

Representations of animals in popular culture and new media

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Whereas animals play a minor part in the so called high culture in the modern era, there is an abundance of animal representations in the mainstream popular culture and new media, ranging from children's books and televisions programs, via the publication of photos and short videos in social medias and on youtube, to the central role often attributed to animals (or animal-like creatures) within the fantasy genre (computer games, literature and moving images). These images, revealing a human cultural mediation of animals, can contribute to the understanding of ecological and ethical conflicts involving animals.

In spite of our dependence on animals and their importance for the ecological balance, our representations of them rarely focus on their utility value. Thus images of animals as producers of food and clothing are rather uncommon. Animals are not just animals either, so what do popular culture and new medias focus on when representing animals, and what can we learn from this?

The representations vary greatly of course, from the sweet and endearing pets in social media, where the animals represent childlike innocence, playfulness and beauty, to the skillful animals we often find in youth literature, where they can represent an ancient and natural wisdom or rather feature a euphemistic expression of sexuality. They can be both the aggressor and the rescuer, and the human-animal relations can be that of identity or of otherness. Sometimes the animals are totally anthropomorphized and have little left of their animality but their appearance. Sometimes, especially within the fantasy genre, humans and animals are fused, or the boundaries between them are blurred, a notion with great religious and mythical roots.

Representations of animals in popular culture and in new media can be studied to reveal different human attitudes towards animals. They also reflect human ideas and intentions and function as symbols.

We want this session to explore different representations of animals in popular culture and new media. We welcome papers with ecocritical, semiotic, philosophical and other relevant perspectives.