

## Foreword

### Is the Film Animal a Specific Kind of Animal?

Lion, elephant, cow, polar bear, horse, or walrus, bee, zebra, and fish: encounters with animals have exuded a special fascination ever since the early cinema. Film appearances can be traced back to Étienne-Jules Marey's and Eadweard Muybridge's movement studies at the end of the nineteenth century. Already during the era of silent film, actors shared the screen with animals in a self-evident manner. Not only has a film genre all its own taken shape, the nature film, depictions of animals can also be found in all film genres: in documentaries, feature films, the aesthetic avant-garde, and in animated films. The animal is thus by no means a motif limited to films directed at children. Frequently, at issue is not really the animal at all. Instead, at stake are issues of human nature, questions of morality, desire, or emotion. Using the depiction of animals, reflections are posed about human culture and society as well as about forms of politics and community. Walter Benjamin thus understands Mickey Mouse as a modernization of Grimm's fairy tale world, flanking the industrial process of production and alienation in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> And in his essay "Why Look At Animals?," John Berger argues that in looking at the animal, humans become conscious of themselves. Beginning with an art historical perspective, the essay focuses on the staging of the animal in the zoo and in the history of culture.<sup>2</sup> As part of the rediscovery of the animal in the humanities since the 1990s, animal representation is now explored in philosophy, literary studies, cultural studies, or cultural history, while the natural sciences are occupied with interpreting the genome and the actual design of living beings. Currently, this development is culminating in the establishment of a transdisciplinary and transnational critical animal studies. Here, the animal becomes the central object of investigation and is explored in terms of anthropomorphisms and in the focus of hierarchical categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and species.

The interdisciplinary spectrum of this research on the animal suggests that this is not just a reaction to sociopolitical questions, such as factory animal farming, or avian and swine flu. The impression that the animal is a topic that is now resurfacing also suggests that it had once been submerged. Perhaps this reawakened interest has something to do with the fact that the animal in Western intellectual history has traditionally been placed in the sphere of the non-linguistic. The animal is thus located beyond the horizon of semiology and structuralism. This is particularly the case when arguments are made in reference to the animal that are beyond the discursive. The animal is then often viewed as the other, the non-discursive, the physical, or a form of presence.

The prerequisites for the current importance placed on the animal, however, are much older. Its history is closely tied to the development of the cinema. Already in 1924, Béla Balázs argued that the living animal, in contrast to the actor, does not act for the camera.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in his 1951 essay "Theater and Film," André Bazin found that the human being enjoys no privilege over animal in film. Unlike the theater, where humanity is always at the center of the drama, a film can be made with an animal as the main figure, or focus on presenting images of the animal, as in the documentary film.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it was only under the conditions of film and the cinema that the relationship between the human being and the animal could be reexamined and reconfigured in the twentieth century.

This book looks at the relationship between film and the animal from various perspectives. The film animals at issue here come from the early cinema, scientific film, screwball comedies of the classical Hollywood cinema, auteur film, or they are part of the digital worlds of contemporary animation. While setting no limits in terms of genre or film history, this volume does not seek to cover the entire subject of the film animal. Our intention is rather to chart out lines of perspective through a broad and in part unknown realm that only began to be explored not so long ago.

The first part, "Classifications of the Film Animal," gathers contributions that examine possible orders of the various worlds of the film animal. Winfried Pauleit's contribution treats the documentation of animals in the *Encyclopaedia Cinematographica*, a showcase project of scientific film in the post-war years. The goal of *Encyclopaedia Cinematographica* consisted in documenting animal (and human) movement as comprehensively as possible. Referring to the early movement studies of animals by Eadweard J. Muybridge und Étienne-Jules Marey, as well as the later transformation of the scientific films produced in an art context, the *Encyclopaedia Cinematographica* is presented as a taxonomy and political issue at the intersection of science and art. In his contribution, Vinzenz Hediger sketches out a "brief biology of the film animal." He distinguishes between archive animals and real animals, that is, animals that once stood live before the camera, and reconstructions of animals, for example, dinosaurs, and fantastic animals, which he calls projection animals. In this context, he encounters a special form of the film animal that appears in the *Rat and Bear* films by the artist duo Fischli and Weiss. These intermediate beings refuse both biological specification as well as being defined in terms of literary or film criticism. In her contribution, Sabine Nessel asks about the staging of animals in the zoo and in the cinema. She does not directly address the viewing of animals, but rather the conditions under which animals become visible. The starting point here is the clay animation film *CREATURE COMFORTS* by Nick Park (1989). This is followed by a survey of the cultural history of the zoo that looks at specific forms of *mise en scène*. At the center of her analysis is a comparison of various visual arrangements

in scenes depicting the zoo across film history, beginning with the Lumière brothers, moving on to examine Alfred Hitchcock's *SABOTAGE* (1936) and May Spill's *ZUR SACHE SCHÄTZCHEN* (*GO FOR IT, BABY*, 1968), and finally looking at Nicolas Philiberts *NÉNETTE* (2010), in the end arguing that the zoo animal, just like the film animal, is always mediated.

The second part of this volume is entitled "Cinephilias of the Film Animal." Intended here is not a zoophilia as a specific counterpart to the cinephilia. At issue instead are various manifestations of the relationship between cinema, love, and the animal. Exemplary for this relationship is the work of Jean Painlevé, which blurs the line separating science and art. In these films, ocean animals and plants are presented in a scientific sense, not without having them appear equally as mysterious figures, staged with music and in part surprising commentary. Using the example of Painlevé's seahorse film *L'HIPPOCAMPE, OU "LE CHEVAL MARIN"* (*Hippocampus, or the Seahorse*, 1934), Jonathan Burt explores the main links and especially the side roads and detours in the relationship between love and sexuality, art and science in the underwater world. A different, very illustrative example of this relationship can already be found in the cinema of the 1910s. In the early cinema, working with wild animals before the camera was a unique feature that distinguished film not only from the theater, but also from the circus and the variety show. The relationship between actresses like Berte Dagmar, Kathlyn Williams, Musidora, and Nell Shipman to animals can be described as close and intimate. But working with animals was also considered risky, and is full of adventurous anecdotes. As Annette Förster explores in her contribution, the writings on the relationship of the actresses to the animals formed part of the attraction of these films. In addition, film work with animals marks a vanishing point for female identity in the 1910s. The Spanish writer Gustavo Martín Garzo dedicates his attention to a contemporary love between an animal and a human being on the screen as presented by Peter Jackson's *KING KONG* (2005). The myth of "Beauty and the Beast," which is only alluded to in the first King Kong film by Cooper/Schoedsack (1933), becomes a model for a romantic-utopian love between human being and animal in Jackson's film. Stars stand before the camera together with wild animals not just in the early cinema and in safari films like *KING KONG*, but also in the screwball comedies of the classical Hollywood cinema. As Raymond Bellour impressively shows in his contribution, in the Howard Hawks films *BRINGING UP BABY* (1938) and *MONKEY BUSINESS* (1952) animals play a special, absurdly askew role in the love relationship of human couples. Using Freud and Lacan's theories of psychoanalysis, Bellour's analysis really takes off, producing a textual movement in which the slapstick of the films manifests itself at moments while reading.

Overarching considerations in terms of the relationship between film and animal are explored in the third part of the book entitled *Philosophies*

of the Film Animal. With Ute Holl's contribution, our attention is shifted from the level of vision to the level of hearing. Instead of a relationship of the gaze, she makes a listening relationship between the human being and the animal the center of attention. This could be translated with the question: what do we hear when we are listening to animal voices recorded in a film? Ute Holl explores the question in terms of media history: with what devices were animal noises recorded and how were they brought to speak? Using animal voices in Robert Bresson's film *AU HASARD BALHAZAR* (1966) she shows that a failure of the human language is established. Herbert Schwaab writes against the backdrop of Stanley Cavell's film ontology in his examination of contemporary digital animation. Using the example of *FANTASTIC MR. FOX* he shows to what extent categories of realism and animation have become obsolete, and how the classical distinction between nature and culture is often explored using the animal. As an alternative, he describes a new genre of "digital realism," emphasizing a special, ambivalent reference to the world and the object. Finally, the contribution by Jennifer Fay on André Bazin offers a posthumanist position in the realm of film theory. The film critic and co-founder of the French journal *Cahiers du cinéma* always had a love not only of film, but also of animals. Referring to Jacques Derrida's writings on the animal, the author succeeds in showing that Bazin's view of the cinema should be understood as a post-human projection in which the animal plays a role that is equal to that of the human being.

Is the film animal a specific kind of animal? This volume provides various answers to this question. With the classifications, cinephilias, and philosophies of the film animal a specific horizon will open—or so we hope—that not only allows for an exemplary exploration of the film animal, but also makes discourses on film based on the animal legible in a new way.

Sabine Nessel, Winfried Pauleit

## Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "Mickey Mouse," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 338–339.
2. John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980).
3. Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).
4. André Bazin, "Theater and Film I" and "Theater and Film II," *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009).

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