

## **Animal Encounters**

Eds. Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini

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**A**nimal Encounters, the volume edited by Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini (published by Brill) is a challenging collection of texts informed by literary and cultural studies, sociology and anthropology, ecocriticism and art history, philosophy and feminism, science and technology studies, history and posthumanism. Organized over six thematic sections, the collection opens with an original introduction by Tyler. Here the author uses the assigned, anthropomorphic 'willful idleness' of the camel to humorously capture the antagonism and agonism involved in animal encounters. The choice of the word 'encounters' as integral part of the book's title is a careful one, as the 'encounter' is a meeting between discrete parties, which ceases at the moment they combine or separate. (Tyler 2009:3) This focus is entirely respected by the essays included in the book, all of which carefully discuss the areas of ambiguity involved in the physical, cultural and temporal space of the encounter with the animal.

The volume is not intended for the 'animal-beginner' but requires a certain level of philosophical knowledge and awareness of the main threads of the current international animal-studies debate in order to be fully appreciated. Most of the essays in the collection however maintain an accessible tone whilst revolving around high levels of academic scrutiny. In fact the volume features the work of some of the most prestigious thinkers in the field, like Donna Haraway, Steve Baker and Jonathan Burt who all have consistently contributed to the development of the field of animal-studies over the past twenty years.

The real strength of the volume however lies in the very careful pairing of essays presented by each section. Most notably *Post-Meateating* by Carol J. Adams is amongst the most original and informative pieces. As the author discusses the concept of the absent referent we are simultaneously invited to consider the ties such concept entertains with consumerism, capitalism, zoos as imperial models, vegetarianism, viruses and antibodies, animal rights, an unlikely PETA advertising campaign designed to dissuade Americans from drinking milk and the erotically charged images of pigs in lingerie of Playboar.

Donna Haraway's essay addresses the question of animals in scientific laboratories. Here again, the idea of the absent reference is key and manifests itself in the form of the (animal) scapegoat. As the author states: "Sacrifice works; there is a whole world of those who can be killed because finally they are only something not somebody, close enough to 'being' in order to be a model, substitute, sufficiently self-similar and so nourishing food, but not close enough to compel response." (Haraway 2009: 123)

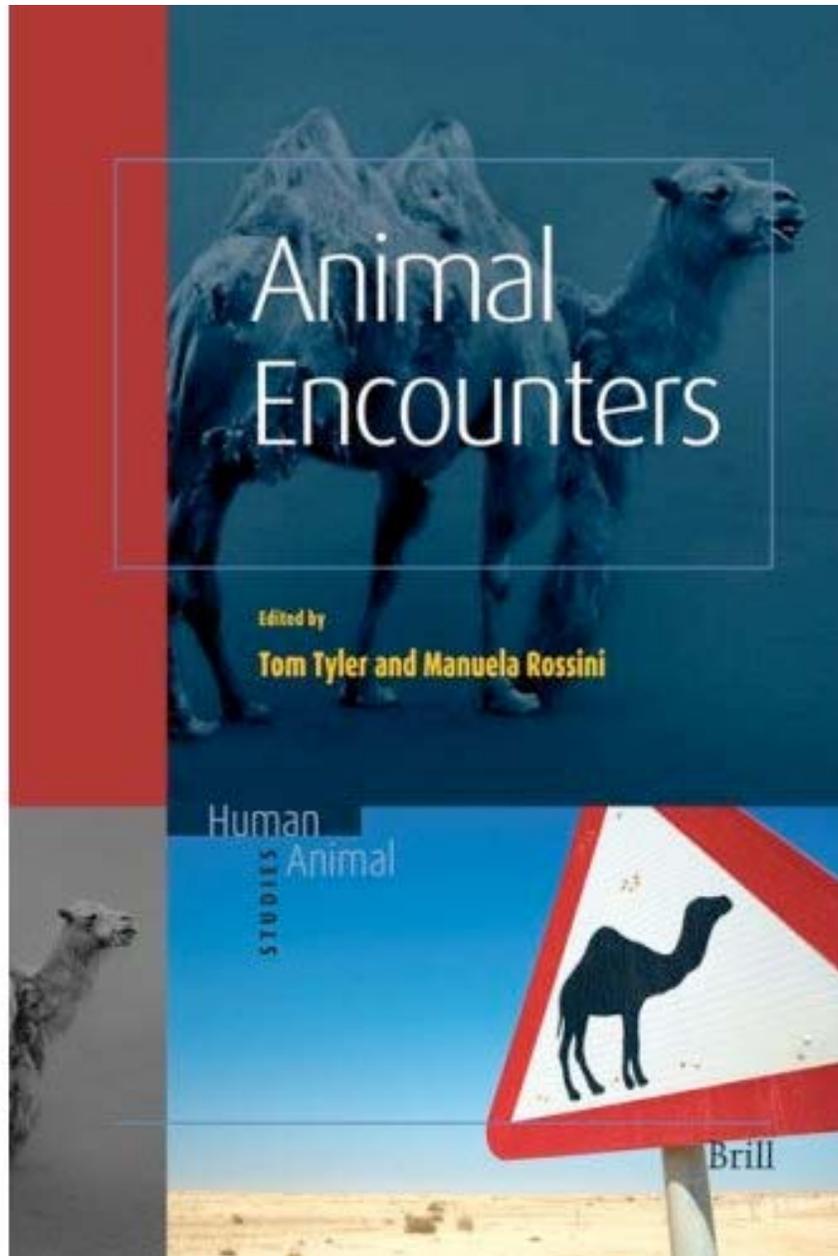
Response is indeed what part five of the volume, titled *Fellow-feeling* is about. Here two very interesting essays, one by Susan Squier and the other by Steve Baker explore the relational

contingencies and potentialities of two very different animals: the hen and the rat. Squire's essay looks at the deep involvement which Miss Nancy Luce developed with the chicken she raised as a reminder that there may effectively be other ways of raising our food and going as far as asking if "there could be an economic meaning to fellow-feeling". (Squire 2009:176)

Baker's interest turns here to the original and challenging "aesthetic experiments" of Lucy Kimbell's *One Night with Rats in the Service of Art*. In question are the nature of artistic contribution to cultural knowledge about animals, especially those whose PR seem to be so complex like for the rat: a repulsive pest to some, and an adorable pet to others. Baker, in conversation with the artist, addresses the ethical considerations involved in the thinking process behind the work, like the role of the ridiculous in the formations of knowledge and the challenges involved in bringing such subject to an audience.

The last section of the book, titled Libidinal Encounters, presents an informed and theoretically grounded discussion of the ultimate cultural taboo, bestiality, or like Rossini rightly corrects us, zoophilia, where the introduction of this new term embodies the essence of the recent revisions in the world of Zoopleasures. Most interestingly, the essay by Monika Bakke looks at extremely controversial works by Oleg Kulik and Andrea Serrano with great analytical clarity, whilst the closing essay by Manuela Rossini explores the posthumanist and gender conscious text AMoT by Paul di Filippo where sexual encounters become the triggering of new futures.

Challenging and provocative whilst extremely informative and academically sound, the volume represents a great opportunity for scholars working in the humanities to develop a clear and concise understanding of the main areas of discussion currently at the core of the field of animal-studies.



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