Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini (eds)
Animal Encounters
(Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009)

There is no question, the animal is *en vogue* and animal studies are almost *de rigueur*. Cultural theory, this strange beast, has always moved in twists and turns (theoretical, linguistic, cultural… turns) and it seems that animality is one of the most recent examples, following important interventions by influential figures like Haraway and Derrida. One good indicator that the academy has thoroughly embraced the "animal turn" is a recent guest column, "Why Animals Now?" in *PMLA* 124.2 (2009).

In many respects, turning towards animals is the logical outcome of political advocacy – i.e. speaking up for the equality of the "other" and creating a space for articulating his, her, or indeed, its difference. In this sense, the animal or non-human other, is the latest other in a long line of others who have "voiced" their rights towards just treatment, equality and respect, by "articulating" their difference. So, after gender, sex, race, age… now, species, or "speciesism" has become the ultimate and most fundamental form of inequality, "racism" or prejudice to be redressed. This is, in the main, a radicalisation of the "politics of representation", in which the "nonhuman" in all its forms is now implicated. A major problem, of course, is that the nonhuman in general, and animals in particular, "really" (i.e. physically) can't speak for themselves, which raises the tricky question of anthropomorphism: can humans really speak on behalf of nonhuman animal others? Even the term "nonhuman", in fact, poses a problem because it tends to presuppose a human norm, essence or truth from which all nonhuman forms differ.

But there is also another dimension to the question of "why animals now?" The obvious connections are, on the one hand, the ongoing and maybe even accelerated physical disappearance of animals under the conditions of modernity. The erosion of what is left of so-called "natural habitats", looming global environmental crises, which will hit animals first, and the radical segregation between pets and animals as "meat products" or exotic attractions, are all part of this disappearing process. On the other hand, maybe more cynically but also more radically, in times of genetic "breeding", boundaries between human, animal and machine are being eroded, questioning traditional "purities" and provoking new utopias of hybridity and anxieties of purification as a result. This has been Donna Haraway's argument ever since her "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), right up to her "Companion Species Manifesto" (2003) and *When Species Meet* (2008). As Rosi Braidotti put it: "the animal has ceased to be one of the privileged terms that indexes the European subject's relation to otherness" (*PMLA* 124.2: 526), which (according to Deleuze & Guattari) means that "in turning into human-animaloid hybrids, we are becoming animal" (*ibid.*) and are, consequently, threatened with the same disappearance as "they" are.

What makes Tom Tyler's and Manuela Rossini's collection, *Animal Encounters*, so refreshing is that its main focus is *not* – at least not primarily – on representation of nonhuman animal others, the problem of anthropomorphism and questions of morality or rights, but, as the title says, on "encounters". These encounters are "agonistic" in their "mutual productive provocation", between humans and animals and between disciplines. The editors have divided the volume into sections dealing with "potential", "mediate", "experimental", "corporeal" and "libidinal" encounters respectively. In the first section, the emphasis is on a critique of the standard criticisms of anthropomorphism in the encounter between humans and (other) animals. Potentiality in fact wants to express the opposite of anthropomorphic closure. All too often the fact that humans cannot possibly know what it is like to be a bat (cf. Thomas

Nagel's famous argument) has been used to foreclose the potentiality of a true encounter between humans and others, an encounter which nevertheless may do justice to the respective "singularities" and peculiar abilities and characteristics of the two parties involved. This is the stance Tom Tyler takes up in his introductory contribution. Anthropomorphism only really becomes problematic when it supports an anthropocentric approach, which supports a "hierarchy", or human "pre-eminence" and results in a kind of "species narcissism". However, anthropocentrism, is more difficult to avoid than might be expected, as Pamela Banting explains in her essay about animal "textuality". In claiming that "nature" is already a textual and therefore culturally mediated concept, poststructuralism and even some posthumanist theories often remain captured within an uncritical, anthropocentric universe of signification. Banting does not argue against a poststructuralist notion of textuality but rather for an acknowledgement of the fact that "natural" marks (such as hoof marks or paw prints, for example) and textual meaning are co-extensive. She turns to examples of nature writing (by Sid Marty and Andy Russell) to show that there is more to "reading wilderness" than just naïve anthropomorphism, especially so, when "reading for life" becomes a question of survival.

The section on "Mediate Encounters" develops from the observation that animals are mostly absent from modern human environments, a "distancing of humans from other animals" that leads to an estrangement which "makes it all the easier for humans to dominate, subject and mistreat individual animals and indeed entire species". Postmodern "irony" and critique have not really changed this fundamental trend towards a heavily mediated nature of most of our relationships with animals. The two contributions in this section, "Post-Meateating" by Carol Adams and "Americans do Weird Things with Animals" by Randy Malamud, come like virtually all contributions in this volume, from well-known authors and proponents for a "genuine anthrozoological understanding". Adams revisits her claim, made in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2000), that behind every meal of meat lies an absence in the form of the death of a nonhuman animal whose place the meat has taken. This separation or absence is what ultimately serves to legitimate meat-eating. While under postmodern conditions some animals indeed seem to reappear, Adams argues that this predominantly media-driven "sympathy" has substituted a "cultural referent" for the absent referent of really suffering, real animals. It might even have increased the distance between animals and humans further by adding another "layer of denial". Malamud's argument, on the other hand, focuses on the "commercially-powerful resource-intensive anthrozoological perversities" that drive contemporary consumerist animal fetishism. Malamud's ecological conscience is prompted into action by, amongst many other examples, a series of photographs called "Perishables" by Pinar Yolacan, which show old women wearing clothes made from animal parts, like for example, a "necklace" made of chicken breast fillets. He summarizes his reaction thus: "I am ecologically offended by the pervasive failure of human culture… to acknowledge with any serious engagement the integrity, the consciousness, the real presence, of other animals in our world" and instead invokes "a posthumanist rejection of the fantasy of human omniscience with regard to animals".

The third section, with essays by Robyn Smith and Donna Haraway, focuses on the laboratory as a place for "experimental encounters" which, maybe surprisingly, complicate a "normative account" of what happens to or with animals in lab research. The main claim here is that agency is not always distributed in entirely predictable ways, i.e. active (human) and passive (animal). Instead, both Smith and Haraway attempt to show that "human and nonhuman animals, as well as machines, are woven together in an instrumental economy in which 'we' live in and through the use of one another's bodies". In this, both essays underpin the overall argument of the volume against human "exceptionalism". While Smith focuses on "Rat

Feeding Experiments in Early Vitamin Research" as an example of how scientists' selves and animal subjects are implicated in the process of the encounter with the "as yet unknown", through the "suspension of identity" (113), Donna Haraway elaborates further on her concept of "response-ability" in human/animal interaction. Haraway's essay in terms of theoretical-conceptual work is certainly the centre-piece of the volume. She argues for animal response-ability, i.e. the ability of animals in all their worlds, including laboratories, to respond and to interact ("responsibility is a relationship crafted in *intra-action* through which entities, subjects and objects, come into being"). With regard to acknowledging and doing justice to animal response-ability, instrumentality is, in fact, not the real (or only) problem as long as there is what Haraway calls a "responsible sharing of suffering". She follows both Bentham's famous argument against animal cruelty on the basis of sentience and Derrida's and Levinas's radicalised notion of "responsibility" as, in principle, "incalculable", to critique the logic of sacrifice that underlies most humanist notions of the relation between humans and animals (i.e. sacrifice as "legitimised killing", to be differentiated from "murder" and the commandment "Thou shalt not kill", which is only applicable to humans). Instead, Haraway puts forward an alternative "commandment", namely "Thou shalt not make killable", to highlight the inevitability of killing (under certain circumstances) and the necessity of "learning to share other animals' pain non-mimetically". Haraway's notion of animal response-ability is thus instrumental to her political aim of achieving "multi-species flourishing": "we are face-to-face, in the company of significant others, companion species to each other. That is not romantic or idealist, but mundane and consequential in the little things that make lives", she claims.

Laurie Shannon and Jonathan Burt bring some historical depth into the question of the materiality or "corporeality" of human and animal encounters. Shannon focuses on the early modern sense of "cross-species relatedness" between humans and animals as part of an alternative and pre-evolutionary, pre-Darwinian history of "human/animal connectedness". Anatomy, in its gradual contestation of an analogy between human and animal bodies, as Shannon shows in her analysis of Vesalius, Harvey and Burton, played an instrumental part in "separating human from animal forms" and thus contributed to the establishment of human exceptionalism. Jonathan Burt, on the other hand, focuses on the 20th-century rise of "posthumanism" and its relation to "animal history". Hybridity, as one of the defining features of posthumanism, all too often focuses on the blurring of the human/nonhuman boundary, according to Burt, while animal/machine hybridity is downplayed (despite or maybe because of the fact, that it is, in scientific terms, the more important field of experimentation).

Susan Squier and Steve Baker in their contributions to the "domestic encounters" section, write about chicken raising and contemporary animal art, respectively. In "Fellow-Feeling", Squier tracks the notion of empathy and intimacy through some women's stories about their experience as chicken farmers, in search of a possible economy based on "fellow-feeling" between humans and animals, and society, understood as "feeling with others". Baker, in his essay, takes his cue from Lucy Kimbell's "Rat Fair" at Camden Art Centre and her related "performance lecture" on "One Night with Rats in the Service of Art" (2005), which started off as a research project into "the ways in which rats get enmeshed in human evaluation cultures". In analogy to Adams's idea that behind every piece of meat lies the absent referent of the death of a nonhuman animal, our vaccinated and medicated bodies hide the suffering and death of billions of lab animals. Baker's essay, by analysing Kimbell's aesthetic "rat performance", raises questions about how art contributes to our cultural knowledge of animals and how the use of living animals in contemporary art can play a positive role have in this process.

The final section on “libidinal encounters” contains essays by Monika Bakke and Manuela Rossini. Both engage with “theories, stories, histories and practices that foreground the fleshly entanglement of organisms”. In fact, they tackle the often repressed sexual aspect of human-animal encounters and the androcentric and anthropocentric frameworks of desire and sexuality that rule Western morality. “The Predicament of Zoopleasures: Human-Nonhuman Libidinal Relations” looks at a cultural shift from “bestiality” to “zoophilia” (or *zoe*-philia) and “zoosexuality” as part of a history of sex that favours “the feelings, emotions and pleasures experienced by individual animals of all kinds”. Controlling experiences of pleasure is a powerful tool for establishing social order but it also plays an important role in the construction of the human/animal boundary. While exploitative pleasures and the consumption of animals and their products are legitimate, erotic pleasure, both for the human and the animal in a libidinal encounter between the two – always an object of fascination and repulsion – has been severely punished throughout history. Bakke claims, however, that zoosexual attitudes reveal a “significant subversive potential” and that the underlying zoophilia offers “an alternative to phallogocentric models of eroticism”. Similarly, Rossini argues, in her reading of Paul di Filippo’s *A Mouthful of Tongues*, that in a posthumanistic world, cross-species sociality offers a “radical alternative to the dominant cultural imaginary” in the form of Haraway’s notion of “naturecultures”, multiplicities or Deleuzian “assemblages” and networks, rather than identities. What posthumanism and feminism share, according to Rossini, is an attempt to take animal encounters seriously and to think beyond binary oppositions (e.g. human-machine, human-animal, nature-culture, man-woman, heterosexual-homosexual). Posthumanist feminism, or as Ian Callus and I have argued, “critical posthumanism” in general, as opposed to, what Rossini refers to as, “cybernetic” or “popular” posthumanism, emphasises the necessarily “messy” materiality and embodiedness that arises out of the gradual dissolution of these boundaries. Rossini sees some of these principles at work in di Filippo’s “ribofunk” (from “ribosome” and “funk” – in opposition to Gibson’s “cyberpunk”) and relates these to feminist work in developmental systems theory by Susan Oyama. She expresses her confidence in the future of the “humanities morphing into the posthumanities before long”, which will be dealing with “the complex entanglements between human and nonhuman actors, things and institutions” and the “subjectivities and new life forms emerging from these encounters”.

The prototypically enacted and analysed animal encounters in this volume impress through their variety and individuality. The quality of each single contribution, the substantial number of leading figures in the field of animal studies and the coherence of the overall project of “destabalising human exceptionalism” make this volume a major intervention within the current debate about the changing relationship between humans and other animals and provides an impressive survey of the positions people have taken up and the diversity and dynamic of this interdisciplinary field. *Animal Encounters* does not only strengthen the cause for the animal turn, but helps turning the “animal question” into a major twist within cultural theory and thinking about and with animals in general.