Guest Editor’s Introduction: Animals, Representation, and Reality

The field of animal studies, which this journal has fostered and promoted for almost a decade, has now begun to develop across an increasing range of academic disciplines. Initially envisaged principally as “a substantive subfield” within the social sciences and, thus, as an academic “parallel” to the animal rights movement, it was nevertheless recognized from the outset that animal studies would also benefit from some contributions from both the humanities and the natural sciences (Shapiro, 1993, pp. 1-2).

In 1997, the journal formally extended its scope “to include investigations in the humanities” (Shapiro, 1997, p. 1), thus anticipating a number of academic conferences in 1999 and 2000, which testified to the considerable growth of interest in animal topics within humanities disciplines. Julie Smith’s contribution to this special theme issue assesses the significance of those conferences. And although “The Representation of Animals” is a theme that will no doubt also be of interest within the social and natural sciences, the issue reflects the particular importance of the question of “representation” in humanities disciplines.
such as history, literary criticism, art history, socio-cultural anthropology, and philosophy, each of which is represented in the contributions to this issue.

**The Work of Representation**

Why is it, it may be asked, that representation has become such an inescapable and compelling topic in these disciplines, and what exactly is its significance in relation to the human experience of other animals? It is important to understand from the start that the term is not used here in the rather narrower sense in which it might be understood by some psychologists, for example, as little more than a product of the brain’s information processing capacities.\(^2\) It is used instead in a sense that is both broader and more complex, as reflected for example, in the titles of forthcoming volumes such as *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (Simons, in press) or, simply, *Representing Animals* (Rothfels, in press). Books such as these acknowledge the extent to which human understanding of animals is shaped by representations rather than by direct experience of them. In the language of scientific studies and in the structure of museum and zoo displays, just as much as in the more obvious examples of art, film, literature, and the mass media, many different forms of representation are employed. In some of these instances - as Robert McKay notes in his contribution to this issue - animals may simultaneously be “represented” in the political or legal sense of having their rights or interests spoken for by animal advocates and others.

This should not be taken to suggest that the study of representations is wholly subjective or partisan. New levels of understanding can emerge from such study. To give one concise example, at last year’s *Millennial Animals* conference (reviewed by Smith) a paper by Matthew Brower considered the subject of North American wildlife photography. Brower’s historical perspective enabled him to show that this practice, currently regarded for the most part as “a non-intrusive, environmentally friendly activity which shows proper respect for the fragility of nature” and as “a model of non-interventionist right practice,” had only a century ago been characterized as “camera hunting.” It was a practice “shaped by the discourses of hunting,” and the resulting photographs were spoken of “as both trophy and kill,” but the particular difficulties created by the technical limitations of the camera at that time led to the camera hunter rather than the hunter with a gun coming to be regarded

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