

INTRODUCTION

It has been six years since the first volume of the *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* (JCAS) was published. Significantly, within this period of time there has been a tremendous growth of interest and commentary from academic and popular circles focused on the broad subject of human-animal studies. Positioned at the cutting edge of these ever-expanding literary landscapes are a range of critical voices; voices which, at the very least, have begun to take important steps forward to politicize the multiple oppressions and struggle that exist within and between the ‘human-animal interface¹.’ Collectively these arguments have been - and will continue to be - crucial in guiding and advancing our understanding of the common roots of violence and gross exploitation which unite rather than divorce human experiences from the experiences of other animals. Crucially, in doing so, they have begun to clear the grounds for *new* normative visions and *new* collective strategies for change to take root.

Within this critical literature there exists a powerful and central argument, one which considers the pursuit of *either* ‘human’ *or* ‘animal’ liberation to be based on highly uncritical, unreflective and superficial understanding of the forces of oppression and domination. Thus, not only are those actions which emerge from such limited understanding destined to fail, but they are also highly counter-productive. A more nuanced and critical understanding would correctly argue that there are *no* absolute and unconditional spaces that exist to divide *all* humans and *all* animals: fundamentally we are one and the same. As Alice Walker² (1986: 6) said:

¹ Importantly, one of the outcomes of this unapologetically inclusive and critical framework has been to radically undermine the binary human-animal opposition so often legitimized within traditional mainstream studies.

² Alice Walker (1986) *Am I Blue?*

"People...have forgotten, and daily forget, all that animals try to tell us. *"Everything you do to us will happen to you; we are your teachers as you are ours. We are one lesson"* is essentially it, I think."

Importantly, this deeper truth uncovers a rich vein of resources with which to tap into in order to bring about meaningful and lasting (moral) progress in society. It is vital that future discussions within and between those academic and activist communities who are truly interested in liberatory ends, must *at the very least* demonstrate a commitment to engaging with, and acting within, the more inclusive and united concept of 'Total Liberation'.

In this context JCAS (and the *Institute for Critical Animal Studies* more generally) seeks ways in which to best engage and promote these authentic, critical thinkers (and agents for change) and, while doing so, continues to build bridges between broader academic and activist communities where they are most needed. In maintaining an explicit commitment to *critical* animal studies, contributors to the Journal will seek to offer greater clarity and context toward the speciesist nature of the contemporary world, and articulate practical visions and strategies to successfully confront and transcend dominant speciesist ideology, and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

Over the last six years, JCAS has continued to maintain a unique and vital space among other publications focused on animal studies. For those who are interested in exactly what this "unique and vital space" is, particularly in the context of Critical Animal Studies versus Mainstream Animal Studies, I would ask you to read the excellent essay, *"The Rise of Critical Animal Theory: Putting Theory into Action and Animal Liberation into Higher Education"* written by Dr. Steven Best that follows this Editorial. Steve delivers a powerful, passionate and extended commentary that critiques the contributions of mainstream animal studies, the notion of pure theory and the fetishism of theory. Moreover, the essay addresses

the need to "re-wild" animal studies, and draws explicit attention to the commonalities of oppression, and the need for Alliance Politics to come to the fore in academic and activities communities. The need for a radical departure from old singular human *or* animal *or* earth politics is more urgent than it has ever been, and it is this challenge - that we are living in an era like no other - which drives the essay to its conclusion.

Focusing on the five other essays included in this Issue, *"Bend or Break": Unraveling the Construction of Children and Animals as Competitors in Nineteenth-Century English Anti-Cruelty Movements*" is written by Monica Flegel, and focuses on the complex relationships which are common to two of the most vulnerable and defenceless groups in society: children and animals. This relationship can be both positive and enabling (e.g. in shared empathy and understanding) or negative and disabling (e.g. physical and mental abuse). Monica harnesses a wide variety of illustrations to support her arguments, and makes a clear-headed call to recognise that, while oppression can manifest itself in different ways in different contexts, it is only by understanding these differences (and their common-ness) that activists can move purposefully beyond the false 'human' *or* 'animal' binary which currently retard progress on both fronts in modern society.

Mike Jaynes is the author of the third essay: *"From War Elephants to Circus Elephants: Humanity's Abuse of Elephants."* Mike makes a powerful and critical contribution to the literature, detailing the often horrific and shameful ways in which elephants have been used instrumentally as means to human ends. Significantly, Mike completes this essay with a renewed call for action. In particular he argues that there is the need to recognise the critical responsibilities that key individuals (especially parents and teachers) have in ensuring that the systematic abuse of these wonderful and inspiring giants can be challenged and overcome.

"Mythologies and Commodifications of Dominion in The Dog Whisperer with Cesar Millan"

is written Lisa Jackson-Schebetta. Here Lisa draws our attention to the highly constructed and dominant representations and images which surround and inform the (binary, hierarchical, anthropocentric, imperialistic) relationships that we have toward dogs (and other animals more generally). To acknowledge and understand the dominant mythology and commodification, Lisa argues, is liberating – it is a necessary step towards being able to re-imagine and re-invent a more liberatory future, set firmly against these current narratives of dominion.

The fifth essay is written by Roger Yates. In *"Rituals of Dominionism in Human-Nonhuman Relations: Bullfighting to Hunting, Circuses to Petting"* Roger skilfully develops a persuasive critique which seeks to contextualise the powerful role of social rituals in shaping humans' speciesist relationships with other animals. Consistently referring to Jim Mason's (2005) multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of human-nonhuman relations, Roger draws on a wide range of international examples to illustrate the point in hand: ranging from UK 'royal' pheasant shoots; Spanish bull running; acts-of-blood sacrifices to the North American rodeo riders; and Anglo-American hunters/ shooters. The essay places great emphasis on the cultural changes which are needed if the moral zeitgeist informing our attitudes towards nonhuman animals is to be unshackled from its speciesist chains and evolve.

This Issue ends with the latest contribution to JCAS by Norm Phelps: *"The Quest for a Boundless Ethic: A Reassessment of Albert Schweitzer"*. This is a beautifully written and passionate contribution which focuses on the mixed legacies of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the renowned humanitarian, theologian, missionary, and medical doctor. Within the essay Norm

develops several interesting and critical themes, which certainly includes the ethic of a ‘reverence for life’ with which Schweitzer is most often associated. There is much to be drawn upon for guidance in many aspects of human-animal advocacy, but perhaps the lesson that ‘Grand designs are rarely achieved... Small works endure’ may be one of the most important of all.

As a final note to end my first JCAS Editorial, it is an indisputable fact that the 21st Century is increasingly caught up in a violent web of global crises (environmental, economic, political, and social) all of which carry very real and catastrophic implications for both humans and non-human animals. It is my belief though that these crises are still negotiable, and the prospect of creating fundamental change and progress toward a better future is still present. If JCAS can help develop and inspire further discussions and more importantly *actions* related to critical animal studies then it will continue make an invaluable and unique contribution.

Dr. Richard J White

Editor-in-Chief