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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/12442>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.12442

ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Michael Fuchs and Stefan L. Brandt, "Animals on American Television: Introduction to the Special Issue", *European journal of American studies* [Online], 13-1 | 2018, Online since 26 June 2018, connection on 08 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/12442> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.12442>

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- 1 Since its early days, American television has offered viewers a wide variety of animal characters.¹ From main characters such as Lassie (*Lassie*, CBS, 1954–1973), Mister Ed (*Mister Ed*, CBS, 1961–1966), and BoJack Horseman (*BoJack Horseman*, Netflix, 2014–) to secondary and tertiary characters such as the cat Lucky in *ALF* (NBC, 1986–1990), Data’s cat Spot in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (syndicated, 1987–1994), and the chicken and the duck in *Friends* (NBC, 1994–2004), animals have been regulars on American television. Of course, these animals play various roles in these and other fictional programs—agents driving the action forward, sidekicks to the human main characters, and little more than accessories or narrative backdrop. Most of the time, however—irrespective of whether they are companion animals or “wild” animals, live-action or animated—they seem to characterize and/or help viewers understand human characters.
- 2 For example, in the pilot episode of *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999–2007), mobster Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) suffers a panic attack while barbecuing at his son’s birthday party. In his first meeting with psychiatrist Dr. Jennifer Melfi (Lorraine Bracco), he suggests that the attack might have been the result of stress caused by feelings of loss—both losing control and losing his family. In addition, he tells her about a duck family who made their home in his swimming pool. Tellingly, when the ducklings fly away, he breaks down. A few days—and another collapse—later, Dr. Melfi and Tony return to the ducks: “What is it about those ducks that meant so much to you?” the psychiatrist wonders. With tears in his eyes, Tony explains, “I don’t know. It was just a trip having those wild creatures come into my pool and have little babies. I was sad to see them go.” “When those ducks gave birth to those babies, they became a family,” Dr. Melfi points out. Tony understands: “You’re right. That’s the link, the connection: [I was a]fraid I was gonna lose my family, like I lost the ducks.” The show here makes explicit that the ducks function as vehicles for human concerns; the duck family is a symbol for both of Tony’s families—his wife, mother, and children, on the one hand, and the mafia,

on the other—and the tensions between these two. The animals are used to anthropocentric ends. In other words, *The Sopranos* does not invite viewers to ponder these creatures as *animals*. Instead, the program makes explicit that these critters are primarily symbols rather than representatives of actual animals.

- 3 Although they might, at first glimpse, focus on actual companion animals and real-world experiences, documentary-style reality TV shows such as *Dog Whisperer with Cesar Millan* (National Geographic Channel, 2004–2011; Nat Geo Wild 2011–2012) and *My Cat from Hell* (Animal Planet, 2011–), likewise, primarily center on humans. Indeed, Millan's voiceover, which opens most episodes of *Dog Whisperer*, declares, "I rehabilitate dogs; I train people." This sentence spotlights Millan and implies that he has an understanding of dogs which exceeds the average human's and that he can impart this knowledge on the uninitiated. In *Dog Whisperer*, rarely is the dog the problem in the household, but rather guardians who fail to follow Millan's three principles of "pack leadership": "exercise, discipline, affection"—in that order. To be sure, by repeatedly emphasizing these three dimensions as key ingredients to a dog's happiness, the show does highlight companion animals' needs and desires, but, in the end, *Dog Whisperer* centers on humans and their inability to understand their nonhuman family members—and their needs.
- 4 While *Dog Whisperer* usually deals with "problem" dogs (and the titular dog trainer), the telling title of *My Cat from Hell* makes its focus clear—"help[ing] cat owners find the source of conflict with their furry friends," as the show's description on the Animal Planet website reads. In certain respects, *Dog Whisperer* and *My Cat from Hell* are mirror images of one another. Where Millan usually finds himself confronted with dogs who get little to no exercise, who know few to no rules, and who receive too much affection (especially in moments when they do something their human companions consider "wrong"), the cats featured in *My Cat from Hell* are often bored or their guardians reward unwanted actions, leading the cats to commit all sorts of transgressions (from the human point of view, of course). As the show's trainer, Jackson Galaxy, points out repeatedly throughout *My Cat from Hell*, all "problem cats" can be helped, if only provided with appropriate help from their guardians to alter their behavioral issues, medical concerns, or other types of mishandling in their homes. To ameliorate these domestic and other problems, the cat guardians are, as Diane Negra remarks in a piece for *In Medias Res* (2016), "called upon to cultivate and monitor the wellbeing of [their] pets" in an attempt to establish "interspecies harmony." More so than *Dog Whisperer*, *My Cat from Hell* episodes often highlight the need to purchase commodities required to properly engage (with) the cats, thus epitomizing the industry that has developed around our companion animals—in which both shows (and dog and cat trainers, in general) play no small roles.
- 5 A relatively recent outgrowth of the constantly growing pet industry is the premium cable television network DOGTV, launched in the United States on February 13, 2012. The official website hails DOGTV as "an audio-visual therapy tool for dogs who suffer from loneliness, boredom, separation anxiety or depression. When your dog is home alone or experiencing stressful situations, DOGTV offers scientifically-developed *content for dogs*. DOGTV provides *programming for your dog*" (our emphases). As a network purportedly geared toward dogs and their needs, DOGTV broadcasts different types of programs for lonely or (or, rather, "and/or") stressed dogs. Relaxation episodes present soothing sounds and calm images, typically featuring other dogs sleeping or relaxing,

while stimulation episodes show other dogs running around, playing, walking on the beach, and so on. The broadcaster's YouTube channel suggests that "[d]ogs love to watch DOGTV," showcasing clips of dogs getting all excited while watching the simulation videos, jumping around, attempting to catch balls that appear to be thrown in their direction, and trying to interact with the dogs they see on the screens.

- 6 In a way, the very premise of the channel appears to challenge John Berger's ideas about the human gaze controlling human-animal relationships, which has become all the more prevalent in the twenty-first century, as "our culture is moving increasingly toward a rhetoric of images, where most communicative acts occur through visual media" (Morey 41). Indeed, in the context of DOGTV, we human beings do not seem to look at dogs; and neither do dogs look at us; here, dogs look at other dogs on television. However, this conclusion would be too simplistic. After all, human technologies frame the dogs displayed on DOGTV, both during the process of recording the dogs and when they are shown on television. In addition, a quick search on YouTube suggests that dogs watching other dogs on television are the objects of the human gaze, too, as their human companions watch, photograph, and record dogs watching other dogs on DOGTV before offering the (audio)visual artifacts for consumption on various internet platforms. Randy Malamud has suggested that the resultant "visual cultural experience of animals is prone to be laz[y] and ... voyeuristic" (85). This lazy and voyeuristic engagement typifies "the deficiency in looking at animals in visual culture as compared to really looking at real animals," which "stems from the basic fact that viewers at the movies or surfing the net are ... comfortably ensconced, isolated, in their own world" (85). In this human-centered world, animals have "found a proper habitat ... in the recording devices of the technological media" (Lippit 25), as they come to inhabit dedicated documentary and nature channels such as the Discovery Channel, NatGeo Wild, and Animal Planet.
- 7 In our day and age, animals' spectral presences multiply across platforms. Indeed, as Cynthia Chris notes in *Watching Wildlife* (2006), "Turning on the television any day, one might flit from views of sharks off the coast of southern Africa to polar bears in Manitoba, rattlesnakes in Florida, crocodiles in Queensland, and pandas, real and replicas, in Sichuan Province" (loc. 66). She continues to explain that "[t]he images of animals and their habitats, natural or artificial, found through television, are representations of real places and the creatures that live there," but they are "selected, framed, edited, and interpreted ... according to an array of social forces and cultural contests over meaning" (loc. 66; loc. 61).
- 8 This constant imposition of meaning has defined the relationship between humans and the nonhuman world, in particular since the dawn of modernity (see Latour 10–12). Tellingly, in one of the first non-scientific books which addressed climate change, Bill McKibben emphasized that anthropogenic actions brought about the end of nature, as conceived by humankind: "We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it, there is nothing but us" (58). Indeed, "traditional approaches to nature and its conservation are no longer quite in sync with the environments we currently confront," Ursula Heise diagnoses in *Imagining Extinction* (loc. 255). In particular, McKibben's notion that "there is nothing but us" has taken on entirely new dimensions with the popularization of the concept of the

Anthropocene, which suggests the interrelation between human and nonhuman actors while simultaneously acknowledging the emergence of humankind as a planetary force. In addition, the notion that there *might* be nothing but us sooner rather than later has become an increasingly pressing anxiety of our age.

- 9 Confronted with the effects of the ongoing sixth mass extinction, scientists and artists increasingly try to imagine and understand nonhuman perspectives. Books such as Alexandra Horowitz's *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* (2012) and Carl Safina's *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel* (2016) have attempted to show the world as animals perceive them. The world of television has likewise sought to bring humans closer to animals. For example, National Geographic introduced crittercams in 2001. These small devices include a video camera and are mounted onto animal bodies. Crittercam claims to allow humans "to experience the world from an animal's point of view," the description of an exhibition based on collected footage suggests (Guarinello). Donna Haraway has opined that the camera, violently attached to the animal body and used as an extension thereof, promises "[i]mmmediate experience of otherness, inhabitation of the other as a new self, sensation and truth in one package without the pollution of interfering or interacting" (252). However, "rather than offering ... an animal's individual experience," Anat Pick has pointed out, crittercam "rehearse[s] early cinema's phantom ride—the mounting of a camera on a moving vehicle for the production of thrill." The technology, Pick suggests, cannot keep its promise, as the animal body is reduced to a mere vehicle for visual spectacle.
- 10 The discourses surrounding crittercam thus encapsulate the tension-loaded interrelations between the natural and the techno-cultural worlds—on the one hand, crittercam represents an attempt at seeing the world through animals' eyes; on the other hand, crittercam is imbricated within a techno-cultural framework shaped by humans. In his book *Ecologies of the Moving Image* (2013), Adrien J. Ivakhiv stresses that movies

rarely take up a single coherent position on the continuum of the human-animal relations. Rather, filmic representations of human-animal relations construct certain forms of similarity and difference, which viewers then take up in their own responses by moving along or projecting themselves within the space between the human and the animal, affectively or cognitively taking up positions, shifting positions, and approaching the boundary by identifying with a character ... or by retracting when faced with the prospect of its crossing. (loc. 5523)
- 11 Animal representations on television are, likewise, caught in contradictions, paradoxes, and inconsistencies. Critics have, for example, suggested that the "wild" animals featured in the reality television show *Call of the Wildman* (Animal Planet, 2011–2014) were captured before the scenes were shot and the scenarios in the show scripted. Even high-profile animal documentaries combine shots from animals recorded at different times and in different places (including zoos) to establish narrative cohesion. By the same token, cooking shows tend to displace the animal entirely, as Carol Adams concludes in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990): "Without animals, there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food" (20).
- 12 In the end, whether animals on display in a fictional program, for example, become stand-ins for humans or refer to actual animals in the "real" world depends on the way in which the individual viewer (influenced by the society surrounding her/him) actualizes their meaning potentials. This special issue of the *European Journal of*

American Studies sets out to explore these paradoxes. What do these animal representations in television reveal about America, Western societies, and the human condition, in general? Is television solely interested in how we *see animals* or do some programs, at least in some way, provide audiences with insights into the actual lives of companion animals or free-living animals? How close can television—the medium that seeks to bring the world into our homes—get to a nonhuman point of view? In trying to answer these and other questions, this special issue takes seriously Brett Mills' recent claim that "none of the things that existing studies of television do can be done unless animal representations are accounted for" (7).

- 13 The essays in this special issue thus broach different issues in connection with animal representations on American television; and they do so from various perspectives. Michael Fuchs's piece is the only one which examines non-fictional programming. In his essay, he explores the ways in which representations of bears in Animal Planet documentaries remediate horror film aesthetics. He argues that the bears in these documentaries function as monsters and thus induce both fear and sympathy. Indeed, death plays a major role not only in the context of Fuchs's contribution, but animal representations more generally. Accordingly, the interconnection between animals and death similarly undergirds the essays written by Brett Mills and Laurel Schmuck. Mills discusses a three-episode narrative arc in the animated sitcom *Family Guy* (Fox, 1999–) in which the show's dog character, Brian, is first killed and then resurrected. Mills suggests that the sitcom exploits animal death to teach the audience a lesson, which, effectively, turns animal death meaningless. Schmuck's essay takes a rather different approach to animal death, as her contribution focuses on animal representations inhabiting Los Angeles. Combining Akira Mizuta Lippit's seminal ideas about animal spectrality with Viktor Shklovky's theory of estrangement, Schmuck demonstrates how *BoJack Horseman* remembers the past of Los Angeles and the past of cartoon history, as the animated animals not only become a means to understanding the human, but also to remember the human and to remember the forever-vanishing animal. The final two essays turn to somewhat more uplifting topics. Primarily focusing on the relationship between the android Data and his cat in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Manuela Neuwirth highlights the various types of becomings that relationships between posthuman beings (encompassing both aliens and pets) can open up. Although Neuwirth sees potential in the franchise's utopian and inclusive premise, in the end, she remains critical of *Star Trek's* rampant humanism and attendant anthropocentrism. Whereas Neuwirth emphasizes the underlying human exceptionalism in a franchise aspiring to depict an inclusive utopia, Stefan Brandt's essay on the pioneering sitcom *Mister Ed* highlights ways in which the show's titular character challenges both anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. Discussing the show's aesthetics of dehierarchization, Brandt draws on Paul Wells's concept of "bestial ambivalence" and Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's notion of "liminal animal denizenship" to illustrate how Mister Ed figures as a shapeshifting character subverting the human/animal dichotomy.
- 14 In the end, this special issue seeks to raise the question of the animal in the context of European American Studies. After all, if American Studies shares a concern about "issues of knowledge and power" (Hall 42), the field must take seriously the animal question. Acknowledging "the intersections of race, nation, class, [gender, sexuality,] and species" (Adams and Donovan 7) will be a first step toward achieving that goal.

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NOTES

1. In critical discourse, the differentiation between “human animals” and “nonhuman animals” has gained traction. While we support the idea behind the discursive gesture of re-integrating *Homo sapiens* into the animal kingdom, including all animal species other than *Homo sapiens* under the umbrella term “nonhuman animals” discursively supports human exceptionalism just as much as the simpler differentiation between “animal” and “human,” which we will use in this introduction. We have left the use of these terms to the individual contributors.

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