

**Session Proposal for
“Animals in the Anthropocene - human-animal relations in a changing semiosphere”**

Session title: Understanding the Meaning of Animals

Co-Chairs: Forrest Clingerman, Ohio Northern University
 Martin Drenthen, Radboud University Nijmegen

Over the last decade, there has been increased study of the hermeneutical dimensions of the human-environment relationship. Increasingly environmental philosophers draw on hermeneutical philosophies (such as the works of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur) to investigate how human interaction with landscapes and environments can be understood primarily as a relationship of interpretation. This type of “environmental hermeneutics” emphasizes the centrality of meaning for defining places and landscapes, the role of intersubjectivity in the construction of environments, the dialogical and narrative qualities of nature, and the relationship of self and other as primary for environmental responsibility, among other things.

Advancing the critical reflection on environmental hermeneutics, the proposed session will investigate our interpretive relationship with non-human animals in light of the changing environment of the Anthropocene.

On the one hand, environmental hermeneutics is a standpoint from which environmental philosophy can examine intersubjectivity, the mediated nature of experience, and the inevitable conflict of interpretations between humans and non-humans. In this way environmental hermeneutics offers a unique voice for understanding the human-animal relationship. Germane to the aims of the conference, the hermeneutical emphasis on interpretation is complementary to semiotics, while also suggesting certain challenges for the latter. The co-chairs of the session anticipate the panelists will touch upon this complementarity, especially insofar as environmental hermeneutics and ecosemiotics both are needed for a fuller understanding of the meaning structures in nature.

On the other hand, the panel will reflect on how “the Anthropocene” is a fundamentally hermeneutical concept. Rather than being simply a factual description of earth systems, the idea of the Anthropocene frames any interpretation of the human relationship in light of current changes occurring to planetary and local environments. Existing in a new Anthropocene era, we now see the world as “humanized.” This raises difficult questions about how humans relate to other animal species: no longer are humans seen as one actor among many, but instead they are unique drivers of global environmental change. In turn, our interpretations of natural environments -- even so-called “wilderness” -- must acknowledge pervasive, unavoidable human impact. When the meaning of landscapes are understood to participate in the Anthropocene era, what effects does this have on the human relationship with other animals?

The session will show the relevance of environmental hermeneutics for animal studies and environmental ethics. Equally it will provide a space at the conference to foster a dialogue between hermeneutical and semiotic approaches to nature. The co-chairs anticipate contributions by Mateusz

Tokarski and Glenn Delière on wild boars in the UK, focusing on how the dialectic between purity and impurity reflect on notions of environmental identity and meanings of place; Martin Drenthen on how the resurgence of wolves in Western Europe urge us to redefine what it means to share living space with predators; and Forrest Clingerman on the topic of the “Anthropocene” and difficulty of belonging to place, in light of shifting habitats and migration patterns. The co-chairs wish to include other contributions, particularly a respondent from an ecosemiotic perspective.