

# THINKING WITH ANIMALS

**A MINDING ANIMALS PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT  
HOSTED BY NEW YORK UNIVERSITY ANIMAL STUDIES INITIATIVE  
& THE NEW SCHOOL**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2013**

**8:30AM – 5:15PM**

**12 WAVERLY PLACE, ROOM G08, NYC 10003**

*(Rescheduled from Friday, November 2, 2012)*

Although the social sciences, humanities, and philosophy have long been characterized by a deep-seated anthropocentrism, the recent explosion of popular moral concern for nonhuman animals has helped expand the boundaries of these disciplines. This conference examines how the “animal turn” is altering the contours of academic inquiry in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, politics, sociology, cultural studies, and literature. Specifically, scholars will examine how our relations with animals both reflect and shape the historical, political, and cultural contexts in which they are embedded; and they will ask what it means to theorize animals as political, economic, social, and moral objects—and subjects.



# SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2013

12 Waverly Place, Room G08, New York, NY 10003

**8:30-9:00AM**      **REGISTRATION**

**9:00-9:15AM**      **OPENING REMARKS**

Colin Jerolmack, *Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies & Sociology, New York University*

**9:15-10:30AM**      **SESSION I: REPRESENTING ANIMALS**

Ada Smailbegovic, *PhD Candidate, Department of English, New York University*  
Dominic Pettman, *Associate Professor, Department of Culture and Media, The New School*  
Miriam Ticktin, *Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, The New School*

**10:30-10:45AM**      **COFFEE BREAK**

**10:45-12:00PM**      **SESSION II: INTERPRETING ANIMALS**

Colin Jerolmack, *Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies & Sociology, New York University*  
Amy Leigh Field, *PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, New York University*  
Pooja Rangan, *Assistant Professor, Department of Culture and Media, The New School*

**12:00-1:30PM**      **LUNCH**

*Location TBC*

**1:30-2:45PM**      **SESSION III: EATING ANIMALS**

Chris Schlottmann, *Clinical Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies, New York University*  
Timothy Pachirat, *Assistant Professor, Department of Politics, The New School*  
Jan Dutkiewicz, *PhD Candidate, Department of Politics, The New School*

**2:45-3:00PM**      **COFFEE BREAK**

**3:00-4:15PM**      **SESSION IV: VALUING ANIMALS**

Jeff Sebo, *Assistant Professor/Faculty Fellow of Animal Studies & Environmental Studies, New York University*  
Rafi Youatt, *Assistant Professor, Department of Politics, The New School*  
Alice Crary, *Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, The New School*  
Dale Jamieson, *Director of Environmental Studies; Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy; Affiliated Professor Law, New York University*

**4:15-5:15PM**      **RECEPTION**

*Location TBC*



# Abstracts

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## SESSION I: REPRESENTING ANIMALS

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### **“After Human Life: Documenting Liveliness in Zones of Disaster”**

Ada Smailbegovic, *PhD Candidate, Department of English, New York University*

Abstract: In *Becoming Undone*, the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz poses a series of open questions about the future of the humanities, asking how the humanities can proceed with their epistemological project in light of the Darwinian rearrangement of the universe that has dislocated the position of the human away from the centre of the universe. “This is not simply the question of how we might include the animal, incorporate it into the human,” Grosz writes, but to ask, “what is the limit of the humanities [...] beyond which it must be forced to transform itself into new forms of knowledge” (15)? This paper will elaborate one possible response to this question, engaging with the forms of post-humanist practice that are emerging in literary and cultural studies, to examine documents of disaster, which surprisingly reveal not empty landscapes of devastation, but the lively re-emergence of animal life. The central object of analysis will be the documentary film *Chernobyl: Life in the Dead Zone* which documents the lives of animals, that are inhabiting the literally post-human landscape surrounding the site of the 1986 nuclear disaster. The paper will constellate this documentary in relation to two fictional accounts of disaster, the 1979 film *Stalker* by the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky and the 1975 film *Black Moon* by the French director Louis Malle, as well as the drawings of Cornelia Hesse-Honegger which depict the mutations that arise among insect populations that have been exposed to radiation.

### **“Just Another Manic Monad: Of Glass, Bees, and Glass Bees”**

Dominic Pettman, *Associate Professor, Department of Culture and Media, The New School*

Abstract: Karl von Frisch famously discovered the complex communication capabilities of bees. Ernst Junger not so famously wrote a proto-cyberpunk novel about the symptomatic existence of robotic glass bees. By putting these two case studies into dialogue, this paper seeks to reassess one of the key questions of the (animal) monad: does it withdraw decisively into its own interiority, or is it capable of forming relationships and alliances with alterity?

### **“Humanitarianism beyond the Human”**

Miriam Ticktin, *Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, The New School*

Abstract: This paper will examine what I see as the expansion of the politics of universal suffering to include animals and plants – that is, to expand humanity understood as an affective community, into new biological domains -- focusing on the accompanying scientific, medical and political technologies that help to shape this emerging community. My starting point is the increasing frequency of stories foregrounding the suffering and rescue of animals, not only in the US but in humanitarian missions in places like Haiti and Japan, which draw on familiar humanitarian sentiments, structures and technologies.

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## SESSION II: INTERPRETING ANIMALS

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### **"The Totemic Pigeon: How Relations with Animals Foster Social Belonging."**

Colin Jerolmack, *Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies & Sociology, New York University*

Abstract: This paper, based on comparative ethnographic research in New York and Berlin, examines how relationships with domestic pigeons configured people's sense of self and relation to society. In New York, I show how the appreciation that a group of working-class males expressed for their pigeons was given impetus by their social relations: they bred and trained their birds according to group customs, and they competed for peer status vis-à-vis their birds. I also examine how the men's animal practices were steeped in working-class culture and fostered social ties that crossed racial boundaries. Shifting to the Turkish pigeon caretakers in Berlin, I show how the birds were vehicles for the men's performance of their ethnic identity, and I describe how the pigeon coop enabled these homesick immigrants to simultaneously maintain a material connection to their homeland and create a Turkish social space in the interstices of their host city. By underscoring how people's close relations with animals can be driven by socially patterned impulses and can organize the "social self," this paper critiques the notion that such associations are inherently tied to an innate desire to commune with nature. It also challenges sociological perspectives that assume nonhumans play no part in shaping the social realm.

### **"Animals and the Production of Meaning: Enriching "The Animal Turn" with Insights from Cultural Anthropology (and Vice Versa)"**

Amy Leigh Field, *PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, New York University*

Abstract: Fifty years ago, Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote in *The Savage Mind* that animals are "good to think." Although this idea in and of itself was not taken up widely in anthropology until "The Animal Turn," human relationships with animals are not a theme which is new to the discipline. Studies of animal totemism, animal classifications, and pastoral livelihoods have always been central topics in anthropology. However, the animal itself as a subject and as the embodiment of difference was not heavily considered. The most recent work in anthropology has begun to apply concepts from within the discipline which reverse this trend, examining themes such as animal personhood, animals in technology, animals in agriculture and food systems, and animals in morality and ethics. My own ethnographic research on the legal regulation of small animal farming in Germany follows this pattern. I attempt to describe the place of the animal in the contemporary European legal system, as well as the meanings ascribed to animals by those who regularly interact with them. The benefit of doing ethnography, the major methodology in anthropological research, is its ability to capture the rich multiplicity of meanings which relationships with animals take in different social, cultural, economic, and political circumstances, and thereby provide empirical data from which we can more clearly theorize the human-animal relationship.

### **"The Elephant's Self-Portrait: On Humane-itarian Interventions"**

Pooja Rangan, *Assistant Professor, Department of Culture and Media, The New School*

Abstract: My paper investigates contemporary humanitarian efforts to rescue and rehabilitate incarcerated and indentured animals as producers of art—a practice most recently and controversially popularized by viral videos of former draft elephants in Thailand producing

paintings for sale. Positioning these efforts as “humane-itarian mediations” that merge the rhetorical immediacy of humanitarian interventions with the disciplinary logic of humane reform, I question the anthropocentric regulatory coordinates of “selfhood” claimed for these newly empowered animal authors, by drawing on attempts by Roger Caillois and Jakob von Uexkull to articulate radically non-anthropocentric theories of animalpoiesis and semiosis.

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## SESSION III: EATING ANIMALS

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### **“Conceptions of environmentally-responsible agriculture: the role of animals”**

Chris Schlottmann, *Clinical Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies, New York University*

Abstract: A number of recent studies indicate that animal agriculture contributes to more environmental impact (especially climate change) than previously thought. This is due to improved assessment methods and the inclusion of more environmental harms such as methane. Such empirical evidence poses a challenge to many conceptions of environmentally responsible agriculture, including localism, traditionalism, and critiques of modernism and technology. This talk discusses this challenge in detail, specifically engaging with some tensions that this evidence raises for environmentally responsible food production.

### **“Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight”**

Timothy Pachirat, *Assistant Professor, Department of Politics, The New School*

Abstract: I present findings from research into the routine killing of animals for human consumption from the perspective of slaughterhouse employees. Drawing on more than five months of undercover employment as a liver hanger, cattle driver, and quality control worker on the kill floor of a Great Plains slaughter-house where 2,500 cattle are killed per day, I will explore not only the slaughter industry but also how, as a society, we facilitate violent labor and hide away that which we find too repugnant to contemplate.

### **“This Little Piggy Went to Market: Representing Animal Life & Death in Pork Industry Discourse”**

Jan Dutkiewicz, *PhD Candidate, Department of Politics, The New School*

Abstract: In a society where animal mistreatment and animal consumption are becoming increasingly viewed with distaste, producers and vendors of animal products engage in various tactics to distance animals and animal death from end consumers. This trend is most tellingly manifested in the marketing and business discourse undertaken by the meat industry. By examining various forms of communication undertaken by companies throughout the pork value chain, this paper seeks to examine the role of distance, deceit, and denial in propagating and normalizing exploitative inter-species power relations. The analysis focuses on how euphemism, jargon, and omission are strategically deployed to affect different audiences' perceptions of pig life and death as well as the very nature of animality itself. This paper goes on to suggest that the commodification of nonhumans inherent in the industry is internally justified and normalized through the active and strategic discursive reduction of animals to products.

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## SESSION IV: VALUING ANIMALS

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### **“Animal Agency”**

Jeff Sebo, *Assistant Professor/Faculty Fellow of Animal Studies & Environmental Studies,  
New York University*

Abstract: Many philosophers put a lot of moral weight on the concept agency, or personhood. They think that you need to be an agent in order to have reasons, duties, and many rights, including the right to life and liberty. And, unfortunately for nonhuman animals, many philosophers also have fairly anthropocentric views about agency: they think that you need to be rational, linguistic, and self-aware in order to be an agent, and that most, if not all, nonhuman animals are clearly not rational, linguistic, or self-aware. However, in recent years some philosophers have begun to challenge this conception of agency, for reasons that often have very little to do with nonhuman animals. My goal in this talk is to present an increasingly popular "minimal" conception of agency and argue that this "minimal" conception of agency implies that many nonhuman animals are agents after all. I will then very briefly consider what the moral upshot of this development might be.

### **“Foie Gras and the Relational Politics of Context”**

Rafi Youatt, *Assistant Professor, Department of Politics, The New School*

Abstract: This paper discusses the role of relational, context-dependent obligations in steering human political commitments to animals, using the debates over foie gras in Chicago as its point of departure. It shows that political stances in the foie gras debates were generated neither by a context free abstraction about "the animal," nor by context per se, but rather by moving ideas about animals from one context to another. It then considers how this example bears on recent arguments in political theory that contexts can, and should, determine the kinds of positive rights that animals have.

### **“Thinking about Animals: How to be hard-headed without being hard (or unimaginative)”**

Alice Crary, *Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, The New School*

Abstract: This talk is a philosophical intervention in debates about animals and ethics. Many thinkers who contribute to the animal protectionist movement start from – sometimes unwittingly – philosophical assumptions that block appreciation of how imaginative works can contribute to an ethically relevant understanding of animals' lives. In this brief commentary, I have two aims: (1) to describe how such philosophical assumptions shape the writings of some prominent animal advocates and (2) to offer illustrations of the sort of imaginative thought about animals that these assumptions exclude. I focus specifically on James Marsh's 2011 film *Project Nim* and Jonathan Safran Foer's 2009 book *Eating Animals*.

### **“The Messes Animals Make”**

Dale Jamieson, *Director of Environmental Studies & Bioethics;  
Professor of Environmental Studies & Philosophy; Affiliated Professor Law, New York University*

Abstract: In a 1947 paper B.A.G. Fuller pointed out that “animals make a mess in metaphysics.” Philosophical systems are typically constructed without regard to animals, and so “they are such

metaphysical misfits...that the only way of keeping the system in order and man master of it is to shoo them out of the house altogether and stop one's ears against their scratching at the door."(p.83). So we get the incredible and unlivable views of Descartes and Malebranche, and from most of the philosophical tradition, an eerie silence.

Animals make messes not only in metaphysics but also in other areas of philosophy including philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, ethics, and legal philosophy. When animals cannot be ignored they are tortured in order to fit into preexisting categories. Rather than being acknowledged for what they are, they are typically discussed in terms of their similarities and differences to humans. Some argue that humans and animals are similar, pointing out that chimps share 97% of their genetic material with humans, asserting that apes can learn language or have a theory of mind, or that rats have empathy. Others claim that animals and humans are dissimilar. They point out that no animals but homo sapiens have ever created anything like New York City with all of its cultural wonders. And as bad as the airlines have become, it would be impossible to survive even a single flight managed and populated by chimpanzees.

The problem, as Nelson Goodman pointed out long ago, is that similarity is cheap, and so these disputes are irresolvable on empirical grounds alone. There are an infinite number of similarities and differences between any two things. The important question is not how many similarities there are between two things, but in what respects two things are similar and how much should we care about these respects. The answer to these questions adverts to our interests and purposes, and so is entwined with our values, presuppositions, and the conceptual framework within which the question is being asked.

For too long investigators have been focused on Human Exceptionalism — some assert it, and others to deny it. What should be rejected is not Human Exceptionalism, but the very idea of Exceptionalism itself. Natural systems express life in a vast array of forms. There is no single (or single class) of exemplars. When things are seen from this perspective the messes disappear. All living things are intrinsic to the natural order in the same way and to the same extent. Taking up this view might require us to confront some truths that are even more inconvenient than that we should give up eating hamburgers and donate the money to PETA. It might force us to rethink who we are.



# Biographies

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## ALICE CRARY

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Alice Crary is a moral philosopher who teaches in the Philosophy Department at the New School for Social Research. Her major publications include *Beyond Moral Judgment* (Harvard, 2007). Her current research interests include realism, modernism and the novel and also questions about the relationship between feminist thought and ordinary language philosophy. She has been teaching and writing about animals and ethics for nearly fifteen years and is currently finishing a book on humans, animals and ethics entitled *Inside Ethics: Resituating Human Beings and Animals*.

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## UNA CHAUDHURI

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Una Chaudhuri is Collegiate Professor and Professor of English and Drama at New York University. She is the author of *No Man's Stage: A Semiotic Study of Jean Genet's Plays*, and *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, as well as numerous articles on drama theory and theatre history in such journals as *Modern Drama*, *Theatre Journal*, and *Theatre*. She is the editor of *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms*, a book of scripts by performance artist Rachel Rosenthal, and co-editor, with Elinor Fuchs, of the award-winning critical anthology *Land/Scape/Theater*. She was guest editor of a special issue of *Yale Theater* on "Theater and Ecology," and of special issue of *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* on "Animals and Performance." She has served on the Executive Committee of the Drama Division of the Modern Language Association, as well as on the American Theatre Wing's Grants Committee. She chairs the panel of judges for the Callaway Prize for the Best Book on Drama and Theatre, and has been a judge of the Obie Awards and the Alpert Awards.

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## JAN DUTKIEWICZ

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Jan Dutkiewicz is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Politics at the New School for Social Research. His research focuses on the political economy of human-animal relations and on the interaction between governance structures and nonhumans.

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## AMY LEIGH FIELD

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Amy Field is a third-year doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology at New York University. She completed a BS in Society & Environment from the University of California at Berkeley in 2009, and an MA in Sociocultural Anthropology at New York University in May 2012. Her specialties within anthropology are legal and political anthropology, human-animal relationships, and the anthropology of Europe. She has just finished a short period of ethnographic field research in Germany, looking at the legal regulations regarding the raising, care, and slaughter of farm animals. In examining small farmers' relationships to animal protection laws, her



dissertation research will explore the ways in which practices of animal care and conceptions of the animal in Germany are being affected by broader processes of legal, cultural, and economic change.

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## DALE JAMIESON

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Dale Jamieson is Director of the Environmental Studies Program, the Animal Studies Initiative, and the Center for Bioethics at New York University, where he is also Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy, and Affiliated Professor of Law. He is a Patron of Minding Animals International. Jamieson is the author of "Against Zoos" and "Zoos Revisited," and many articles regarding the moral status and cognitive and affective capacities of non-human animals. His most recent books are *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2008), and *Reflecting on Nature: Readings in Environmental Philosophy, 2nd Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2012) with Lori Gruen and Chris Schlotmann.

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## COLIN JEROLMACK

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Colin Jerolmack is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies at New York University. He also teaches in NYU's newly created Animal Studies Initiative. He received his PhD in sociology from the City University of New York, and then was awarded a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Scholars in Health Policy Research Fellowship at Harvard University. His research interests include Community and Urban Sociology, Environmental Sociology, Human-animal Relations, Culture, Health, and Ethnography. His first book, *The Global Pigeon: How Animals Shape City Life*, will be published in February 2013 by the University of Chicago Press.

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## TIMOTHY PACHIRAT

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Timothy Pachirat is an Assistant Professor and the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of Politics at the New School. His research and teaching interests include comparative politics, the politics of Southeast Asia, spatial and visual politics, power and the sociology of domination and resistance, the political economy of dirty and dangerous work, and interpretive and ethnographic research methods. His most recent book, entitled *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*, was published by Yale University Press in November 2011. His forthcoming book, *Ethnography and Interpretation*, is under contract with Routledge Press and will be published in 2013.

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## DOMINIC PETTMAN

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Dominic Pettman is Chair of Culture and Media, Eugene Lang College, as well as Associate Professor of Liberal Studies, New School for Social Research. He is the author of *After the Orgy: Toward a Politics of Exhaustion* (SUNY, 2002), *Avoiding the Subject: Media, Culture and the Object* (AUP, 2004 – with Justin Clemens), *Love and Other Technologies: Retrofitting Eros for the Information Age*

(Fordham, 2006), *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines* (Minnesota, 2011), and *Look at the Bunny: Totem, Taboo, Technology* (Zero Books, 2013).

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## **POOJA RANGAN**

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Pooja Rangan is Assistant Professor of Culture and Media in Eugene Lang College at the New School. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *differences*, *Camera Obscura*, *South Asian Popular Culture*, *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, *The Sarai Reader*, and *Shoppinghour Magazine*. She is currently working on a book, *Humanitarian Mediations*, that examines the discursive and medial frames of contemporary humanitarian media interventions.

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## **CHRIS SCHLOTTMANN**

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Christopher Schlottmann is Clinical Assistant Professor and Associate Director of Environmental Studies and Affiliated Professor of Bioethics at New York University. His research is in the areas of environmental education, environmental ethics, and the ethics of food and the environment. He recently published *Conceptual Challenges for Environmental Education* (Peter Lang, 2012) and co-edited *Reflecting on Nature: Readings in Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2012) with Dale Jamieson and Lori Gruen. He teaches "Food, Animals and the Environment," for which he won the Animals and Society Course award from HSUS and ASI. He is working on a book on the ethics of food, focusing on the central role of animals and the environment.

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## **JEFF SEBO**

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Jeff Sebo is an Assistant Professor/Faculty Fellow in Animal Studies and Environmental Studies at New York University, where he teaches Animal Minds, Ethics and Animals, Political Theory and Animals, and Food, Animals, and the Environment. His research focuses on what it takes to be a moral agent and to have direct moral status. He explores these questions in the case of human beings by arguing that many human beings have multiple personalities, some of which are full moral agents and all of which have direct moral status. And he explores these questions in the case of nonhuman animals by arguing that many nonhuman animals are rational and self-aware in at least a minimal sense, and therefore count as moral agents in at least a minimal sense.

Jeff has published work on animal ethics in *Animal Liberation Philosophy & Policy*, and has presented work on animal ethics at Georgetown University, New York University, Syracuse University, and the University of Texas at Austin.

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## **ADA SMAILBEGOVIC**

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Ada Smailbegovic holds an M.A. in English and a B.Sc. (Honours) in Biology from the University of British Columbia. Her research areas include 20th Century Poetry and Poetics, Science (Biology) and Literature, Affect, and Animal Studies. Her M.A. Thesis was entitled "Poetics of Liveliness:

Theories of Embryological Development and Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*." In her doctoral work, she addresses the relationship between affect and ethology (through the work of Spinoza, Silvan Tompkins, and Jakob von Uexküll), and ways of conceptualizing animals, from an ecocritical perspective, as organisms that are tethered to the sensitive environments in which they live.

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### MIRIAM TICKTIN

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Miriam Ticktin is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College. She is the author of *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*, University of California Press, 2011 (co-winner of the 2012 Douglass Prize in Europeanist Anthropology); and *In the Name of Humanity: the Government of Threat and Care* (co-edited with Ilana Feldman), Duke University Press, 2010.

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### RAFI YOUATT

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Rafi Youatt is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Politics at The New School. He is interested in questions of agency and power in human-nonhuman relations, particularly as they relate to political life. His research and teaching interests include the politics of animals and animality, environmental political theory and science studies, international relations theory, and global environmental politics. He is completing a book entitled *Making Global Biodiversity: Nonhuman Agency and Environmental Politics*.