

Conference Report

The Factual Animal: Audiovisual Representations of Real Other-than-Human Animals

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The international conference ‘The Factual Animal: Audiovisual Representations of Real Other-than-Human Animals’ was held from November 29th to December 1st, 2023, at the Faculty of Philology, Translation and Communication of Universitat de València, in Spain. Co-organised by the CULIVIAN (‘Animals in Literary and Visual Cultures’) research group at Universitat de València, the Department of English and German, and the Department of French and Italian, the event brought together a wide range of researchers, scholars and activists interested in the field of (Critical) Animal Studies.

The conference focused on the representation of *real* other-than-human animals in visual and audiovisual mediums (documentaries, movies, social media, photography, etc.), but also in other forms of cultural devices that *frame* animals in specific ways (zoos, museums, and other spaces of animal exhibition). Discussions covered an extensive variety of topics, ranging from animals as entertainment to audiovisual activism to engagement of viewers with animals in media. Due to the large number of participants, the talks were run in concurrent sessions, organised according to topics.

Likewise, keynote speakers from various fields added very diverse perspectives to the discussions. Randy Malamud, taking the expression *busy as a bee* as a starting point, reflected on the presence of animals in our everyday language. World-renowned photojournalist Jo-Anne McArthur further enriched the discourse by introducing the audience to the world of animal photojournalism and visual storytelling. Claire Parkinson tackled the topic of so-called ‘dangerous dogs,’ particularly pertinent amidst the ongoing ban on these animals in the United Kingdom. With an excellent presentation, Brett Mills explored the portrayal of animals in au-

diovisual media, notably shedding light on the case of the horse Sallie Garner. Lastly, Paula Casal extensively examined the issue of animal captivity, focusing on great apes, elephants, and dolphins.

It is worth noting that this conference went well beyond conventional talks and offered a wide array of activities for the participants to engage in. On the first day, after McArthur's talk, assistants were able to visit the exhibition 'Hidden: Animals in the Anthropocene,' by We Animals Media photographers, at the Centre Cultural La Nau, as well as enjoy a welcome reception and a vegan cocktail. The vegan dinner held on the second day of the conference also provided a space for networking and building professional and personal connections among attendees. Leaving animal products off the plate was a gesture by the organisation which perfectly aligned with the anti-speciesist aim of the conference.

Likewise, book presentations brought into focus recent scholarly contributions to the field – *Hidden: Animals in the Anthropocene*, by Jo-Anne McArthur, the upcoming *The Climate Crisis and Other Animals*, by Richard Twine, and Claire Parkinson's and Lara Herring's (eds.) *Animal Activism On and Off Screen* should be mentioned. I would like to highlight the collaborative workshop on animal film and education, organised by Patrycja Chuszcz, Bianca Friedman, Michał Matuszewski, and Friederike Zenker. It provided an exchange of ideas and perspectives to encourage interdisciplinary approaches and debates to bring animal issues into the classroom. These activities blended academic discussions with hands-on experiences, ensuring interactive participation for all involved.

Overall, the talks and activities of 'The Factual Animal' offered high quality discussions on how we see and represent other animals. This, in turn, fostered a community committed to advocating for more ethical, inclusive, and thoughtful portrayals and engagements with other-than-human animals in media and cultural spaces.