Review: Georgette Leah Burns and Mandy Paterson eds. *Engaging with Animals: Interpretations of a Shared Existence.* Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2014.

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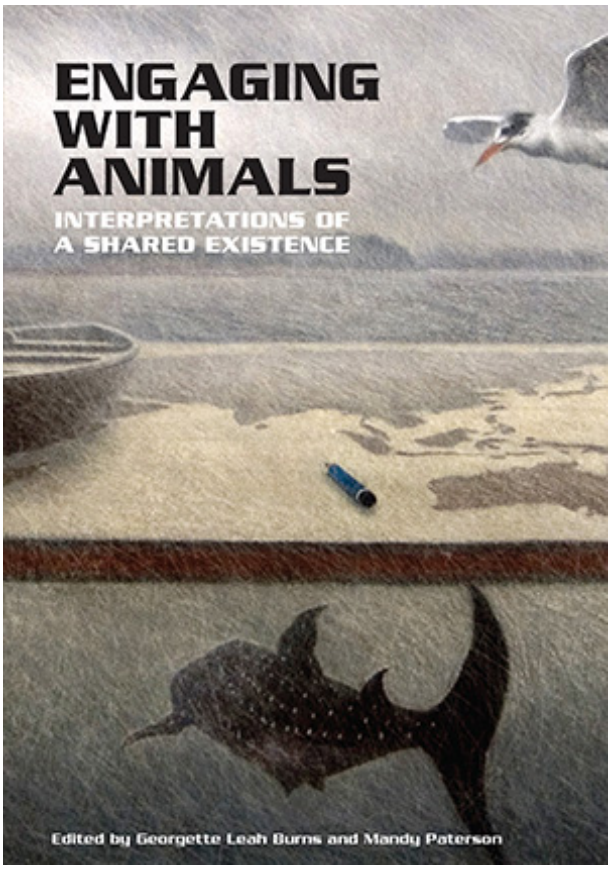
One of the most valuable aspects of collections based on Animal Studies conference papers is the way the essays reflect and display how far the field has developed at a specific time. This is a vibrant, fast-growing inter-, trans- and cross-disciplinary area of study and the essays in collections over the last 10 years indicate the enormous range of topics, perspectives and approaches such studies can take. In the case of the five biennial conferences held by the Australasian Animal Studies Association (AASA), formerly the Australian Animal Studies Group, the papers presented indicate not only the evolution and variety of focuses and issues dealt with, but also the development of disciplinary or thematic content, although each conference has been open to papers on just about any topic related to animals.

Engaging with Animals: Interpretations of a Shared Existence contains a selection of papers from the fourth AASA biennial conference held in Brisbane in 2011. This conference seemed to have a greater number of papers with a practical point of view or related to hands-on experience of animals than previous conferences. There was a contingent emphasis on ethics and other relevant issues and papers often concentrated on expressly Australian themes and concerns. Edited by the conference organisers, Leah Burns and Mandy Paterson, the book reflects this emphasis in its title, which puts the focus on human *engagement* or relations with animals. But it is only somewhat evident in the scope of the essays and the three sections into which they are divided: 'Attitudes, Ethics and Interactions', 'History, Art and Literature', and 'Animal and Human Welfare'. The arresting cover image also sidesteps obvious interpretations of the idea of a

'shared existence' with its references to global and environmental anxieties and its brooding, even ominous, tones. The collection contains a majority of essays by women, a trend that certainly seems to be on the increase in Animal Studies in Australia.



The essays in Part 1 'Attitudes, Ethics and Interactions' include Leah Burns' 'Anthropomorphism and Animals in the Anthropocene', which looks at the role of anthropomorphism in this current age, the importance of environmental ethics and the concept of interspecies and ecocentric ethics as a necessary way forward. Burns argues that judicious anthropomorphism offers a way for humans to relate positively with nonhuman animals through

a reciprocal engagement that recognises similarities rather than dwelling on differences. In doing so a connection – or reconnection – between human and nonhuman animals is forged, leading to a relationship based on an ecocentric, interspecies ethics that offers some hope to counter the negative impact of humans so evident in the Anthropocene.

Nicholas Malone and Ally Palmer's 'Ethical Issues within Human-alloprimate Interactive Zones' presents an anthropological perspective on human-animal interactions, calling for an 'ethically grounded' anthropology (21), particularly where the sub-fields of biological anthropology and primatology are concerned, as well as a reconsideration of humankind's relationships with the natural world. An essay 'On Rats, Good Science and Openings to Relatedness' gives Simone Dennis the opportunity to explore human-rodent relationships through the ideas of scientists and philosophers such as Heidegger, Bacon and, more recently, Acampora. Through interviews with 312 scientists, Dennis challenges the assertion made by Acampora that there is an essential detachment between scientists and the rodents they use. In doing so she outlines the complexities of the relationship between the scientist and the rats, where there is an acknowledgment by the scientists of a kinship with the rats, even as they engage in a powerfully dominant role that involves the harming and killing of the rats. Sandra Burr focusses on perhaps the most familiar human-animal relationship – the companion animal – but she explores the more controversial idea of sexual relations between human and nonhuman animals. Burr uses the community response to a scandal surrounding an exposé of an Australian footballer simulating sex with a dog, as well as references to bestiality in popular culture including Goldsworthy's novel *Wish* to discuss what she perceives as a shift from just physical concerns for the welfare of animals, to a more nuanced approach that acknowledges 'the rights of animals to have their dignity preserved' (54).

Sophie Fern, Kate Nash and Elizabeth Leane examine 'Encounters with Antarctic Animals in ABC's *Catalyst*' in an excellent example of interdisciplinary Animal Studies writing. Antarctica has no indigenous human population (similar to islands such as Mauritius and the Falkland Islands before colonial occupation) and even now has no permanent inhabitants, so experience of the continent's wildlife is primarily dependent on visual texts. Fern, Nash and Leane concentrate

on the representation of two animals native to this icy place: penguins and invertebrates, as they appear in the Australian TV program *Catalyst*. The idea of 'charisma' is the focus of this exploration because this idea has implications for engendering concern for endangered animals by enlisting public support for conservation. While work on wildlife documentaries is mentioned, it is the clear, concise definition of the meaning of the word 'charisma', so often used in scientific circles, which is a feature of their paper. The authors cite Lorimer[1], who outlines three 'types' of charisma – ecological, aesthetic (and within this 'cuddly' and 'feral' that appeal to humans in different ways) and corporeal – that show clearly how *Catalyst* 'manipulates' its audience's sympathies (76-77). Statements in the essay are supported by research findings from science and social science that bring a strong, revelatory aspect to its conclusions. It is a fascinating analysis that shows how the TV series deploys various forms of nonhuman charisma in its depiction of both penguins and invertebrates, such as krill. The authors conclude that *Catalyst* is teaching its viewers 'new and diverse ways to acknowledge the appeal of other creatures' (89).

Part II of the collection, titled 'History, Art and Literature', begins with Jill Bough's 'The Donkey and Mr Simpson: Remembering the Donkey in the Anzac Legend'. Bough unpacks the story, well known to many Australians, of work done in rescuing the wounded during the WWI campaign at Gallipoli by an Australian stretcher-bearer, John Simpson, and the little donkey known (amongst other names) as Murphy. Bough describes how the story quickly took hold of the collective imagination at the time, with the donkey's role echoing biblical narratives with the real animal and the symbolic beast becoming blurred such that differentiating fact from fiction can be difficult. One of the most interesting parts of the essay is the comparison of the various memorial sculptures of Simpson and his donkey, which Bough suggest reflect the changing attitudes of humans to animals over the decades. While unfortunately not reproduced in the collection, Bough describes how the most recent sculpture, which was created by Robert Hannaford in 2012, places increased emphasis on an equal standing between Simpson and

[1] Lorimer, J. (2007) 'Nonhuman Charisma'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 25: 911-32.

Murphy. She points out that Murphy was the first animal in Australia to be formally recognised for wartime service, eventually being awarded the RSPCA's Purple Cross in 1997. While Bough does not discuss the issue of animal agency in the co-opting or coercion of donkeys as participants in war, she nonetheless points to the importance of acknowledging the part played by Murphy and other donkeys in helping the men deal in various ways with this brutal campaign.

In 'Howling, Haunting and the Symbolic Dingo,' Amanda Stuart describes how artists of the late colonial era depicted dingoes in pictorial newspapers. Like thylacines, who were rarely seen in the wild, carnivores such as the dingo were convenient victims of the colonial imagination, especially in relation to sheep. Stuart rightly identifies the blatant stereotyping that occurred and also discusses Merryl Parker's work on the significance of the dingoes' howl. While the examples and opinions Stuart cites are interesting, the essay would have been stronger if she had drawn them together into a decisive statement and her own assessment or opinion had come more to the fore. She might also have set the dingo alongside other species at the time and even *over* time to place its depiction in a wider context and formed some conclusion from the result. However, in terms of human experience in colonial Australia, Stuart does achieve this.

Anne Taylor is an artist whose essay deals with liminal creatures such as microscopic marine life, invisible life forms and deep sea species – animals remote from our daily lives or even from accessible representation. Her essay 'Animal Approximations: Depicting Cryptic Species' locates the author's own artwork within the context of a long history of depictions of sea creatures, and in particular those that tend to be overlooked due to their small size, fragile bodies, or inaccessible habitats. Through a description of the works of artists and illustrators since the sixteenth century, Taylor outlines the importance of making visible these mostly invisible creatures, such that we better acknowledge their importance and their vulnerabilities, and our own duty to take account of these creatures in our ethical sphere when it comes to human-animal relations. She concludes with a discussion of her own artworks, which, driven by ecofeminist concerns, depict humans interacting with the creatures of these submerged worlds. Taylor argues that the visual arts play a key role in developing a consideration of these often overlooked animals. Through the creation of her images she aims to prompt a consideration of the human impact upon the oceans and the myriad animals that inhabit them.

In 'Linguistic Anthropomorphism: *Timbuktu*, *The Whistler* and *The White Bone*' Sally Borrell gives an articulate assessment of three examples of fiction and how they deal with animal voices in different ways – that is, fiction that explores 'what the worldviews of other species might be by according language to nonhuman animals' (149) – and provides an effective means of opening up questions about animal subjectivity (149-50). Borrell initially discusses what is often perceived as the 'obstacle' of anthropomorphism and investigates its meanings, implied and otherwise. She then shows the specifically canine perspectives presented in Paul Auster's *Timbuktu*, where animal language is used to give a dog's eye view on human-animal relations, and Stephanie Johnson's *The Whistler* which employs it to 'draw these into question' (164). On the other hand, Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* shows us the limits of our knowledge to promote ecological responsibility. The idea of linguistic anthropomorphism pervades this essay, and Borrell concludes that it is the commonalities between these texts that provide insight into how it works. For example, both Auster and Johnson use humour, while all three texts use otherness, in terms of an animal's heightened sensitivity, memory and clairvoyance, to show 'the importance of creative licence in asking readers to countenance linguistic anthropomorphism' (164).

Part III 'Animal and Human Welfare' begins with Mandy Paterson's exploration of the question 'TNR (trap-neuter-return): Is it a Solution for the Management of Feral Cats in Australia?' First she presents a good outline of the various positions stakeholders assume on feral cats and then takes a position herself: she suggests these interested parties need to talk. Her acceptance of the 'problem' regarding introduced and native animals is refreshing. She points out facts that make an easy answer to the issues involved difficult to find: paradoxically, neutered cats live longer, the presence of cats may not really be a problem (they control mice and rabbits) and it is not just cats who are responsible for reducing native wildlife, but other animals as well. In addition, State laws differ – in one it is an offence to abandon a cat, in another it is unlawful to release a cat (that is, a 'pest') into the wild. Most research Paterson quotes from divides cat populations into 'closed' and 'open' – urban cats belonging to a closed population – while in fact most of her discussion centres on the issue of feral cats in the Australian bush. Her conclusion is that there is no ecological benefit from neutering and returning these cats to the bush, but that the practice does reduce or maintain a population and

is considered welfare-conscious, although there is no immediate benefit for wildlife. Paterson's essay is thought-provoking and a useful contribution to the place where ecological problems intersect with Animal Studies.

The section continues with Sally Healy's exploration of 'Animal Farming in Australia: Consumer Awareness, Concern and Action'. This chapter details the results of a survey of over 800 Australians on the impact that their level of awareness of farming practices has on their consumer choices in purchasing animal-based foods. With the rise of ethical consumerism and current debates about what should constitute 'free range' when it comes to egg production, this is a timely study which indicates a high degree of concern for the welfare of animals in agriculture and a confusion over how to make ethical purchasing decisions due to a lack of transparency over the production methods used.

Clare McCausland's 'A Utilitarian's Argument against Animal Exploitation' is a fitting follow-on to Healy's chapter in its attention to the commercial exploitation of animals. In this essay McCausland takes up a challenge made by abolitionist Gary Francione (2010) as to whether utilitarianism can argue against the property status of animals. Francione suggests that if it can then it should consequently defend abolitionism, at least to some degree. McCausland makes a well-considered and cogent argument in support of the common ground of these two philosophies in their endorsement of a need to end the commercial exploitation of animals.

The collection closes with the chapter 'Emotions in Animals' where Nicky McGrath and Clive Phillips focus on an issue critical to public concern about animal welfare. This essay presents an overview of the research into emotions in animals, including how emotional states are defined, what their purpose is, what effect they have, what the implications are for animal welfare, and how to measure emotions in nonhuman animals. In detailing the differing research conclusions regarding the study of emotions in animals, the authors demonstrate both the complexity of our fellow creatures and the difficulty in establishing irrefutable evidence of the nature of their emotional lives. We clearly have a way to go before any consensus can be reached, but the chapter provides a valuable summary of the various methodologies available. This is a fitting conclusion to this collection, putting the sentient, feeling animal at the forefront, while acknowledging the difficulty in coming to an agreement about the emotional lives of the animals with whom we share this existence.

Engaging with Animals will be eagerly sought by those who have been involved in the grass roots of Animal Studies in Australasia, as well as by international scholars involved in this growing field. The thirteen essays that comprise the book display the fascinating variety of topics that are emanating from Animal Studies conferences and exemplify the value of collections such as this. The book contains a number of colour illustrations that will add to a reader's enjoyment and understanding of the essays. The citation lists at the end of each essay seem comprehensive and they are also invaluable for readers in a relatively new field, as is the index. The collection will hopefully achieve the editors' aim to promote understanding and encourage new ideas about how our complex relationships with other animals can be developed and nurtured.