Introduction: Animals, Place and Humans

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Place has multispecies meaning. From their wintering grounds in Central America individual Wood Thrushes (*Hylocichla mustelina*) have been shown to return over 7500 km to the same place they nested the year before (Stutchbury et al.). With this example, one among many, it is clear that humans are not the only species to have a relationship to place. Just as it has been shown that humans are not the sole proprietors of language and culture (Rendell and Whitehead; Pepperberg and Lynn), place is another fertile territory to disrupt our human-held assumptions about animals.

The theme, Animals, Place and Humans, is considered both literally and figuratively for this edition of the *Animal Studies Journal* in the following dimensions:

1) *Specificity matters.* Human-animal relationships occur between specific individuals, in specific places, at specific times (each day, each year and over time) and yet they are often reported as generalisations: dislocated, abstract, atemporal. Encounters, no matter how brief or rare, are relevant to cultivating an understanding of how humans and animals can interact with each other. Through each encounter, humans and animals may learn something about the other and themselves; in order to do so, humans need to pay close attention to what happens, how it comes about, and how the space is involved. Such attentiveness includes a recognition of technologies which may be active in mediating the encounter.

2) Where *we encounter animals can have a significant impact upon* how *we see animals*. Some settings and instances encourage us to see them as unique individuals, while others foster a homogenising tendency to see animals as generic representatives of species. Consequently, place is a factor in the kinds of relational spaces we can imagine having with other animals.

Opportunities for meaningful contact may be obscured by the way places are organised physically and socially; not the least of which is the way power circulates in specific places. Meeting whales in captivity, for instance, is a highly structured activity in which the power of the institution exerts limitations on where are how interactions can occur; humans can only get close to whales if they purchase the privilege, and the fees increase with increasing levels of intimacy (from just looking, to feeding and then touching). Then, there are the myriad ways power is exercised over the whales by institutional owners and staff – such as the whales' confinement, dependency for food, size of the pool, visibility, training schedules and activities – as well as by the humans who visit them.

While technologies such as cameras, binoculars, and screens are often central to all kinds of human-animal enounters and can thus contribute to a lack of attention to the actual animals, they can also substantially enhance encounters and enable heightened attention and focus upon individuals. And yet, their ambivalence should not be mistaken for neutrality.

3) *Placelessness, as a concept, rules in mainstream environmental philosophy*. Ethical theories concerning animals tend to assume that interactions occur in a vacuum, such that abstract moral principles suffice for all issues and conflicts, everywhere, anytime. Feminist ethicists have, for a very long time, reacted against the omniscient central moral subject, countering with the primacy of context, care, and specific relationships (Donovan; Gaard; Warren). Even this emphasis, however, may remain superficial by stopping at identifying a setting and a kind of relationship. Few take into consideration the 'presence' of space, the felt affects of material and social influences. Animal geographies locate animals and analyse their presence, absence, consequences and reasons for either, but often do not operate in phenomenological, multisensory dimensions. Generally speaking, they can all miss the intercorporeality of the relational space between and among humans, other animals and places. Relational spaces, as they are conceptualised in this issue, are imbued with qualities of permeability, embodiment and proximity. Here, permeability means dualities have porous boundaries and matter mixes between the two. Embodiment operates at the level of the immediate sensory experience as well as through narratives, both textual and visual. Lastly, in these articles, proximity operates both in physical and emotional realms. The authors use relational spaces as a lens for analysing relationships between humans, animals and place, offering perspectives not prominently presented elsewhere.

For both the co-editors of this issue, we felt that it was important to texture the academic works here with other styles of writing and ways of knowing about the relational space between humans and animals. Inspired, in part, by Law's call for 'heterogeneity and variation' (6) in methodology, we actively sought to include works that puncture that dichotomy between academic writing and other ways of describing the world. In this regard, we have included forms of work not typically found in a peer-reviewed journal, including a work of non-fiction and a visual essay. We see this as an allied approach to understanding the multiple ways of engaging with the world that is required to meaningfully think of our work with the more-than-human.

In 'Bearing witness: Re-storying the self in places that are always more than human made', Alette Willis builds the argument that if allowed, animals can act as moral audiences in both the telling of our own stories and in the co-creation of our own selves. This is to 'bear witness': the act of engaging in an inter-subjective, inter-species 'form of moral agency' and in turn, being changed by that story. Using three autobiographical texts by authors Alice Walker, David Hopes and Laura Foreman, Willis suggests that these authors' dialogues with animals provided new opportunities for interpreting their actions within the world while also opening the possibility for co-constructing (or revising) their identity. This new interpretation helps the authors' answer the question of how they 'ought to live' and what kind of stories ought to be told about particular places.

Intricately linked in this meaning-making is place. Willis writes that 'just as narratives give meaning to experiences, places give meaning to carved off sections of space', thus, the act of creating 'human' spaces is never finished as the more-than-human can irrupt and cause us to reconsider the value – or status – of these places. In this sense Willis suggests that ethics – answering what you ought to do – is intertwined with place-making – answering what reality ought to be. In concluding her work, Willis writes that a new act of place-making, one without regard for 'physiological difference or spatial proximity' can allow for a range of 'being and acting in the world beyond what we can imagine today'; in this regard, Willis' work problematises 'the assumption that it is only with other human animals that we come to co-construct and … know our selves' and the places we together inhabit.

Such insight comes out of a first-hand encounter with a cougar (*Puma concolor*) on the shores of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. In her work of non-fiction, Canadian poet and

author Christine Lowther describes how this experience sparked an evolution in both her understanding of species and of her relationship to the temperate rainforests of her home. 'In pursuit' is a vibrant example of how personally held ideals about a species of animal change when we are faced with first-hand experiences with an individual; in some regards Lowther reflects Willis' notion of 'bearing witness' but at a fleeting and darker scale. While descriptive, this piece also works to show how an individual's understanding of place and animals are clearly related – no longer are cougars and 'wilderness' so unidimensional in Lowther's mind. Enigmatically (much like the cougar itself) Lowther looks deeply for an explanation of the encounter; looks for answers as to why the cougar acted as it did. The reason behind the experience, however, goes largely unanswered. In this closing, perhaps we see a more typical outcome of the unexpected encounters humans have with wildlife.

Shifting place, from the temperate rainforests of British Columbia, in 'Tales of cruelty and belonging: in search of an ethic for urban human-wildlife relations' Erin Luther presents a distinctly urban narrative, taking place in Canada's largest city where wild animal inhabitants 'have become victims of a conceptual problem encapsulated by the oxymoronic term *urban wildlife*.' Using a Toronto case study of human-raccoon relationships, Luther lays out the argument that human-wildlife interactions are always interpreted through the lens of social-spatial belonging. Luther links the incident of an individual charged with animal cruelty to the notion that a particular kind of civility is bounded (spatially) within the city. Here, Northern Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) act as a liminal species between urban and wild, where disputes about animals in urban areas become disputes about 'spatial legitimacy'. In this way, human interactions with raccoons threaten 'the boundaries that separate us from our own animality' and in turn 'threaten the boundaries of the urban moral order'. Luther asks the reader to consider what kind of ethic might help us develop a picture of urban space that allows inhabitation by both humans and raccoons and, in turn, offers the suggestion that paying attention to the socio-spatial context of these interactions is key.

Ryan Hediger takes on the little discussed history of war dogs supporting American forces in the paper 'Dogs of war: the Biopolitics of loving and leaving the U.S. canine forces in Vietnam'. The story shared is a paradoxical one, where these dogs working in the Canine Forces gain agency, and alongside their human handlers, saved lives. Hediger draws on primary sources to outline how dogs and handlers created strong emotional bonds and inverted the usual

suppression of emotion or 'dehumanisation' in war. At war's end, however, the dogs were deemed as 'useless machinery' and left behind to be euthanised or slaughtered for food. Hediger suggests that the 'contours of [these] dog/human relationships map the extreme emotional terrain of war more broadly.'

Dogs' power in this conflict came, in part, from their sensory abilities, giving the 'out of place' U.S. forces a tactical advantage against the North Vietnamese Army (or at least neutralising the NVA's advantage). Hediger writes that while animals exist along a continuum of value that is open and negotiated though time and place, this value can easily change – and this is especially true of dogs at war: 'In Vietnam and in contemporary war more generally, place becomes space, subject becomes object, animal becomes equipment, and vice-versa.'

An unexpected parallel is evident in contemporary artist and academic Perdita Phillips' visual essay and an accompanying commentary in 'Observing across scales: Broome Bird Observatory as a site of multiple exchanges'. Phillips situates these pieces at the Broome Bird Observatory (BBO), located in Western Australia. The mudflats exposed at low tide provide a key stopover on the East Asian-Australasian flyway for thousands of long-distance migratory birds known collectively as waders or shorebirds. In an 'operation [that] takes place with military precision', individual birds are collected and counted by human bird banders, in turn becoming an object of scientific study. Much as it does in the institution of war, biopower operates in the scientific practice of bird banding. Phillips participates in this act, and shares how these birds are both objectified and individualised. While a distinctly scientific endeavour, Phillips illustrates – literally – how for the humans involved banding can act as powerfully affective experience, 'destabilising human subjectivity and eliciting humility, wonder, empathy and protective emotions'.

Phillips contrasts her time with waders on the shore of Roebuck Bay to a species of bird found inland from the BBO. Great Bowerbirds (*Chlamydera nuchalis*) are in some ways the antithesis to the visiting shorebirds: they are a residential, ubiquitous and terrestrial bird species occupying 'differing but parallel spatial environments' to the waders. This contrast is used to great effect in the work. Phillips sought out the nest characteristics that individualised the local male Bowerbirds and participated in a form of conversation with the local nest-making males by seeing what objects offered by Phillips would be incorporated into their bowers. While Phillips

had less intimate contact with the Bowerbirds in comparison to the shorebirds, the enacted relationships were more dynamic with an exchange between human and the more-than-human. This differential between species in place has implications for a place like BBO, where humans from across Australia and around the world come to see the spectacle of shorebird migration while paying unequal attention to the Bowerbirds.

Rather than talking about the affective power of a bird in the hand, Ike Kamphof focuses on a relatively new wildlife viewing practice – watching live animals at a distance via web cams over the Internet. 'Linking animal and human places: the Potential of webcams for species companionship' examines the implications of showing animals in a 'natural' setting, relatively undisturbed and unaware of the cameras placed there. In this regard, not only is it a study of the watcher and the observed, it is a phenomenological analysis of a third place: the screen. Kamphof asks, with the proliferation of websites streaming live views of distant species 'Can these sites contribute to new, technologically mediated ways of living together as companion species?' This new kind of watching, then, is an act with an ethical dimension, one where animals challenge the notion of 'one-sided spectatorship' typical in nature documentaries. While Kamphof identifies that a tension does exist between the capture and objectification of animals by the human viewer, it is through the haptic viewing enabled by webcams that she posits these sites offer an opportunity for 'more responsive and responsible kinds of relating to nonhuman animals'.

In summary, contributors to this issue negotiate the dynamic role of place in human-animal interactions and ethical relationships. In their own way, each of the documented encounters demonstrates how place-dependent our perceptions of animals really are. While the authors have conceptualised place differently, their exploration of relational spaces disrupt the artificial boundaries that are dominantly assumed to exist when humans and animals share space. Each of the human-animal stories presented in the following articles invites the reader to contemplate their assumptions about the relational spaces they encounter, contributing to a collective imagining of our place in a multispecies and multidimensional world.

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