

## **Animal studies as a field of research in the humanities**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article aims to discuss the field of research called animal studies within the humanities, especially in literature and philosophy. In general, when we talk about animals, we think of pets, of food, of means of transport, but animal studies take the animal from that place in order to think about its subjectivity. In Brazil and in other countries, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, there is already a significant number of researchers who discuss issues of animality from the reading of literary texts and philosophical texts, such as those of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Animal studies as a field of research is genuinely transdisciplinary, as it dialogues with many fields of knowledge, constituting a hybrid space of discussions, above all, to reflect on animal representation in various instances. The hypothesis defended in this article is that by the light of animal studies it is possible to rethink the status of the human.*

**KEYWORDS:** *dialogue, animality, philosophy, representation.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Animal. Ox. Agribusiness. No, this article does not come from the agrarian sciences, zootechnics among other related areas. Comes from the humanities, literature, arts or philosophy, as you wish to name. The strangeness can arise because until very recently, animal place was in the courses that we have just mentioned, however, with the animal studies, this reality has been changing and, currently, animal is also spoken in literature, in the so-called humanities courses. Animal studies have no precise definition or methodology. Some say it is a theory, others say it is a kind of criticism, but, in fact, no consensus has yet been reached on a possible conceptualization, so in the absence of a more precise classification it has been more convenient to refer to animal studies as a field of research that attempts to understand the complex relationship between human and animal. The professor of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Brazil), Maria Esther Maciel emphasizes that the core of animal studies revolves around two questions: "what concerns the animal itself and the so-called animality and what turns to the complex and controversial relationships between men and non-human animals" (Maciel, 2011).

The relationship between man and animal, over the years, has built a dualistic system in which the human being always seems to take advantage of the animal. The animal studies do not propose the choice of one side: human or animal, but the attempt to live in harmony, after all we live in an era that Dominique Lestel (2002) called a hybrid community, it is enough to see in our homes the presence of one or more animal coexisting, sometimes, as a family entity. Thinking the animal only by virtue of the representation of the human, in a way, is disregarding it in its subjectivity, since the human is still the ideal to be pursued. So much so that in some cultures, turning a human into an animal is a form of punishment for some committed offense.

Animal studies as a field of research brings as premise to discuss the animal question from various fields of knowledge, in an attempt to demonstrate that it is urgent to rethink not only animals, but also humans, that is, the reconfiguration is broad-spectrum, after all we all inhabit the same place that has suffered, each year, new forms of aggression that put the life forms on Earth, including the human being, in a troubling situation for several reasons that are not the case here and now. It is the famous anthropocene era, but that is subject to be discussed at another time.

It is necessary to emphasize that animal studies contemplate, above all, the relations between man and animal and the conditions in which such relationships occur, as Maciel (2011) argues, without subjugation of one another. Studies of this nature are justified because animals have always been close to humans since the earliest eras of which we have heard. However, even with this proximity, if we make a quick turn in time, we do not have to go that far to see that at different times the animal has been subjected to different types of suffering. With the rationalist thought of the eighteenth century, which included the philosopher René Descartes, the animal did not have much chance, since it was reduced to a machine body, automated and soulless operation. Cartesian thought concretized in the Modern Era the split between animal and man, which, for Maciel (2016), does not mean that in other times there has not been a refusal of animality. A good example would be the demonization of the animal throughout the Middle Ages, which configured the animal part as the place of all dangers.

From the earliest known civilizations, man demonstrates the ability to reproduce things from different perspectives. These early records, called cave paintings, often consist of illustrating, for example, animals, which may provide some insights into the culture and beliefs of peoples of old.

In the hieroglyphs of Ancient Egypt, animals were also represented and permeated the sacred field, since some figures of gods were represented by parts of animals in human bodies, such as Ra, responsible for the creation of the world and described with the face of a bird of prey; Bastet, goddess of fertility with the face of cat, the Hindu Ganesha with his elephant head. In Indian culture the cows are considered sacred because they represent Nandi, mount of the god Shiva.

In addition, religions have distinct ways of seeing animals. Judaism, for example, has *tsáarbaaleihaim*, which is a principle that forbids unnecessary suffering to animals and also to living things in general. [But is there necessary suffering?] This same principle governs the condition of the Jews consuming meat. For this to happen, the process of abating the animal must ensure the least possible suffering of the animal. There are also those who believe that animals are spiritual beings evolving through transmigration, without still possessing the self-consciousness, which is characteristic of man. One day, when you gain freedom of choice and continuous awareness, you will reincarnate as men. When we think of the man-animal relationship from the period of prehistory and from the connection with the sacred, it is possible to perceive that this tie, in a certain way, was equivalent to the relation of man to nature itself. Over time, man has been distancing himself more and more from primitiveness and instinct, that is, everything that made him remember his animal nature or as Derrida (2002) says an unbearable proximity.

For Maria Esther Maciel (2011), the other animal was always present, mainly in the field of representation and metaphor. An example of this can be seen in George Orwell's *The Animals Revolution*. A story that, when the reader's inattentive gaze can pass through an unpretentious fable of an oppressive government. Now, behind the animals that take control of Mr. Jones's Farm there are a series of metaphors that represent humans themselves in an important period of history. With apparent lightness and comedy, Orwell deals with selfishness, authoritarianism and ambition for power that permeates human relationships. Each of the animals represented plays a fundamental role in the understanding of the narrative; Orwell (2007), as we look at the historical context of *The Animals Revolution*, published in 1945 - the beginning of World War II, a period in which the world was divided between capitalism and socialism, Orwell reflects on equality between men through of the animals that inhabit *Granja dos Bichos*, of which is the famous phrase "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

One discussion that is also dear to animal studies is speciesism. The Australian philosopher, Peter Singer, warns of the dangers of the idea of speciesism, not only for animals, but for all who are considered as civilization: Indians, Blacks, Women, Children, Homosexuals, Transgenders and so many other colonizing constructions. The Indian is not of the same species as the white; the man is not of the same species as the woman; the child is not of the same species as the adult; the black is not of the same species as the white and so on. This is because speciesism is based on the belief that one species, whatever it may be, may be superior to another. If you are not a member of my race or my species, then I need not have compassion or consideration. For Singer (2010) this idea of speciesism is used in relation to nonhuman animals, just as white racists use the same discourse in relation to black Africans.

At first, there is no doubt that the idea of speciesism presented by Peter Singer is seductive, however, it should be pointed out here that the speciesism as Singer understands and defends it is not free from criticism, even by advocates of well-being, as is the case with the American philosopher Cora Diamond (1991). In fact, Singer calls for controversial and sometimes contradictory arguments, such as when he says that humans in states considered vegetative or babies born without brains can be used in laboratories for scientific experiments rather than some animals or even to be killed, because they are not people. This is a contradiction, for, at first, we are led to think that Singer is in favor of every form of life, but it seems that it is not quite so. Peter Singer is interested in animal rights equal to human rights, but the philosopher stumbles upon his own arguments to try to persuade people, for example, not to consume animal products. Singer's biggest problem is that in attempting to secure animal rights, he lowers the human, fostering the usual opposition: animal on one side and human on the other.

According to Diamond, Singer makes use of moralistic arguments, which bring more harm than benefits to the struggle for animal welfare. In the philosopher's understanding, literature, for example, could be far more efficient in the mission of sensitizing people about animal protection or the practice of vegetarianism or veganism than Singer's whole moral philosophy, based on human opposition and nonhuman, and which treats vegetarianism as a moral and ethical issue. We can find an example of what Cora Diamond speaks in a short story by Brazilian writer Machado de Assis - "Carnivores and Vegetarians." In this story, Machado (1998) de Assis uses the episode of a butchers' strike to defend vegetarianism, but a defense without value judgments or any other type of moralistic discourse. Moreover, in Brazilian literature there are many examples of works in which the question of animality leads to an awareness of animal welfare. The work of the writer Guimarães

Rosa is an example of literary writing that, without moralism, speaks of animals in a way so touching that it sensitizes its readers, who start to feel looked at by the animals and, therefore, to worry about the well-being of these living beings, our companions of the house ... of life ...

In an interview with Maria Esther Maciel (2016), Lestel talks about questioning the roles of man by questioning the complexity of animals. Lestel (2016) argues that animals are subjects who interpret meanings, interpret the world in which they live, interpret what others do and what they are, even being able to interpret themselves. This statement, let us agree, is somewhat controversial, because it escapes the hegemonic discourse about the animal, does not imply that these beings will be able to possess artistic behavior, but defends an individuality of these beings "subjects" who invent the world in which they live and, according to Lestel (2016), it is up to the ethologist to create ways to deal with animal inventions.

Coupled with the concept of similar societies, the notion of hybrid communities of Lestel implies the coexistence between different species, based on the exchange of interests and affections. The author also emphasizes that it is important to think about the interest that animals represent for the human community, especially as generators of meanings. The place of the pet, for example, makes the man think of his own place in the community, the opening of the other to his fellowship and solidarity. How would a world be like animals? Difficult to imagine this situation ...

Another issue that can not be overlooked is activism. Researchers in animal studies generally do not like to talk about activism, however, coincidental or otherwise, all of these researchers are sensitive to the cause of animal welfare, with many of them raising the banner of vegetarianism or veganism. In fact, in an anti-agribusiness and livestock movement, vegetarianism and veganism have grown exponentially, which encourages debate about the cruelty involved in the process of animal consumption. Originally published in Berlin by the headquarters of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Meat Atlas: Facts and figures about the animals we eat, aims to stimulate the debate about the consumption of these animals and the impact and global connections made by the choice of eating meat. There are many advertisements that try to mobilize people for not eating meat. It is a growing movement. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer (2010) analyzes animal exploration by virtue of the eating habits of most people and regards it as the major cause of animal suffering. What the author questions is the serial animal production, which causes a distancing between the consumer and the animal - which on a scale of production is called steak. Hygienized packaging on the market shelves increasingly alienates the consumer's production process, which still believes that its food comes from small farms while large companies profit from the meat industry.

The goal of the livestock industry has increasingly been to invest less time and food to force the growth of these animals more profitably. The animals remain in controlled locations, the famous industrial farms, besides having food, water, locomotion and interaction with the other rationed animals. As a result, they live under extreme stress situations that culminate in mutilation situations. Incidents of this nature are detrimental to producers, who in the case of poultry have found a solution called "debiting". The technique consists of cutting the beak of the birds, aiming at the improvement of the production, reduction of cannibalism and egg beetling. The treatment of cattle is equally extreme, since they are also condemned to confinement until they are transported - often without conditions - to the slaughterers. An example given by the author is calf meat, derived from the calf meat. These animals are forced on a restricted diet, in addition to staying in the dark to avoid any kind of agitation. Singer thus demonstrates the harmful effects of speciesism. In fact, a species that judges itself superior to the others submits its "inferiors" to conditions of suffering so that they can find a steak of the texture, color and flavor it expects.

While animal advocates worry about the animals that end up on the dishes, they also turn their eyes to the animals they suffer during their life and lose it for the benefit of human entertainment. In Brazil, in the southern region, there is a typical ritual called "Farra do Boi," a ritual that consists of releasing an ox in a place and having it chase the participants who attack the animal with objects. This happens until the animal gets bruised to the point of not getting up - which causes the abatement. This practice of a cultural tradition brought by the Azoreans who landed in Santa Catarina between 1748 and 1756. The symbolism of this ritual is to relate the ox to the figure of Judas, the traitor of Christ. Therefore, the season that most presents incidents is during Lent and during the period between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. "Protected" by faith, the participants allege *carte blanche*, although the Catholic Church declares itself against this manifestation. Some say that this ritual is part of the local culture. In 2007 the municipality of Governador Celso Ramos approved the municipal legislation that elevated the Farra do Boi to the condition of cultural patrimony. This law was repealed by the Court of Justice of Santa Catarina, since the Federal Supreme Court prohibited the holding of such events in 1997, followed by the Environmental Crimes Act of 1998, which began to punish with up to a year in prison who practices, collaborates, or omits to prevent acts of cruelty against animals.

The discussion of cultural heritage versus cruel practice extends to Spanish bullfights. Bullfights have taken place since the medieval period, when the aristocracy faced bulls at royal family celebrations or military conquests. In arenas, on horseback, the bullfighters aimed to wound the bulls and in the end kills them. In the

eighteenth century King Philip forbade the aristocracy to participate in such events, but the practice was already so popular, that before the public took the event for itself. As there was no financial condition to own horses, the practice started to be done on foot. Usually occur in places known as "Plaza de Toros". Once again, Singer's theory of speciesism proves itself, so that the race believed to be sovereign imposes cruel suffering on these animals, making them, as it were, smaller than humans. In the case of bullfighting and bull-biting, the argument is even more cruel, since they claim that it is a cultural manifestation, but it is well to remember what the African philosopher, Achille Mbembe (2016), speaks about this artifice to use the name "culture" to justify barbarism and atrocities committed with others, to justify the impossibility of change, argues Mbembe (2016).

Animal studies, as you can see, pass through various fields of knowledge. Here we have emphasized the philosophy of Singer and Lestel, believing that the two researchers, each in its own way, are those that approach aspects of animals that are more differentiated than others. We speak of controversies and controversies of Singer, but we would like to clarify that these controversies do not cancel their work in defense of the animal cause, after all the philosopher is a name of weight in the animal studies and has managed, to a certain extent, to call attention to the otherness animal .

Every animal is formed by a singularity or "form of life," so the discourses produced about the animal tend to be fragile, since the animal in its "life forms" eventually escapes the human understanding. However, the art allows us instruments that can build cracks and allow us to approach the animal. And why is this approach important to us? It is important because we may be experiencing the moment of the "Animal Turnover". This expression was coined by Sarah Franklin in 2003 during the Conference of the Australian Association of Cultural Studies and refers to the interest in the animal in different instances - literature, philosophy, psychology, activism, among many others. The animal arrived at the universities and it was not through the door of sciences like zoology or laboratories.

Thinking about a possibility of animal subjectivity implies understanding that animals have a perception of the world that surrounds them, they have a way of life different from ours, but this is not a pretext to assujeitá them, but a possibility of growth in this exercise of " radical alterity ", of" absolute otherness "to remember Derrida (2002). Perhaps this "animal turn" can be a way to make man go back to his animal and natural roots, since man alone can do little, especially when he is in dispute with nature. In our view, literature and philosophy can contribute to this paradigm shift and make us more sensitive to other forms of life than ours, after all, a living being is only necessary to guarantee the right to life.

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