

The Challenges of Technoscience for Critical Animal Studies

**A Report on the 3rd European Conference
for Critical Animal Studies,
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From the 28th to 30th of November, the 3rd *European Conference for Critical Animal Studies* was held at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis. The thematic focus of this year's conference was on the analysis of the concept of "Technosciences". The term Critical Animal Studies describes a young, interdisciplinary research field that deals with the relationship of humans to animals. The focus of Critical Animal Studies is on the critique of human-animal relationships, so research on topics such as justice, violence and exploitation, sustainability, consumption and production of animal products or on proposals of alternative human-animal relations dominated the conference. The ICAS conferences claim, moreover, to build bridges between science and engaged civil society.

The claim of interdisciplinarity could be only partially fulfilled. Particularly well represented were researchers from the social sciences, philosophy and the cultural, literary, and media studies. The academic contributions were complemented by an exhibition of the artist Hartmut Kiewert as well as the screening of the documentary *Maximum Tolerated Dose* with a subsequent Skype discussion with filmmaker Karol Orzechowski. Underrepresented, if not entirely absent, were the natural sciences and economics.

The conference program included keynote speeches by critical educationalist Dr. Helena Pedersen, who reported on her experiences with the training of veterinarians, as well as by Anat Pick, who talked about the representation of animals, their bodies, and their vulnerability in movies. She

also talked about early pioneering work, such as that of Thomas Edison, who filmed the electrical execution of an elephant – but primarily to demonstrate strength and potential of electricity.

Further highlights were the two panel discussions. For the discussion on animal experiments, which was moderated by Kathrin Hermann, the panelists Tereza Vandrovcová, Dr. Martin Balluch, Claudio Pomo and conference organizer Dr. Arianne Ferrari were invited. The podium was supplemented by a video message from Dr. Andrew Knight from the Caribbean. Unfortunately, most debaters failed to comply with the prescribed time for their statements, so the discussion was opened to the public immediately at the end of the sometimes extensive statements. The plenary discussion dealt with, *inter alia*, the question of how many political compromises in the concrete demands for an end to animal testing should be accepted. Especially the position of Balluch Martin, who demanded a list of criteria to distinguish between useful/legitimate and useless/illegitimate animal experiments, provided a basis for an unfortunately much too brief discussion.

The second panel discussion attempted to start a discussion between different positions on the *Politics of Nature*. A controversial discussion arose between Dr. Rita Wing and Dr. Elisa Aaltola on the role of intuition as a theoretical basis for the question of moral inclusion or exclusion of animals. The third discussant, Dr. John Sonbanmatsu, delivered a political plea for a socially critical perspective on the human-animal relationship, which also includes a critique of capitalism. Although the second panel discussion at first gave the impression to not be thematically focused enough, there was a quite interesting discussion, which was continued in the hallways and at lunch.

Also controversial was a discussion about the status quo and perspectives of Critical Animal Studies, which was scheduled as a group discussion. This was triggered, among other things, by differing views about which scientific and political criteria individual scientists must comply with in order to be counted among scholars of Critical Animal Studies.

In addition, the conference program included a variety of thematically ordered streams, where predominantly younger scientists could present their papers and projects. Presentations were held on very different topics, such as *Literary Critical Animal Studies*, *Critical Ethology*, or *Technosciences, Science, and Power*. Streams on topics such as *Military Uses [of Animals]*, *Meat* or *Experiment* also dealt specifically with the use of animals, as well as with acts of violence on animals.

The contents of the different streams stand quite representative of the wide range of topics that are covered by the field of Critical Animal

Studies. Similarly, however, it shows that sometimes the common content between the individual work was hardly visible, so that a future question to be addressed is the extent to which a common research interest, a common methodology, and common research practice are needed for the legitimization of Critical Animal Studies as an independent, interdisciplinary discipline of its own.

It also became partly clear that within Critical Animal Studies, there are very different scientific standards. While many presentations corresponded to high standards in terms of content and form, some contributions lacked structure, clear research questions, comprehensible methodology, and a coherent argumentation. This reveals a typical “childhood disease” of young sciences, which Critical Animal Studies should overcome as quickly as possible.

In conclusion, it can be said that the 3rd *European Conference for Critical Animal Studies* was an important step both for the exchange within the scientific community as well as for the further establishment of research into the human-animal relationship in general. The organization of the conference was successful, which is why the gratitude to the main organizer Arianna Ferrari and her team at the end of the conference was more than justified.