

## Animals in Focus: Creative and Social Imagination

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Placing animals in focus through imagination and reality, we are thinking about their position in new ontological paradigms in a multidisciplinary way. The article presents the relationship between man and animal through folklore, literature, film, language, and photography. The authors derive their research from the theoretical discourses of ecocentrism, new animism, ecocriticism, semiology, antispeciesism, cognitive ethological studies, and critical animal studies.

▪ **Keywords:** animals, representations, folklore, literature, film, animal-human relations, critical animal studies, imagination, animal body

Ko v fokus postavljamo živali v imaginaciji in realnosti, multidisciplinarno premišljamo o njihovem položaju v novih ontoloških paradigmah. V prispevku so prikazana razmerja med človekom in živaljo, kakor se kažejo v folklori, literaturi, filmu, jeziku in fotografiji. Avtorji in avtorice se teoretsko opirajo na diskurze ekocentrizma, novega animizma, ekokritike, semiologije, antispeciesizma, kognitivnih etoloških študij in kritičnih animalističnih študij.

▪ **Ključne besede:** živali, reprezentacije, folklor, literatura, film, živalsko-človeška razmerja, kritične animalistične študije, imaginacija, živalsko telo

### Introduction

The anthropocentric perception of the world that surrounds and accommodates humans, of nature on the one hand and of culture on the other, where we are asserted to have complete control over ourselves, nature, and other living beings, can be considered an anachronism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the anthropogenic factor is still one that causes widespread destruction of the natural (more-than-human) world, especially so the animal world. To transform or end this paradigm we need “robust biological-cultural-political-technological recuperation and recomposition” and “multispecies eco-justice” (Haraway, 2016).

Because of the new ecological and ethical findings (bioethics, cf. Francione and Charlton, 1992; James, 1997; Klampfer, 2010; Grušovnik, 2016; Vičar, 2020) within the broad social and cultural spaces and in the changed state of the world (the epistemological and paradigmatic shift, Kuhn, 2012 [1962]) that led to the shift of focus from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, it was necessary for world science to establish complex multidisciplinary research of animals and nature, as well as how humans relate to these concepts in the humanities, which would then use different findings to redefine the relations of people-animals-nature-environment-society on new ecological and ethical foundations. This process can be observed since the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

and much more transformatively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Golež Kaučič, 2017, 2023; Nocella, George, 2022: 3).

We have to start rethinking animals for them to no longer be trapped between the concepts of *zoé*<sup>1</sup> and *bio* (Wadiwel, 2015; Agamben, 1998). According to Paul Taylor (1986), from the viewpoint of biocentric equality, all organisms, regardless of their species, have the same intrinsic value and the right to be treated with respect. In this way researchers have already started their journey towards biocentrism and ecocentrism: Gary Steiner (2008) introduces the so-called discourse of kinship with animals, discussing the problem of the placement of animals in the moral society solely on the basis of their cognitive or verbal abilities, asserting that the animal in relationship with the human should function as our kin – an entity that has intrinsic worth in this multispecies community. Gary Francione (2000, 2008), however, thinks time has come for an abolitionist view with regard to animals, John Sanbonmatsu (2007, 2014, 2017) advocates for a critique of speciesism as a system of domination, Steven Best (2014) for a shift from bare academic thinking to activism, Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson (2021) think it is time for trans-species justice, and Natalie Khazaal and Nüría Almiron (2021) write about an ethic of interspecies empathy or compassion at a global level. If we want to follow the ontological turns in the humanities, it is necessary to rethink the difference between humans and animals, the ethical and ontological status of animals, and to go beyond the distinction based on new insights and political practices. Vittorio Hösle (1996 [1991]) argues that we are on the threshold of a new moral and political paradigm – the ecological paradigm – and that, in addition to economics, various scientific disciplines in the humanities can contribute to the implementation of this paradigm. The so-called new environmental paradigm (Dunlap et al., 2000) is oriented towards the claim that nature is an ecosystem with all intrinsic rights, regardless of its importance for humans. The concept of the intrinsic value of animals, arising from a growing interest in the boundary between us and them becoming more fluid or non-existent due to the research of evolutionary biologists and ethologists (Griffin, 1984, 1992; Waal, 1999; Bekoff, 2007) writing about animal languages, cultures, emotions and even morality, and the ethical awareness that humans are only one of the species in this world, has also inspired semantic turns and concepts: i.e. the animal turn, the social turn, the political and ontological or posthumanist view which ensures that the recognition of personhood belongs not only to humans, but also to other living beings.

In order to break down the mental barriers in the human mind that prevent us from seeing and knowing what is happening to the animal Other, along this progression a

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<sup>1</sup> We reject the binary position of the “bare life” and “qualified life”, aware of Agamben’s concept of ‘*zoé*’ as a critique of the mechanisms of power and sovereignty regarding the bare life of industrial animals. We point out Giorgio Agamben’s distinction between *bios* (political form of life) and *zoé* (generic form of life), or the understanding of biopolitical caesura, where violence in the human relationship with animals is used as a dividing line between life and death, and the animal is squeezed into a perspective “in between”.

shift in our attitude towards animals must happen. But if we put animals in focus, we have to change the way we think about them, go beyond social dualisms and start from the animal standpoint.

The thematic issue of this journal originates from the research project *Thinking Animals: Transformative Aspects in Research of Animals in Folklore, Literature and Culture* and inscribes various findings about new transformative views on the position of animals in the world, based on a new ontological paradigm (Gröling, 2014: 106; Telban, 2017; Golež Kaučič, 2017, 2023) and the animal turn (Andersson Cederholm et al., 2012; Magliocco, 2018).

### **Thinking animals**

The project is based on extensive theoretical and methodological reflections of various national and international scientific discourses in folklore studies, ethnology, ecocriticism, philosophy, anthropology, biology, and ecology. We aim to establish a new so-called imaginative counter-discourse and analytical criticism of anthropocentrism, through detailed and composite interdisciplinary research on folklore, literature and cultural heritage, with an emphasis on critical discourses about the complex analogies between natural and cultural ecosystems, and parallel research on contemporary cultural practices and dynamics.

Within the project, we are intensively developing the scientific discipline of zoo-folklore studies or zoofolkloristics, a relatively new discipline within folklore studies. It makes a critical assessment of the traditional knowledge of animals, which on the one hand conveys remarkable messages about the coexistence of humans and animals, and on the other reveals certain attitudes and practices that are no longer acceptable in our time. The subject of the discipline is animals in folklore, namely in all spheres of folk spiritual culture, i.e. in songs, tales, fairy tales, fables, legends, proverbs, sayings, riddles, jokes, folk language, cultural practices, folk drama, mythology, folk medicine; but studied from new perspectives, with a new perception and reception. Zoofolkloristics should enable a distinct paradigmatic change, moving from the role and importance of animals to a redefinition of tradition. This would also enable changes in perspective from the animal as an object to the animal as a person. Furthermore, we could also point out positive examples of the coexistence of the two entities, not only on a metaphorical-symbolic or mythological level, but by looking at real relationships with the help of the testimonies of people who in the past coexisted with animals, which in some way also reflect folklore texts, songs, stories, etc. (Golež Kaučič, 2015, 2023).

We have conducted the research in the field of ethnology and folklore studies; however, we did not restrict ourselves to either, but rather shifted away from anthropocentric views and positioned within ecocentric ones, with the awareness that the subject

concerns new relationships between humans and animals, coexistence, and recognition of the animals' intrinsic value – at the moment only recognised by humans in a specific moral community. At the same time as scientific research, we want to integrate all these new insights into the educational process, so that at least at the university level we can introduce different discourses on attitudes towards the Other.<sup>2</sup>

### **The voice of animals is missing**

This issue places animals in focus – even if their voice is missing – indirectly through human thinking about animals, at least along conceptual lines. What is most important is outlined: to hear the animal's voice (Brooks Pribac, 2021: 33), to contemplate its point of view, and replace the anthropocentric stance with the zoocentric one. That is why we theoretically and methodologically follow different insights, interwoven from various scientific sciences and not just the folkloristic-ethnological-anthropological. If so, then we are talking about the “anthropology of animals” (Noske, 1989),<sup>3</sup> since some new concepts of animal studies and critical animal studies talk about animal persons or even about animal people, or about their subjectivity (Hall, 2004: 3; Calarco, 2008: 5; Weil, 2012: 37–38) and no longer only about animals, thus transcending the binary divisions we have created in our human-animal relationships. Some anthropologists reject critical animal studies because their acceptance in anthropology would be “suicidal” for anthropology. They also see in the animal turn a cessation of interest in farm animals (Baskar, 2023: 24, 26), which can be refuted not least by Brooks Pribac's research on living with sheep in Australia and their study (2021; see also Despret, 2005; Marino, Merskin, 2019). Anthropologists beginning to recognize the subjectivity of animals, even domesticated ones, likely should constitute progress for anthropology, at least in the light of ethics and the findings of cognitive ethology (Bekoff, 2007; Bekoff, Pierce, 2009; Best, 2014: 121–135). This would show that past practices can be changed without changing the past but rather the future of the human-animal relationship. By adopting new paradigmatic shifts, the attitude of the farmer towards the farm animal would also be shifted, negative traditional practices would thus be unlearned, across time replaced with positive ones. This dialectic would be “to unlearn outmoded harmful practises and re-learn compassionate forms of praxis such as love, liberation, and abolition” (Kirk, Hall, 2021: 8; Poirier et al., 2024: 6).

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<sup>2</sup> More about the project: <https://gni.zrc-sazu.si/sl/programi-in-projekti/misliti-zivali-transformativni-vid-iki-raziskav-zivali-v-folklori-literaturi>.

<sup>3</sup> Noske's work is a call to expand the field of anthropology and to include a more comprehensive and empathic understanding of animals, challenging scholars to reconsider long-held assumptions and to develop new methodologies that acknowledge the significance of animals in human life. Barbara Noske explores the idea that animals possess subjective experiences and agency, arguing against the traditional view that regards animals as mere objects or resources for human use. Noske's work contributes to the broader discourse on animal subjectivity and the ethical implications of human-animal interactions.

Already in 2012, Kari Weil wrote the book *Thinking Animals. Why Animal Studies Now*, in which she reflects on the relationship between human and animal at the point when we stand in front of animals and see them eye-to-eye. Yet we do not know what the animals see when they look at us, i.e. whether they, according to Lotman (1990), see a “mad creature”, or, according to Agamben (2011), an “anthropological machine”, or just a fear-inducing and totally unpredictable mass of flesh. John Berger and many others have reflected on how animals are perceived. Berger even wrote that animals have vanished from human consciousness and view and have become invisible and meaningless (Berger, 1980: 17, 22). Does man really know how to observe a real-life animal, or only sees some illusory animal image created in the mind’s eye, or the notion of it that society has constructed? Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism* (2005) put forth a criticism aimed at anthropomorphisation, on the grounds that to imagine animals thinking like humans is a form of egoistic narcissism, since humans see the world only through their own reflection in a mirror. When people project their own thoughts and feelings onto other species, there is of course a close link between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, placing man at the centre. Daston and Mitman point to another argument against the use of anthropomorphism, which has to do with the human desire to transcend the limitations between ourselves and other species, the desire to understand them from within, or even by becoming an animal.

Though it is crumbling, albeit very slowly, the social construct of animals remains central. We should therefore abandon the anthropocentric view of nature and replace it with syntheses on the roles of the animal in cultural history, moving from natural zoology to cultural zoology, understanding that this constant intrusion of animals into the human world, both on a symbolic level as well as physically, urgently requires a response to their needs and interests, which must first of all be recognised. Autopoetics is no longer sufficient, multispeciesism, interspeciesism, and intersectionality are looming, because we are becoming increasingly aware, as Daniel Elstein argues (2003), that “species” is a socially constructed category and not a natural given – the great fallacy of the hierarchisation of species came to be out of this construction. But are we really aware of what it means to think animals differently? This presupposes actually stepping out of oneself and into the other, as far as we are able to do so.

When a person is thinking animals, does that mean they are really thinking “of animals” and simply projecting the human mental map onto them? Or do they consider animals as conscious and sentient real beings? Doing so, existing human illusions might shatter. But what does it actually mean to think about animals, and perhaps even to think like an animal? Can we even think animals without stepping before a deep chasm of ignorance, of misunderstanding, an abyss that we did not and are still very reluctant to cross? We have constructed a bipolar and binary world in which the “us” and “others” are still rigidly set. Man has therefore created mental concepts by which he judges,

reacts to and acts upon the world. Will we ever find out how animals actually think? Is it not time we finally started learning from them? And not just from cats and dogs, from every single creature we encounter and establish a relationship with. Only when we discover that there is not just one mind, the human mind, but that there are different minds, when we recognise them, will we be able to take the crown of anthropocentrism from our heads. But the mind is not the only distinctive trait, there are also emotions, consciousness, self-awareness, etc. Subjectivity, the sense of existence, is so different from what we can observe scientifically that the two cannot even be described using the same language. An encounter with the animal mind can have the same function as a great work of art or a religious experience: the unusual becomes familiar and reminds us that reality encompasses much more than we normally assume. Leaping over the abyss, we realise that animals are not mere creatures from other worlds, they are not visitors to this world, they are those who live here, independently of us, and this planet belongs to others than just us.

Berger (1980: 6) argued that because we do not have a common language, the animal's silence ensures that it is different from man, distant and excluded from his community. Will we understand animals better if we learn their language? We ought to connect our communication channels to the animal plane(s), just as Sue Savage Rumbaugh already knew how to ask chimpanzees what they wanted and "how to talk" to them (see Bekoff, 2010: xxxviii – xxxix). Humans are yet to learn animal languages. A century ago, Sarah Orne Jewett asked:

Who is going to be the linguist who learns the first word of an old crow's warning to his mate ...? ... How long we shall have to attend school when people are expected to talk to the trees, and birds and beasts, in their own language! (Orne Jewett, 1881: 4–5)

Recently, the concept of animal languages has been revived. For example, Patric Murphy (1991) suggested that humans should learn the languages and dialects of animals, which he called "ecofeminist dialogue" (1991: 50; cf. also Donovan, 2006). Cognitive ethologists have identified animal languages in countless species. The biologist Con Slobodchikoff e.g. identified the language of prairie dogs (Slobodchikoff, Coast, 1980; Slobodchikoff, 1998; Phelps, 2008: 5). Unfortunately, knowledge of animal languages and communication will not be achieved if they are denied subjectivity. Barbara Smuts (2001) e.g. used sympathy, empathy, and mindfulness in her study of baboons. It was a "creative and caring intersubjectivity" that enabled her to develop "a feeling for what it means to be a baboon" (Smuts, 2001: 293). Twenty-five years later, she had developed her knowledge of baboonish to the point where the animals could understand her, despite her "outrageous human accent" (ibid.: 307). Max Scheler believes that compassionate intellectual capacities need to be fostered in order to understand animal experience and

decode a “universal grammar” (Scheler, 1970 [1923]: 11; House, Williams, 2022: 9). A cow calls loudly when she feels distressed after being separated from her newborn calf (Marchand et al., 2002: 19–28).

Maybe we should live with animals, not just dogs and cats, but pigs and stags, too. Sharon Nuñez Gough shows how the human-pig relationship can be different. Nuñez Gough (@CARE, 2019), animal activist, rescued and adopted piglets from factory farms and offered testimony, narrating her life story about their emotions and personalities. The three pigs grew into big sows and were given names. Through observation and autoethnography (Chang 2008), she found that they had very different personalities, maintaining a strong dialogical relationship with the animals. (Corman, Vandrovcová, 2014: 144–145).

In an article on the three ethologies (mental, social, and environmental), Mathew Calarco analyses the experience of ethologist Joe Hutto, who published the testimony of seven years of living with stags (deer) in Wyoming in a book that completely transformed the usual anthropocentric view of stags and deer. He found that individual stags<sup>4</sup> have an entirely unique personality (Ohrem, Calarco, 2018: 55). Hutto could no longer support hunting because he began to sympathise with the deer and the stag in their pain caused by the hunter – he shared their sorrow. (Calarco, 2018: 57). In his book *Touching the Wild: Living with the Mule Deer of Deadman Gulch*, Hutto wrote:

This community, this family, into which I have assimilated in a strange way, has undoubtedly reshaped and redefined my identity. More and more it seems that my world – my frame of reference – has irrevocably changed. Maybe I really do see a different perspective – I see the world through the eyes of other beings. (Hutto, 2014: 294)

Researcher Barbara Smuts (2006) has found that it is only by paying close attention to an animal that we can establish a proper relationship with it. Her attitude towards her own companion, the puppy Safi, showed that only a humble understanding and appropriate response to animal behaviour, dialogue, and the absence of dominance can bring about a relationship of equals. Or as Smuts puts it: it is a “dialogical exchange” and “embodied communication” (2006), which is a kind of language. In Smuts, Safi speaks and Smuts listens (cf. Smuts, 2009). Corman and Vandrovcová suggest that:

Here we see that when animals have the opportunity to interact between different species, they also engage in dialogue. The anthropocentrism of the liberal humanist subject does not and cannot hold in the context of

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<sup>4</sup> Compare a completely different view of roe deer in an agro-cultural society, where deer and stags as live animals are perceived as pests (Kozorog, 2023).

such a profound interspecies relationship. The Western conception of the human subject, which operates in a passive world where only humans are subjects, is clearly a deception. (Corman, Vandrovcová, 2014: 143)

The Earth is full of animal species that have found solutions to live well in a way that ‘discredits’ human hegemony, as shown by at least two early texts in history that deal with the relationship between animal and human and speak of the superiority of animals rather than humans. The first is Pliny the Elder, who wrote in *Natural History*: “All other (underlined by the author) animals know their own natures: some use speed, others swift flight and yet others swimming. Man, however, knows nothing unless by learning – neither how to speak nor how to walk nor how to eat; in a word, the only thing he knows instinctively is to weep.” (Pliny, *Natural History*, Vol. 7, Chapter 1, cited in Sax, 1998: 17). The second text is the medieval text *Ikhwan al-Safa* (Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity) which is a 10<sup>th</sup> century Arabic encyclopaedia, namely its 51<sup>st</sup> epistle (The Debate Between Men and Animals), which deals with the meeting of species (quoted in *Razgovor čovjeka sa životinjama*, 2008), where animals argue that they are at least equal, if not superior to humans, and that lacking speech does not make them inferior since animals use different sounds to communicate which are not understood by humans in turn. Therefore, claims that knowledge, skills, speech, intellect and upright posture give people the right to enslave, torture, and exploit animals are nothing more than empty ostentation. Nagel, who doubts that we will ever understand what it is like to be a bat, nevertheless gives the imagination a chance, saying “it may be easier than I suppose to transcend inter-species barriers with the aid of the imagination” (Nagel, 1974: 442).

### **Imaginative and real animals**

Through social and creative imagination (Poirier, Tomasello, George, 2024: 6), the topic of this thematic journal is addressed by five authors who belong to cultural or critical animal studies, although they come from different humanistic sciences, such as history, literary science and ecocriticism, folkloristics, ethnology, anthropology, and linguistics. Multidisciplinarity, which combines methodologies and theoretical aspects, is necessary today, as monodisciplinarity limits innovative thinking. We aim to use the ethical and ecological discourse on the so-called “poetics of the species” and the “poetics of the individual”, i.e. bear(s).

Bears are discussed by two authors of this thematic issue, Zoltan Nagy and Lizanne Henderson, who examine the image of the bear in culture and society, the contemporary discourse of the present-day encounter with the bear, as well as its objectivization or subjectivization. In the article ‘Bears and Humans’ (Nagy, 2024), Nagy discusses the



issue of the relationship between humans and bears (specifically the Siberian bear), the concept of “more-than-human society”, where the attitude towards the bear is changing in the Khanty community. He asserts it is necessary to adopt the “native view” that one should gain knowledge of animals the indigenous way, but at the same time explores how the indigenous society perceives the bear, since they believe that the bear is similar to a human and that it understands human speech, but not vice versa. He notes that the border between bear and man in this folklore is liminal, that they may pass into one another, or that they are not in a binary opposition as is the case in Western ontology. In his article, through the stories of informants, Nagy furthers the concept of new animism, which was established by Viveiros de Castro (1998). Although it seems that the bear is placed in focus, or that man defends its subjectivity (Kernev Štrajn, 2007), man nevertheless destroys this very subjectivity when he hunts and kills the bear for one reason or another.

If we put the animal in focus also through different representations, we can find that these representations vary to a great extent. Mario Ortiz-Robles recognizes four ways of animal representations in literature: anthropomorphic, fantastic, symbolic, and realistic. Different modes of representation also include different figurative functions of animals in literature, each of them establishing a specific relationship with the referent, i.e. with a real animal (Ortiz-Robles, 2016: 23). Lizanne Henderson in the article ‘Ways of Seeing Polar Bears in Fantasy Films, Fiction and Folklore’ illuminates the representations of the bear in folklore, film, and literature, where it more or less exists as a human substitute or is demonized, and at the same time discusses the so-called “therianthropy” (the ability to shapeshift from human to animal form). The bear as a monster, its demonization in fantasy films, literature and folklore, robs it of its subjectivity. In this case, the fiction does not help in the rehabilitation of the animal and does not represent its real life and role, instead the animal becomes a demonic creature (cf. Calarco, 2008: 42; Vičar, 2020). Henderson also discusses a different view of the polar bear when she presents the attitude towards it in Inuit tradition, as bears become “creatures with their own agency” (Henderson, 2024). The representation of the bear as a beastly creature that attacks and devours people is still present in fiction (cf. Golež Kaučič, 2018), but the author emphasizes that the reality of polar bears is much darker, as they are threatened with extinction due to climate change. The bear goes from abstraction and symbolization to the liveliness of a real being, which is losing the battle for life in the Anthropocene.

Anthropocentrism in language is presented by Saša Babič in the article ‘Animals as a Stereotyping and Characterizing Element in Slovenian Name-Callings’ (2024), which, through the stereotyping of animals in short folklore forms, notes that animals often appear in linguistic structures as substitutes for humans in the anthropomorphic way (Lockwood, 1989), but the transfer of animal characteristics to humans is also frequent, namely as zoomorphism. Anthropomorphization is one of the most common

representations of animals in folklore, found in all genres of folklore. Furthermore, anthropomorphizations can be representations of human concepts applied to animals, which the folklore creator has often imprinted in songs and stories; or just a virtual or post-reality, something that may have originated from a specific relationship with an individual animal or species. Frans de Waal (1999: 255–280) developed the concept of “animal-centric anthropomorphism”, which could be understood as an attempt to go beyond the hope for a total and perfect representation of the animal being, or to introduce a tolerant attitude towards the borrowing of human concepts to explain animal behaviour (Simons, 2002: 116–139). By its very definition, anthropomorphism is the misapplication of words used to describe humans to animals (Bekoff, 2010: 69). According to Eileen Crist (1999: 161): “crossing the border between nature and culture is not anthropomorphic, by giving animals a human mind – but zoomorphic, by indirectly revealing the animal face of human society.” Babič notes that the properties attributed to animals are socially constructed and have scant connection with real beings and their intrinsic nature. With language, which is then semantically realized in metaphors, animals become objects and generalized images (cf. Stibbe, 2001; Vičar, 2011).

Anthropomorphization and zoomorphization is the generator of literary works for children, so it is extremely important how children are educated through imagination, as this represents the foundation on which humans build all further relationships with animals. Through these imaginative images, a critical response to the real existence of animals is also possible, if it is not merely romanticized and allegorized. Helena Pederson emphasizes the great importance of implications for pedagogical practice and their potential consequences for the position of animals in education and in society at large. She posits it is necessary to use analytic tools such as “critical pluralism” and “immanent critique” in relation to animals in education (Pedersen, 2019). Criticism of the objectification and commodification of animals is expressed by Kalina Zahova (2024) in the article ‘Representations of Nonhuman Animals in Bulgarian Literary Education’. Her concern for the position of animals is reflected through the exploration of negative and positive representations of animals in children’s textbooks, in the literature curriculum developed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Sciences. In these textbooks, “anthropodomination” and the normalization of violence towards animals is manifested, and animals are rarely shown as the subjects of their own lives. The author discusses how the selection of literary works can affect students’ attitudes towards real animals, when the reality of their lives is carefully masked. It is, in fact, an analysis of the absence of critical judgment about the inclusion of literary works in education, which are supposed to serve establishing a positive attitude towards animals and to criticize human negative attitudes and practices. She unfortunately notes that imaginative realizations of human attitudes towards animals are subject to the prevailing dominant ideology, although proactive teachers do have the option of presenting students with a different view of animals. Zahova believes that it is high

time these curricula include content that addresses transformative relationships with the planet and its animal inhabitants.

Precisely by criticizing the objectification of animals and their bodies in various positions of exploitation and abuse through the photographic gaze and the gaze of animals back into our eyes, in the article ‘Exposed Animal Bodies: The Photographic Observation of the Body-Space of the Anthropocene’, Branislava Vičar (2024) expands upon the new concept of transcorporeality defined by Stacy Alaimo. The photographs highlight the fundamental postulates of the Anthropocene, which represents a larger, intertwined, global system of domination (Freeman Packwood, 2010; Best, 2014) that influences animal imagery. These are not just images but the reality of bodies and their existence in the capitalist system, returned to our consciousness through the photographic capture. Not only that: just as we are looking at the animals, so the animals are looking back at us, and this look is full of pain – it is not just a suffering automaton but rather a being that watches us in our guilt of destroying the world, where animal bodies and souls are constantly exploited and used. Regardless, their eyes tell us that their lives matter. Through the analysis of photographs the author also highlights the issue of speciesism and notes that it is closely related to the climate crisis, which means that the photographs are not only photographs of bodies but of subjectivity, and also witnesses of the injustice of the world (cf. Marjanić, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

We live in a system that allows us to dominate over animals physically and psychologically. This system ignores the fact that animals are sentient beings, capable of developing deep social relationships and of expressing themselves in natural conditions. To recognize these immanent realities, the system would have to change radically, the social constructs of the animal would have to be redefined, and it is particularly important to understand that the attitude towards the animal must be perceived as an ethical and ontological turn that allows us to see the animal as an individual being, as a moral subject and as knowledge of what is happening to it, because only in this way is such an ontological turn even viable. If we conceive of animals as persons, free and formally protected by law, an animal turn may in fact be possible – and it will be possible to truly think of animals in a different way. Therefore, people need to conceptualise their existence in a way that does not diminish the value of animals or create a hierarchy of living beings. The conceptualization of animals in the presented articles is already tending to new ways of thinking in critical opposition to anthropocentrism. It is still man who constructs the animal, establishes some or another relationship with it, abstracts or symbolizes it, but is also beginning to realize that the animal exists regardless of humanity and its interests. It is important to put the animal in focus in

all imagined and real situations in which it encounters a human being, but at the same time vital to deconstruct the social position of animals today through imagination and witnessing, and through imaginative and poetic justice (Nussbaum, 1995; Brooks Pribac, 2021; Golež Kaučič, 2024), so as to move to multi-species communities and cross-species social justice.

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### **Živali v žarišču: ustvarjalna in družbena imaginacija**

Zaradi novih ekoloških in etičnih spoznanj v širšem družbenem in kulturnem prostoru in spremenjenega stanja sveta, ki so povzročili tudi premik pogleda iz antro- v ekocentrizem, je bilo treba v svetovni znanosti razviti kompleksne multidisciplinarne humanistične raziskave tako živali in narave kakor razmerij človeka z njimi, da bi z različnimi spoznanji redefinirale razmerja ljudje-živali-narava-okolje-družba na novih ekoloških in etičnih temeljih. Ob premiku fokusa od ljudi k živalim in ob sledenju ontološkimi obratom v humanistiki je neogibno premisliti razliko med ljudmi in živalmi, etični in ontološki status živali in preseči razločevanje na podlagi novih spoznanj in političnih praks. Zato predstavljamo tudi osnovne izhodišča projekta Misliti živali in cilj, tj. izoblikovanje transformativnih pogledov na živali v folklori, literaturi in kulturi ter preseganje dvojnosti človek-žival. Uveljaviti želimo nove smeri raziskav



živali v humanistiki, tudi ob spoznanjih novih smeri v biologiji, npr. varstvene biologije, in njihovo povezovanje.

Na podlagi teoretskih spoznanj, ki uveljavljajo biocentrično enakovrednost vseh organizmov, diskurza sorodnosti z živalmi, kritike speciesizma kot sistema dominacije in uveljavljanja čezvrstne pravičnosti ter etike globalne medvrstne empatije ali sočutja, se sprašujemo, ali vsi ti diskurzi različnih avtorskih pogledov na žival, kakor se nam kažejo v ustvarjalni in družbeni imaginaciji, predstavljajo t. i. imaginativni protidiskurz. Obravnavamo tudi poglede na žival in odsotnost njenega glasu, ki izvira iz nerazumevanja njene raznovrstne komunikacije. K njenemu razumevanju zdaj že prispevajo nekateri kognitivni etologi, ki so se naučili različnih živalskih jezikov. Poleg tega je mogoče ob tesnem sobivanju z različnimi živalmi rekonstruirati njihove družinsko-družbene odnose (poetika vrst), hkrati pa spoznavati posebnosti živalskega individuuma (poetika posameznika).

Multidisciplinarni pogled na žival je ponazorjen s pogledom na sibirskega in polarnega medveda. V prvem primeru je s konceptom »več kot človeška družba«, po katerem je meja med medvedom in človekom zabrisana, predstavljen medved; človek na eni strani brani njegovo subjektiviteto, a jo na drugi strani uničuje. Polarni medved, kakor je predstavljen v folklori, filmu in literaturi, je demoniziran in simboliziran, hkrati pa je v očeh Inuitov prikazan kot bitje z lastno zmožnostjo delovanja.

Živali so predstavljene tudi v kratkih folklornih obrazcih. So stereotipizirane, antropomorfizirane in zoomizirane, ko se živalske lastnosti prenašajo na človeka ali nasprotno, kar pomeni, da so družbeno strukturirane in generalizirane.

S tem je povezano tudi izobraževanje o položaju živali in odnosu človeka do njih, ki vpliva na družbo kot celoto. Izbor literarnih del o živalih je predstavljen v analizi bolgarskih učbenikov za književnost. Prevladujejo negativne reprezentacije živali ali antropodominacija in normalizacija nasilja do živali.

Kritika objektivizacije živali in njihovih teles je prikazana s fotografijami živalskih teles ob upoštevanju novega koncepta čeztelesnosti. Z analizo fotografij je osvetljen speciesizem, ki je tesno povezan z podnebno krizo. Fotografije teles so tudi fotografije subjektivitet, ki pričajo o nepravilnosti v svetu.

Žival je pomembno postaviti v fokus v vseh imaginativnih in realnih situacijah, v katerih se srečuje s človekom. Ob tem je pomembno tudi dekonstruirati družbeni položaj živali danes v imaginaciji in pričevanjih. Imaginativna in poetska pravičnost omogočata prehod iz monoskupnosti v večvrstne skupnosti in uveljavljata medvrstno socialno pravičnost.