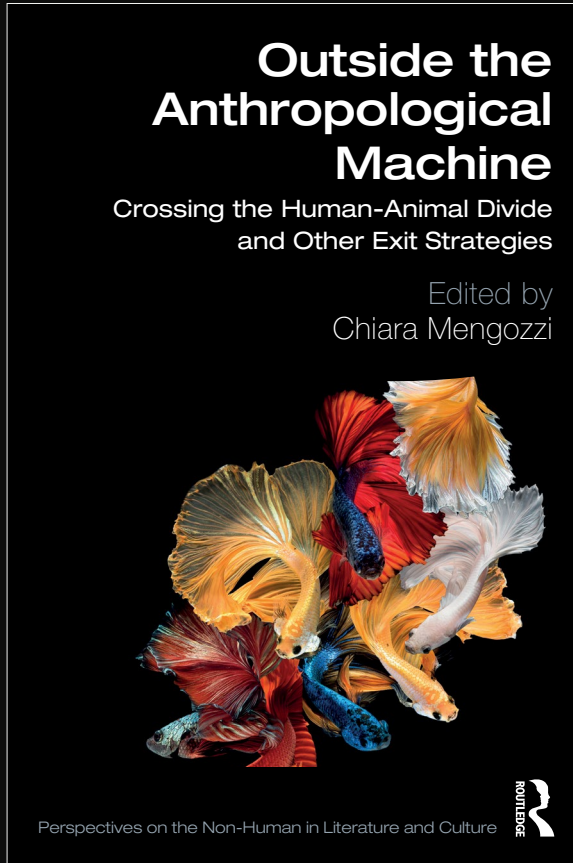


The Animals' Point of View

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Review of:

Chiara Mengozzi, ed. *Outside the Anthropological Machine: Crossing the Human–Animal Divide and Other Exit Strategies*. Perspectives on the Non-Human in Literature and Culture. London: Routledge, 2021. vii + 283 pp., 23 b/w ill. £104.00 (hb); £29.59 (pb, eB)

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Whatever happened to Giorgio Agamben in human-animal studies? After the translation and publication of his book *The Open* in 2003 it seemed as if his work was showing up everywhere in academic and political circles concerned with the social treatment of animals. At least in my experience, however, Agamben disappeared just as quickly, and one does not come across his work nearly as much in current writings in human–animal studies. According to Chiara Mengozzi’s new edited volume *Outside the Anthropological Machine*, such absence might have something to do with Agamben’s theorizations of the “anthropological machine”, the device with which he explains the production of human culture by way of its dualistic separation from the animal. Firstly, Mengozzi writes, “Agamben does not describe both sides of the anthropological machine, neglecting what consequences it implies for the life of animals”. And secondly, “he does not indicate what strategies one needs to adopt in order to render the machine inoperative” (1). Whether or not this truly is the case is a question for another time and place. But if human–animal studies has tended to foreground both the lived reality of animals and the everyday applicability of its political thought, then Agamben’s ideas may indeed look like a dead end.

Mengozzi goes on to raise another, potentially more deep-seated reason for Agamben’s disappearance from critical animal discourse: his theism. Mengozzi herself remains ambiguous on the issue. She is quick to point out that Agamben’s religious ruminations shouldn’t be dismissed too readily as they may very well provide a fruitful path of inquiry. Yet at the same time she reiterates blanket suspicions against the religious, “given that the three major monotheistic religions, far from questioning the anthropological divide, played a significant role in establishing the man-animal binary that allows the machine to function”; consequently, the essays she has curated for this volume engage “in a more secular approach, leaving aside the sphere of the religious” (2). Perhaps it is this general suspicion that also has distanced animal scholars from *The Open*. In my opinion, however, it would be worth revisiting this side of Agamben’s work, as it might provide some answers to the open questions that Mengozzi critiques.

Outside the Anthropological Machine takes a different route. In her introduction, Mengozzi makes a case for how we might render the anthropological machine inoperative by confronting humans with the otherness of animals. Yet, despite the prominence of Agamben in the book's title, readers coming to the volume in the hope of learning more about his work, theistically or otherwise, will be disappointed. Only four of the fifteen chapters engage with Agamben's work, and none do so in appropriate levels of depth. Mengozzi's introduction uses Agamben as little more than a stepping-stone. Even her characterization of the anthropological machine remains superficial at best, adopted as a general shorthand for the attempts of humans in the Western world to distinguish themselves from and raise themselves above other animals. Mengozzi might argue that the chapters *are* both the explication and unmaking of the anthropological machine. Yet nowhere does the concept of the anthropological machine serve as a critical tool of reflection that would allow us to evaluate the papers' propositions *as* exit strategies.

Agamben's absence is in and of itself not necessarily a problem, especially since the contributions to the volume and their collation are perfectly capable of standing on their own. Yet it is odd that a book titled *Outside the Anthropological Machine* contains only a handful of superficial and incidental mentions of its central concept. The book, it seems to me, makes visible here a tendency in human-animal studies discourses to reproduce rather than re-evaluate established narratives. Indeed, it is a commonplace in human-animal studies to start from the observation that animals have been forgotten and written out of human societies, and in the present volume the anthropological machine serves as a convenient shorthand for this narrative. However, while there may have been a (short) time in history when this observation had merit, I wonder whether human-animal studies has not undermined this very claim in recent years, as its scholars have brought to light a much more granular and complex recognition of the problem of interspecies relations throughout history. Agamben's disappearance from animal studies discourses, then, may equally be explained by the very explosion of research in human-animal studies since the 2000s, which in various forms might question the use of the anthropological machine as concept.

To be clear, not every book has to reflect on such questions — by exploring the perspective and experience of nonhuman animals, *Outside the Anthropological Machine* makes a different, but no less interesting and weighty contribution. However, by framing the volume's essays as exit strategies from Agamben's anthropological machine, it surrenders the possibility of questioning whether (post-)enlightenment society really is as dualistic as it appears to be, and consequentially whether such dualism might be the primary problem that we face. Instead, it seems time to re-evaluate and rewrite the stories we tell in human–animal studies.

The contributions in Mengozzi's volume provide ample starting points for such re-evaluation. As a way of disrupting our societal dealings with other animals, Mengozzi embraces the recognition that “animals are simultaneously like us and different from us (but each of them in their particular way) and that their life is neither inferior nor superior than [the lives of] humans” (3–4). This recognition represents a dual movement for Mengozzi. On the one hand, it requires us to recognize animal lives as being meaningfully and agentially engaged with the worlds in which they live. On the other, it necessitates an unlearning of our anthropocentrism. Mengozzi highlights three challenges that face us when we think through these problems: the relegation of humans from the centre to the “margins” of (historical) narratives; the need to refocus on the relational exchanges between humans and animals and how they aid or hinder “genuine encounters”; and the difficulties of leaving our own human world and entering the animals' world on their own terms (5). Following Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky, Mengozzi argues that the technique for tackling these challenges is a thoroughgoing defamiliarization of ourselves as “humans” and a concomitant familiarization with the world of the animal.

Overall, I found the chapters in the volume excellently curated in responding to these challenges. Each makes an original and thought-provoking contribution beyond its immediate empirical concerns while opening up new ways of thinking about and with animals. I would hope that *Outside the Anthropological Machine* be-

comes one of those edited volumes that stands the test of time. The volume's chapters focus on the by-now well-trodden track from the nineteenth century to the present. Across the fifteen chapters readers hear from both established and emerging scholars. While Europe provides the geographical centre of gravity, the volume balances perspectives on Western Europe with those from Central and Eastern Europe. Analytically, the book develops, as much as this is possible in a traditional edited volume, an arc from the potential of registering and representing the agency of animals in history and literature towards the possibility of adopting the animals' view in cinematography and video games. It is this analytic arc that makes the book more than the sum of its parts.

The first three essays — Éric Baratay's "A Giraffe's Journey to France (1826–1827): Recording the Encounter from the Animal's Point of View", Violette Pouillard's "Structures of Captivity and Animal Agency: The London Zoo, ca. 1865 to the Present Times", and Rachael L. Pasierowska's "Atlantic History from the Saddle: The Role of Horses in the Slave-Trading Atlantic World" — experiment, successfully to my mind, with the potential of using a variety of sources to reconstruct the lived experiences of animals in specific historical settings. Through a careful reflection on the challenge of understanding the viewpoint of an animal from human-authored sources, Baratay reconstructs how the nameless giraffe that was gifted to King Charles X of France in 1826 by Egypt's Muhammad Ali Pasha al-Mas'ud ibn Agha might have experienced the journey from Marseille to Paris. Baratay applies a scientific method to writing an animal's biography that builds on ethological reflections of the existing source material. Pouillard continues Baratay's concern with the experience of the animal but turns to considering the physical environment of captivity as a way to reconstruct the animals' experience of and agency in the zoo through the architectural changes of the monkey dwellings in the London Zoo. Pouillard reveals this story not so much as one of improvement, but as one of continual limitations on the animals' agency through their physical environment. Pasierowska, finally, turns our attention to the changes in the Atlantic World, both in the Northern and Southern hemisphere, during the age of slavery. Reading together a

range of different specific cases of horse-human relationships, she proposes that the history of the horse allows us to connect the histories of the various peoples and groups across the Americas and write a cross-continental and cross-social Atlantic history.

Michał Krzykowski's chapter shifts the inquiry to a theoretical reflection on the contradictions of a carnivorous lifestyle under capitalism, and as such is somewhat at odds with the other papers in the first section. Reading the advent of cultured meat as a radical disruption of the carnivorous foundations of modern Western society, the chapter makes the argument that cultured meat might help us move towards a world beyond animal suffering. Krzykowski's essay thus provides a bridge from the previous historical readings to the final two chapters of the section that explore, through literary analyses, how humans struggle to recognize the nonhuman in the world. In "Laika's Lullabies", Anita Jarzyna provides a comparative reading of different literary forms (newspaper stories, poems and a graphic novel) and their (in)capacity to capture the subjectivity of the famous Russian street and space dog Laika, highlighting the graphic novel as a genre that proves particularly well suited to recognizing Laika's tragic fate without overwriting her agency. In the second chapter, Chiara Mengozzi argues that existing analyses of Karel Čapek's 1936 novel *The War with the Newts* are symptomatic of an obstinate tendency within criticism to centre the world on the human, even or perhaps especially when confronted with an anti-anthropocentric novel such as this. To counteract such readings, Mengozzi offers a non-anthropocentric reading that suggests history will continue even without the presence of humans.

The volume's middle section switches the perspective to the interrogation of animal-human encounters and how they affectively interfere with our sense of a discrete, autonomous human self. In their essays, Maria P. Gindhart and Quentin Montagne trace these ideas in the zoo and the aquarium, respectively, as spaces that promise humans close encounters with animals. Gindhart continues in the wake of the previous two essays by showing how certain narrative and medial approaches construct and affect encounters between keepers, visi-

tors, and nonhuman animal inhabitants in the zoo. Montagne shifts the attention to the boundary between human spectators and animal attractions in public aquaria and traces the attempts to create an unmediated encounter with marine animals by trying (yet ultimately failing) to sublimate this boundary. Kari Weil's "Flesh, Fur, and Forgetting" departs from another institutionally framed encounter, namely the exhibition "No Life Lost" (2016) of taxidermied horse skins by Berlinde De Bruyckere and her collaboration with author J. M. Coetzee. In Weil's case, it is the sensation of touch, or indeed our shrinking from it, that creates the boundary between humans and animals. Weil shows how De Bruyckere's and Coetzee's languages reestablish a trust in touch that thereby opens up a memory of our shared animality. As Weil draws on touch as mutual bond between humans and animals, Eva Voldřichová Beránková's chapter recenters the potential of our encounters by showing how the literary Decadents of the Nineteenth Century positively embraced their disparagement as "strange animal species" by their opponents to "transcend the human-animal dichotomy" (185). Voldřichová Beránková argues that the Decadents not only advocated for the better social treatment of animals, but also used their literary works to explore animals' experiences as models of an alternative perception of the world.

The book's final section deepens the pursuit of this latter question, thus continuing a conversational line that stretches across the individual contributions of the volume. The first three chapters here—by Anne Simon, Kári Driscoll, and Jonathan Pollock—continue Voldřichová Beránková's engagement with literature and its many constructive and deconstructive strategies as a means to recognize the perspective of animals. Simon intriguingly explores how human language can serve to make legible the expressions, emotions, and affects of other animals. Since human language evolved not just in conversation with other animals, but from a shared communicative space with other animals, who rely equally on figuration and rhetoric in their lives, she argues that humans can in fact speak for other animals. "Human" language thus becomes a tool not just for human expression but for other animals' expressiveness as well. Driscoll in turn proposes that zoopoetics, by bringing to light the indetermi-

nacy of literary meaning, might be able to break the current totalizing conception of community as necessarily *human* and anthropocentric. Through an engagement with the voice of mice — or rather the painstakingly constructed absence thereof — in Franz Kafka’s “Josefine, the Singer or the Mouse Folk”, Driscoll shows how zoopoetics can interrupt the separating and unifying voice of this anthropocentric totality, opening it up to that what does not fit into this totality. Finally, Pollock reads the poem “Pretty” by Stevie Smith to show, via Uexküll, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, Guattari, and Ovid, how the beastly quality of language — in which “words can ‘become’ just as living organisms can” (241) — invokes ‘unhuman’ affective repertoires.

These literary analyses are complemented by the volume’s final two essays which explore how visual techniques engage with the perspective of other animals. In “Cameras That Pose as Animals” Concepción Cortés Zulueta analyses the deployment of animal perspectives in film. She highlights the defamiliarizing potential of animal point-of-view shots, which not only invite us to see through another’s eyes but compel us to consider that animals have their own irreducible perspective. This idea is pushed from passive viewership into a more active participation in Michael Fuchs’ essay on video games, “Playing (with) the Non-human”. In keeping with Mengozzi’s overall intention of the volume to embrace how animals are both like and unlike us, Fuchs reflects on the limitations of inheriting the experience of a bear as it is rendered by the development (and what he considers to be the failure) of the game *Bear Simulator*.

While I found all contributions highly readable and instructive, the great accomplishment of the volume is, in my view, the rich cross-connections that emerge between the essays. Thus, when Fuchs echoes Rosemary Sullivan’s words that “language is one of the tools we use to . . . explain and master nature” (269) — a claim that is convincing for Fuchs’s reading of *Bear Simulator* — one is instantly thrown back to Simon, Driscoll, and Pollock for further depth and potential alternative routes of inquiry. There are, of course, criticisms that can be levelled. As intriguing and enriching as Baratay’s mediation of ethological and historical perspectives is, for example,

I am not convinced that his approach avoids any anthropomorphism (37). Especially when it comes to inheriting the point of view of an animal, there is something disconcerting in the wholesale rejection of all forms of anthropomorphism, as this categorically denies the animal a large repertoire of experiences. Hence, I remain critical of the absoluteness of Baratay's concern, his juxtaposition of an allegedly non-anthropomorphizing scientific vocabulary with a supposedly unjustly anthropomorphizing literary approach. Some readers might also find Krzykowski's chapter too suggestive, sweeping, and meandering in its theoretical readings, while claiming a radicality it never fully clinches. And although hinting at the historical context in which her texts are situated, Jarzyna's reading of them could have reflected more upon the difference in historical situations in which they are placed and their temporal distance to the event. Similarly, Cortés Zulueta and Fuchs may too hastily assume that techniques like POV and first-person simulation *are* animal perspectives in the first place. Despite the fact that these essays ultimately judge these techniques as failures, more time could have been spent reflecting on what it means for a human viewer to receive the offer of an alternative, nonhuman perspective. But these are critiques that build on the achievements of the essays, and they thus point to how the volume as a whole broadens and advances our understanding of animal-human relations and the place of literature within them.