already actively being written and something that we still need to figure out how to write; something that is already ‘here’ yet still on the horizon. And perhaps it is something that we should (try to) write *while* arguing about how it can, or should, be written – which is not only a methodological but also a political and ethical question, one that, I think, is nicely captured by the subtitle of Hilda Kean’s article on

86 Seton: *Wild Animals I Have Known*, p. 9.

the challenges of animal history: “What Is Really Enough?”⁸⁷ For Seton, a collection of animal histories like those presented in *Wild Animals I Have Known* “naturally suggests a common thought” in that they served to emphasize “a moral as old as Scripture—we and the beasts are kin.”⁸⁸ And yet, perhaps such an idea of creaturely kinship is not only a moral that can be extracted *from* his stories but also, or even more so, their very precondition – a *stance* that enabled him to (try to) write their histories in the first place.

As has been pointed out by others, even though our shared species identity with past humans may allow us to make more plausible claims about their lives and experiences, the often very different realities – social, cultural, political, but also environmental, biological and corporeal – they lived and inhabited still require us to fundamentally rely on the use of our imagination. That is, even though they wandered the earth as members of our own species, it would be foolish to assume that we can have ‘access’ to their truths in any unmediated and *unimagined* way. The question of truth is, of course, a perennial problem in its own right, a discussion of which is very much beyond the scope of this essay. But I agree with Beverley Southgate’s assessment in her 2007 ‘manifesto’ for history that, the reception of poststructuralist-postmodernist critique notwithstanding, “there remains a widespread belief in the unitary nature of ‘truth’ about the past.”⁸⁹ With regard to historical animal studies, the quest to recover the ‘truth(s)’ of animal lives is perhaps most often understood as an interdisciplinary endeavor that involves a more varied set of perspectives and methodologies, incorporating, for example, the insights of non-humanities disciplines such as ethology. Emphasizing this aspect, Cary Wolfe reminds us of the “daunting interdisciplinarity” that has accompanied the “very genesis”⁹⁰ of animal studies and points to the ways in which the “internal disciplinarity of history or literary studies or philosophy is unsettled when the animal is taken seriously

87 Hilda Kean: Challenges for Historians Writing Animal-Human History. What Is Really Enough? In: *Anthrozōos: A Multidisciplinary Journal of the Interactions of People & Animals* 25,3 (2012), pp. 57–72.

88 Seton: *Wild Animals I Have Known*, p. 12.

89 Beverley Southgate: “Humani Nil Alienum”. The Quest for “Human Nature”. In: Keith Jenkins / Sue Morgan / Alun Munslow (eds): *Manifestos for History*. London: Routledge 2007, pp. 67–76, here p. 70.

90 Cary Wolfe: Human, All Too Human. “Animal Studies” and the Humanities. In: *PMLA* 124,2 (2009), pp. 564–575, here p. 565.

not just as another topic or object of study among many but as one with unique demands.”⁹¹ With regard to the specifics of historiographical practice, however, it is important to remember that what this focus on interdisciplinarity does is allow us to articulate not so much the historical truths of animals but more informed, more educated, more elaborate historical imaginings that more seriously take into account the irreducible complexity of human and animal ways of being.⁹²

The Scope and Structure of This Volume

The present volume understands itself as a contribution to a post-anthropocentric reappraisal of the genesis of the modern United States over the course of the American ‘long nineteenth century,’⁹³ from the revolutionary birth pangs of the nation as such to the momentous social, political and economic transformations of the Progressive Era, which, as Stanley Corkin argues, marked “the birth of the *modern* United States”⁹⁴ and its emergence on the world stage as a fully-fledged capitalist industrial power. Particularly in view of the extensive historical timeframe in which the contributions collected here are situated – and given the vagaries that perhaps always accompany the process of putting together a collection of academic essays such as this one –, it is hardly worth mentioning that many topics, developments and contexts that fall within this timeframe remain un(der)addressed. Nor do the contributors necessarily share a joint philosophy on why and

91 Wolfe: *Human, All Too Human*, pp. 566–567.

92 As Éric Baratay argues, “a link must be made with the imagination, in as controlled a way as possible, so that we come out of ourselves, our condition, so that we decenter ourselves and move to the animal side, even into the animal, in order to make ourselves (in part) animal,” without, however, losing sight of the fact that “our reconstructions of animal lives remain human.” (Éric Baratay: *Building an Animal History*. In: Louisa Mackenzie / Stephanie Posthumus (eds): *French Thinking About Animals*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP 2015, pp. 3–14, here p. 12.) For Vinciane Despret such a kind of decentering also means taking the risk of speculating about the interiority of animals: “how did animals understand and experience what humans offered them or forced on them?” (Vinciane Despret: *From Secret Agents to Interagency*. In: *History and Theory* 52,4 (2013), pp. 29–44, here p. 32.)

93 The term is, of course, British historian Eric Hobsbawm’s, who uses it as an analytic framework for his discussion of European developments from the time of the French Revolution to World War I.

94 Stanley Corkin: *Realism and the Birth of the Modern United States. Cinema, Literature, and Culture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press 1996, emphasis added.

how to write animal history. What they do share, however, is the conviction that an adequate historical understanding of the ‘human’ past requires a critical and sustained engagement with its more-than-human dimensions. Accordingly, the contributions collected here offer various insights into the wide relevance of animality and human-animal relations as aspects that have always penetrated all areas of American society and culture and also crucially shaped the relations (of power) between different groups of humans. The long-nineteenth-century perspective of this volume pays tribute to the fundamental changes in the relations between humans and animals throughout the nineteenth century – both in the spheres of discourse and imagination and with regard to material practices and spaces of encounter and interaction –, while acknowledging that these changes must be understood in their pre- and post-nineteenth-century connections and continuities.

The contributions to the first section of the volume are centered on the significance of human-animal relations in the development of American modernity and on forms of human-animal relations that can be understood as expressions *of* modernity. Focusing on the profound transformations wrought by the ensemble of phenomena associated with this term, such as urbanization, industrialization, consumer culture and advances in science and technology, they also exemplify the complex and often contradictory status of animals in modernity. For example, while the nineteenth century saw the development of a modern sensibility that resulted in a stronger ethical consideration of animal life – especially with regard to working animals (such as draft horses), stray animals, and the variety of pets living in human households –, in the United States and elsewhere the nineteenth century also ushered in what Derrida describes as the “*unprecedented* proportions of [the] subjection of the animal” by the operations of industrial capitalism.⁹⁵ Grappling with the role of animals in American modernity requires us to

95 Derrida: *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p.26, original emphasis. For the role of the horse in American modernity, see, for example, Clay McShane / Joel Tarr: *The Horse in the City. Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 2007; Ann Norton Greene: *Horses at Work. Harnessing Power in Industrial America*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 2008. For the development of American pet culture, see Katherine C. Grier: *Pets in America. A History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2006. Of course, the status of modern animals becomes less ambivalent if we focus not so much on ‘animals’ but on different animal species and their respective roles in modern societies.

take into account not only quantitative and qualitative changes in representations of animals against the background of a growing print culture and the emergence of new representational technologies such as photography and early film but also the development of specifically modern practices and institutions of human-animal relations, among the darker manifestations of which is no doubt the mechanized animal death of the slaughterhouse.

The first chapter, by *Katherine C. Grier*, addresses the nineteenth-century rise of an American pet culture and industry with a focus on the development of the American trade in songbirds. Grier traces the activities of a number of German immigrant bird dealers who played a pioneering role in the establishment of the bird trade in the United States and whose biographies serve to illuminate the growth and diversification of the culture of pet keeping over the course of the century. While the two brothers Charles and Henry Reiche established a successful business in New York City that was centered on the importation of canaries (but also imported 'exotic' animals as large as elephants), the commercial efforts of another German immigrant, Henry Bishop – also known as 'Bishop, the Bird Man' – were concentrated on Baltimore. Besides running a successful mail-order trade and (like the Reiches) promoting his expertise in pets in the form of advice books, Bishop also advertised the business of fellow immigrant Otto Lindemann, who specialized in cage making and protected his various innovations in the construction of bird cages with patents. Besides serving as testimony to the growing demand in the animals themselves, the biographies of these German immigrants offer some remarkable insight into "the emerging world of pet supplies and equipment" and the increasing professionalization of the pet trade as an expression of American modernity.

Focusing on the specific role of literary fiction and the functions of literary animals, *Roman Bartosch* discusses the ways in which the factual or perceived absence of wild animal life in an urbanizing American society correlated with fictional expressions of an animal presence and agency that was characterized by a "supposedly wild, untamed realness." While, over the course of the nineteenth century, the lived realities of human-animal relations were increasingly shaped by the interactions between humans and domesticated animal species in built environments, Bartosch's discussion of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) demonstrates how these

ever more urban realities provided the “affective and experiential foundation” for contemporary imaginings of wild animality and their fictional narrativization. Literary animals, Bartosch argues, populate these narratives in the guise of “ciferae” – a concept he takes from Tom Tyler –, as “real, if absent, creatures of flesh and blood” who also function as “markers of desire, affect, and symbolism” and whose peculiar textual agency remains inseparable from the historical context of their literary creation.

Olaf Stieglitz’ chapter deals with the cultural emergence of animal ‘star athletes’ in the context of American horse racing. As his chapter shows, this phenomenon was strongly interwoven with – if not indeed dependent on – the representational possibilities opened up by both the technology of photography as such and by its increasing importance in the growing, highly receptive media environment of the Progressive Era. Photographic visualizations of equine athletes such as Man o’ War were of a more than merely illustrative character and of crucial importance for the popularity of horse racing as a spectator sport. While the “dense photographic dispositive” of American horse racing was characterized by an arrangement of human gazes and by the desire of those humans invested in the sport (such as owners, jockeys or betting spectators) to gain information about the qualities and capacities of the respective horses, horse racing photography also portrayed the animals as individual and even exceptional beings whose strong visual(ized) presence at times overshadowed the importance and achievements of their human partners. As Stieglitz shows, horse racing photography thus both allowed for and relied on a distinct animal presence – the non-human athlete – at the heart of its modern narratives of competition and performance.

Completing the first section of the volume, *Michael Malay*’s discussion of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) demonstrates that the famous muckraking novel’s account of the horrid working conditions in the turn-of-the-century Chicago meatpacking industry invites a reading that not only highlights in unsparing detail the suffering of animal bodies in the Chicago stockyards but points to the interwovenness of a socialist and an ‘animal’ dimension in Sinclair’s critique of industrial capitalism. Sinclair, who spent seven weeks in the stockyards district prior to writing *The Jungle* and hoped that it would induce Americans to voice their outrage regarding the exploitation and mistreatment

of immigrant workers, refuted the idea that his novel was concerned with the “moral claims of dying hogs.” But, as Malay demonstrates convincingly, beyond or even in conflict with Sinclair’s intentions, such a transspecies perspective on the interconnected exploitation of both immigrant *and* animal bodies is in fact suggested by the narrative itself. Even though the novel “has mostly been read as a tale of humanity’s soul under capitalism” in which suffering and dying animals function as metaphors for the plight of the proletariat, this metaphoricity is challenged by the way in which Sinclair’s writing is suffused with – perhaps haunted by – the disturbing materialities of industrial-scale animal death he himself had witnessed. As Malay argues, Sinclair’s novel thus also serves as powerful testimony to the new (commoditizing) modes of seeing nonhuman creatures brought about by industrial modernity’s modes of production.

In the way it illuminates both the transformative effects of American modernity on the lives of animals and the interplay between human-animal relations and the social relations of power and inequality that shape *human* life in American society, Malay’s contribution functions as a bridge to the second section of the volume. The essays in this section are interested in how ideas about both the figure of ‘the animal’ and the specifics of different animal species have been co-constitutive of human social categories such as race, gender and class and how particular forms of human-animal relations have shaped interhuman relations in often problematic ways. From the infamous suggestion of sexual relations between black women and apes in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) to the animalization of black humans under slavery to the post-emancipation atrocities of lynching which, as an article quoted by anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells claims, was seen as an appropriate response to the “beastial [*sic*] propensities”⁹⁶ of African Americans no longer ‘kept in check’ by slavery – the history of white epistemic and physical violence against black people offers ample testimony to the discursive intertwinings of animality (or species) with race,

96 Ida B. Wells: Southern Horrors. Lynch Law in All Its Phases. In: Ead.: *Southern Horrors and Other Writings. The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–1900*, ed. by Jacqueline Jones Royster. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford / St. Martin’s 2016, pp. 46–68, here p. 59. For the intersections of animality and race, also see Mark S. Roberts: *The Mark of the Beast. Animality and Human Oppression*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP 2008; Christopher Peterson: *Bestial Traces. Race, Sexuality, Animality*. New York: Fordham UP 2013; Lundblad: *The Birth of a Jungle*.

sex and other categories that shaped (though in different ways) Euro-American perceptions of, and relationships with, non-white and indigenous peoples both in American society and on the North American continent more broadly. However, while animalized humans were usually relegated to a precarious position outside the hegemonic domain of Man, we shouldn't limit ourselves to a historical analysis and critique of this concept but also ask, as Alexander Weheliye does, "what different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from this domain?"⁹⁷ In a similar vein, given that the material practices of human-animal relations often figured prominently in differential constructions of the human – for instance, as markers of 'civilizational status' or gender difference –, we need to focus on these material practices not only with regard to the ways in which they informed dominative intersectional constructions of animality but also how they might have challenged or eluded them. This includes taking into account the role of nonhuman animals in these contexts not as passive objects of human knowledge production, hegemonic or otherwise, but as beings whose corporeal presence and agency could actively (re)shape human imaginings and discourses.

As *Brigitte Fielder* shows in the first chapter of the section, the dehumanizing institution and practices of chattel slavery as well as the rhetoric employed both in its defense and in its condemnation require careful attention with regard to the interplay and intersections of race and species. Focusing on dogs and their relationships with enslaved people as it was portrayed by antislavery writers, Fielder's insightful analysis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) demonstrates that taking into account the complexity and ambivalence of the relationships between enslaved people and animals allows us to draw a more complex picture of "how both oppression and resistance occurred in a landscape of not just human, but also human-animal relations." In the context of slavery, the dog had a polymorphous discursive and material existence, functioning as a racist rhetorical figure employed to relegate black people to the status of inferior beings (and

97 Alexander G. Weheliye: *Habeas Viscus. Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke UP 2014, p. 8.

to justify their being physically treated as such – ‘like dogs’) and as creatures of flesh and blood with whom they could have both antagonistic and affectionate relationships. While dogs often figured in abolitionist writing in the form of bloodhounds, instruments of terror used to violently re-enslave escaped black people and to prevent others from trying the same, they were also shown as companions of the enslaved, a potentially subversive relationship that was particularly dangerous in its suggestion that the canine allies of the slave system could also become friends with the enslaved.

Keridiana Chez illuminates the gendered politics of pet preference at the turn of the twentieth century by focusing on changing ideas about (the ‘character’ of) dogs and cats as well as the beneficial or detrimental effects of human relations with these species. While dogs were traditionally represented as masculine and associated with favorable qualities such as loyalty, honesty and obedience, the apparent unpredictability of cats, their insistence on bodily autonomy and seeming lack of affection for their human ‘masters,’ became part of a discourse of unruly or ‘pathological’ femininity-felinity in which the “interspecies pair” of woman and cat formed an “unhealthy affective economy.” As *Chez* argues, however, in the context of fin-de-siècle anxieties and concomitant shifts in the construction of gender, dominant representations of dogs and cats underwent a similar change: while, despite some more favorable and complex representations by fiction writers, the negative image of the cat persisted as a metaphor for the disruptive effects of modernity, the animal’s reviled independence and its lack of domesticability was appropriated for the construction of a different kind of dog – one that was more self-assertive and could function as the animal equivalent of a type of masculinity that successfully resisted the emasculating effects of ‘overcivilization.’ *Chez* article not only underlines the “entangled evolution” of discourses of gender and animality (in this case caninity and felinity) but also shows that in processes of “the gendering of the nonhuman” animals were never simply passive objects but “influenced human constructions [...], displacing narratives inscribed unto them back on human bodies.”

Concluding the second section of the volume, *Aimee Swenson* focuses on the significance of the Navajo-Churro sheep in the cultural life of the Navajo people of the American Southwest and their central role in the conflict between the Navajo and an expanding American settler society.

Originating from the Iberian Churra sheep introduced by sixteenth-century Spanish conquistadors, the sheep were quickly integrated into Navajo culture, ushering in a transition of the Navajo from a hunter-gatherer to a pastoral society. An adequate understanding of the breed's vital role in Navajo society requires us to consider not only the animal's sociocultural and economic centrality but also its genetic and anatomical composition as a unique embodiment of the "reciprocal, interdependent histories" of the Navajo and their sheep. The Navajo-Churro breed, Swenson argues, thus functions as a "historical witness" in that it reflects a specific biophysical historical existence of human-ovine partnership "in which human and animal continuously affect and co-shape each other." As a result of Navajo resistance to increasingly aggressive white encroachment, a violent 1860s military campaign led by Army colonel Kit Carson during which thousands of the Navajo's sheep were killed, and a failed attempt at imposing a sedentary farming lifestyle on them, they were finally forced onto reservations, with their remaining sheep today still being the target of forced stock reduction programs. Beyond its specific historical focus, Swenson's chapter thus also offers important insight into the role of animals and human-animal relations in conflicts between white settlers and indigenous peoples in settler colonial contexts.

The contributions that make up the final section of the volume address the significance of animality and human-animal relations in the history of American exploration and territorial expansion. With the rise of Enlightenment natural history in the eighteenth century, scientifically minded Americans like Jefferson became increasingly interested in exploring and classifying the natural and animal 'productions' (as they were frequently called, reflecting the predominantly utilitarian attitudes of the time) of the national domain as well as those regions of the continent that would or could become a part of it. Exploration was, of course, never an 'innocent' activity but in fact accompanied by at times excessive violence against nonhuman nature and animal life (not to mention its colonialist impetus). The famous ornithologist John James Audubon, for example, still widely regarded as a trailblazer for American conservationism, killed thousands of birds for the drawings and descriptions that make up his multi-volume *Birds of America* (1827–1838) and

Ornithological Biography (1831–1839).⁹⁸ Like those of his fellow naturalists, Audubon's expeditions and studies were dependent on animal death. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the focus of explorers and naturalists gradually shifted to the regions west of the Mississippi, and, whether they were aware of it or not, their individual expeditions, travels and adventures became part of a broader national (and nation-building) process with immense consequences. The concept of Manifest Destiny, coined by New York journalist John L. O'Sullivan in an 1845 article in the *Democratic Review* dealing with and encouraging the possible annexation of Texas by the United States, reframed earlier conceptions of American exceptionalism dating back to the colonial period in a more specifically territorial expansionist vein. While Manifest Destiny – especially in combination with an increasingly virulent 'Anglo-Saxonist' racism – no doubt represented its most aggressive articulation, American visions of a divinely preordained continental expansion 'from sea to shining sea' had already been anticipated by a host of earlier commentators in Jeffersonian times.⁹⁹ In combination with the dominant perception of a continental wilderness populated by wild beasts and 'savage' humans, none of whom had a justifiable claim to land that was awaiting its 'improvement' by white civilization, the relentlessness of territorial expansion had catastrophic consequences both for indigenous species and ecologies and the lifeways of indigenous societies.¹⁰⁰

98 For a recent critique of Audubon's status as conservationist icon, see the editor's introduction in John James Audubon: *The Missouri River Journals of John James Audubon*, ed. by Daniel Patterson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2016. As Christoph Irmscher argues, Audubon's texts were often "tension-packed stories [...] in which Audubon himself appears alternately as the killer and the savior, the destroyer and the preserver of birds." (Christoph Irmscher: *The Poetics of Natural History. From John Bartram to William James*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP 1999, p. xxiv.)

99 For the history of American 'Anglo-Saxonism,' see Reginald Horsman: *Race and Manifest Destiny. The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 1981. For expansionism in the Jeffersonian era, see Frank Lawrence Owsley / Gene A. Smith: *Filibusters and Expansionists. Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800–1821*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press 1997.

100 It was only with the emergence of the New Western history in the 1980s that the history of westward expansion was more seriously considered with regard to non-white, non-male, indigenous and environmental perspectives. See, for example, Patricia Nelson Limerick: *The Legacy of Conquest. The Unbroken Past of the American West*. New York: Norton 1987; ead. / Clyde A. Milner / Charles E. Rankin (eds): *Trails. Toward a New Western History*. Lawrence: UP of Kansas 1991.

Neill Matheson's chapter focuses on naturalist William Bartram and the influential account of his late-eighteenth-century travels in the American Southeast. While a significant amount of scholarly work has discussed the significance of Bartram as an early American nature writer and proto-environmentalist with a remarkably nonanthropocentric worldview, Matheson brings into view the more specific and hitherto mostly neglected question of Bartram's attitudes towards nonhuman animals. As Matheson shows in his discussion of Bartram's *Travels* and his lesser known essay on "The Dignity of Human Nature," the naturalist's writing is haunted by a tension between his frequently articulated concern for animal life and his inability to prevent animal death and suffering at the hands of his contemporaries in the context of a dominant cultural tradition in which nonhuman beings for the most part remained outside the sphere of ethical consideration. While Bartram laments the pervasiveness of violence as such – that is, among human as well as nonhuman beings –, it is his sympathy for the plight of animals who suffer human acts of violence and cruelty that distinguishes and isolates him from his contemporaries. As Matheson argues, it is precisely his helplessness and impotence in the face of this violence which also underpins his interspecies ethics.

With a focus on the antebellum period, my own contribution discusses the role of trans-Mississippi Western geographies in what I term the 'zooanthropological imaginary' of nineteenth-century American culture. Beginning in the early decades of the century, the environments west of the Mississippi and the forms of human and animal life associated with them became the focus of American imaginings of animality and humanity in a period in which traditional ideas about the boundaries between them were increasingly becoming unsettled. My chapter argues that contemporaries perceived and experienced Western bioregions as 'animal geographies' that were characterized by an exceptional animal presence and agency and that imposed, or encouraged, modes of human-animal relations that could differ significantly from the experiences in built or rural Eastern American environments. While for some contemporaries Western animal and human life (including the relations between whites and 'Indians') embodied the already popular idea of a relentless struggle for existence from which white, civilized Man would, or was supposed to, emerge victorious, for others the experience of the West instead highlighted the reality of the human being

as a living creature among others, with ethical implications sometimes acknowledged, sometimes denied. Antebellum Western environments thus functioned as imaginary and material spaces of ontological speculation and experimentation that played a significant role in pre- or proto-Darwinian conceptions of animality and humanity and the ethics of both human and interspecies relations.

Concluding the volume, *Andrew Howe* delves into the tragic history of the passenger pigeon, one of the irremediable casualties of territorial expansion and its often disastrous environmental consequences. While the American bison is the species that usually comes to mind in this context, unlike the pigeon the bison – an example of ‘charismatic megafauna’ that became nostalgically associated with the nation’s frontier past – was rescued from the brink of extinction and today is no longer listed as an endangered species. The existence of the passenger pigeon, in contrast, found its definite end in 1914 in the Cincinnati Zoo with the death of Martha, the last known living member of the species. Howe’s contribution illuminates the context and causes of the pigeon’s extinction as well as early responses to and attempts at explaining the rapid decline of a species which had numbered in the billions at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The history of the pigeon also sheds some light on American engagements with the possibility of a permanent disappearance of species (that is, with the concept of extinction), an idea that was only seriously considered by a minority of authors prior to the nineteenth century, because it “violated deeply held views about the overall stability and perfection of the natural world.”¹⁰¹ The passenger pigeon, Howe argues, functioned as a “flexible symbol, representing immigrants, settlers, and indigenous groups,” and the attention garnered in 2014 by the 100th anniversary of Martha’s death as well as the variety of writings about the pigeon – including a number of songs – seem to underline that its extinction, as Howe puts it, “continues to trouble the American consciousness.”

101 Mark V. Barrow: *Nature’s Ghosts. Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2009, p. 2.