



The Animal

Call for Papers for the 34th Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism

11-14 July, 2016, Uppsala University, Sweden

“Nothing, as a matter of fact, is more closed to us than this animal life from which we are descended. ... The animal opens before me a depth that attracts me and is familiar to me. In a sense, I know this depth: it is my own. It is at the same time that which is farthest removed from me, that which deserves the name depth, which means precisely *that which is unfathomable to me.*”
Georges Bataille, in *Theory of Religion* (1989: 20-22)

The animal has always been lurking in the background of (the study of) organization. The entire knowledge tradition of management, organization, and indeed also economics, is firmly rooted in farm technology and agricultural affairs, concerned for instance with the productivity of oxen and horses. Key production technologies of industrial organization, such as assembly lines, were modelled after slaughterhouse practices, and the ways in which carcasses were moved along by means of overhead trolleys (cf. Ford 1922). Even management models on performance/stress relationships that underlie lean management ideals rest, as Martin Corbett (2013) has shown, on experiments with Japanese dancing mice. Despite the fundamental role that the animal has played for organization as we know it, it has remained peripheral to organizational discourse; only in recent years have we seen an explicit, and emerging, interest in “our organized relations with animals” (Labatut *et al.* 2014).

Lodged in Uppsala – once the home of Swedish botanical and zoological master-systematiser Carl von Linné – SCOS 2016 seeks to further mobilize our thinking on this suppressed aspect of organization, by exploring the force of the concept of “the animal.” More than merely directing the attention towards an empirical blind spot of organization, and inviting animals back onto/into the field, the aim of the conference is to follow Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1964) dictum and think with/through/by the animal – perhaps even tease out the animal and animality in our own research, in the phenomena that we study, and/or in the academic community to which we belong. Doing so will inevitably, we believe, throw light on and problematize also another cornerstone of organizing and organizational life, namely “the human.”

If the animal has played a peripheral, yet foundational role in/for organization studies, it has also done so, in a more abstract sense, for humanist thought by and large. Various species appear in the writings that have contemplated and sought to theorize our worldly existence, and they keep recurring across cultures and civilizations. Anaximander of Miletus held that humans had sprung out of the sea, not only evolving from

fish-like animals but originally shaped and sheltered inside such creatures. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958: 223) resolutely maintained that “if a lion could speak, we could not understand him”, while Thomas Nagel (1974) famously tarried with the question of “what is it like to be a bat?” In Confucianism, a person failing to live up to the moral standards of a particular social relation would be nothing more than a beast. And as David Graeber (2011) has noted, the maxim “that no one has ever observed two dogs exchanging bones” has echoed from medieval Persian prophets up through Adam Smith. Then, there is of course also the overwhelming interest in yet another animal species in humanist thought – homo sapiens, the human animal.

Whereas the human has traditionally been thought as either a distinct and superior type of animal, or a kind of being essentially different from animals altogether (see e.g. Agamben 2004), many of the separations and continuities between these two categories have indeed imploded. The Cartesian position of seeing animals as machines or automata, constituted by material mechanisms, and governed by the laws of matter alone, never chimed well with either the continuities identified by the ancient Greeks, or the etymological roots of the concept – the Latin “anima,” meaning soul or spirit (cf. Simondon 2011). Today, we have of course also learned that animals, just like humans, use tools and language, share a cultural or political nature, act on the basis of deliberative imagination, are capable of showing empathy, get depressed, *et cetera*. The macabre genealogy of assembly lines points, moreover, to how the wild and savage resides within, and at the very core of human civilization. And slowly, it has begun to sink in that the question of what it might be that distinguishes “us” from “them” was flawed from the start. To make the point that any distinction is necessarily superficial and cannot but fall into the trap of anthropocentrism, Friedrich Nietzsche succinctly stated that an animal which could speak would say “Humanity is a prejudice of which we animals at least are free” (1997: 162).

Against this background, papers are invited that address the animal and animality in and of organization – or indeed the a-human, in-human, non-human, post-human, neo-human or all-too-human in organization and organizational processes. Contributions may find inspiration in the following themes:

- The animal, the body, and embodied animal experience in/of organization
- Animal modes of being, metamorphosis, animal-becoming, being-with-animals
- Animal senses, animal madness, and madness in/of animality
- Organizing life worlds of animals, humans, plants, parasites, and tics
- Hunting, herding, grazing, organizing
- Sociobiology, grooming, and altruism in organization
- Behaviourism, Pavlov, and the conditioning of dogs and laboratory rats
- Organizing animals and ANT
- The organization as safari
- The politics of the animal and animality
- Animal rights, animal exploitation, animal extinction and organization
- The animal and morality: empathy, compassion, cooperation
- Animal labour, animal industries, animal testing, meat scandals
- The animal and technology: animal test-pilots and animal alternatives
- Animalizing the human, humanizing the animal
- Birds and bees and organization
- Animal art and the art of the animal
- Disneyfication, anime, animal cosplay, and cute economies
- Beauty and the beast, and the post-human in/of organization
- Animal deities, lobster-gods, and theology in organization
- Hybridity, centaurs, fauns, and fables

Open stream and workshops

SCOS 2016 will also have an open stream, allowing for the presentation of papers of more general interest to the SCOS community. In addition we are open to suggestions for workshops or similar events in line with the proposed theme. Outlines of workshops should be the same length as a paper abstract and should give an indication of the resources needed, the number of participants, the time required, the approach to be taken and the session's objectives. Please identify "open stream" or "workshop" on your abstract, as appropriate.

The Venue

The conference will be held at **Norrlands Nation**, which is located in the city centre, and just a stone's throw away from Uppsala Cathedral. Facing Fyrisån, it is housed in a grand nouveau renaissance style building from 1889.

Convenors

The conference is hosted by the Division of Industrial Engineering and Management at Uppsala University, in Sweden. The main organizers are Thomas Taro Lennerfors and David Sköld, both at Uppsala University.

Abstracts

Abstracts of no more than 500 words, in pdf-format, should be submitted as e-mail attachments by Friday December 4th 2015 to: scos2016@gmail.com. You may also direct any queries to this address.

References

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