

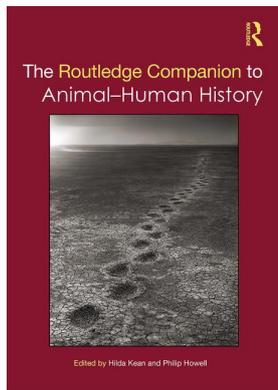
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Hilda Kean, Philip Howell

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Mieke Roscher

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NEW POLITICAL HISTORY AND THE WRITING OF ANIMAL LIVES

Mieke Roscher

Introduction

There has been a heated debate among animal historians around the topic of the ‘real’ versus the symbolic animal, with some historians arguing that a history of animals can be nothing more than a representational recount of animal lives, the historian’s role being that of a chronicler as well as interpreter.¹ This seems highly problematic both with regard to the responsibility of historians and to the objects of such conceptualisations (whether animal or other). More generally, what can be termed ‘the representation debate’ reveals difficulties central to the understanding of writing history. Historical approaches that claim to rely solely on the representational consideration of animals and that really record only human attitudes to animals might therefore be in need of an elaboration. Indeed, what is required is a fusion of historiographical approaches that take representation seriously, but which go further by also including the material life of the animal, namely the life of specific animals in historical contexts.

Practising history with regard to making visible the past lives of animals can draw on a number of concepts well established within the historical discipline. It can also profit from more recent historiographical debates which have been developed in view of changing societal conditions, activating concepts made available by the new political history and the cultural history of politics respectively, including other than human actors by expanding the focus on ‘materiality’ and the ‘body’.² The animal, or so it may be suggested, meets the criteria of those possible beneficiaries of such new approaches in political history. Drawing on a set of concepts in a revised cultural political history, specifically the construction of reality through communicative and bodily processes on the one hand and the differentiation between political framings and ‘politics as practice’ on the other, a productive agenda for writing the lives of animals and of practising animal history is conceivable.

What is required in order to get to the core of animal history is thus a twofold approach that combines the *material* interaction between humans and animals (and the impact of these interactions on animal lives and bodies) with their discursively charged *representations*, or, to speak in terms of political history, the juxtaposition of

symbolic action and social action. Through this lens a distinct *production* of animals (both materially and discursively) can be identified.³ This production is manifested historically and thus needs careful examination, particularly with regard to the role of the animal in these meaning-making processes. Underlying this argument is the assumption that this production relies on a constant exchange with the animal. This exchange or co-production can further be regarded as a process of political negotiation via or with the animal.⁴ Both of these processes are naturally bound to have very different consequences for the animals' lives and are in need of scrupulous historical disentanglement.

Relying on input from new political history as well as from material culture approaches, the history of the body and performativity studies, the substantive aim of this paper is to illustrate how the political meaning of animals is produced in this way, through practices of humans *and* other animals. This production of meaning has an explicit and versatile political agenda by which animals are directly affected and which animals also *effect*. This applies to normative measures as part of political decision-making processes such as animal welfare laws as well as philosophical and ethical conceptions about the role of the animal within the larger societal framework. Within this theoretical and historiographical scheme, the possibilities of conceptualising animals as political actors who help determine the political dimension of human-animal relationships come to light. To explicate this theoretical discussion I will rely on examples and sources from my own work on animals, more precisely on dogs and horses in the Third Reich. Through these examples, I want to demonstrate what needs to be considered empirically as well as methodologically when writing a political history of animals.

Political history and animals

Political history has dominated historiography from its inception in the Rankean tradition right from the start.⁵ Seen as the recounting of diplomatic history, the history of political systems as well as of the history of political ideologies, this approach, although based primarily on empiricist ideas, clearly ignored animals. It also failed to take notice of workers, women and colonised people as actors of history. Although animals were frequent in political symbolism from antiquity onwards and appear as such in iconographic source material accordingly, serving as a medium of communication and perception, of structure and order and of interpreting the world, political history has tended to neglect them. This must appear strange in view of the fact that animals have also functioned as ubiquitous others, material evidence to justify and to explain all sorts of, predominantly political, ostracisms, demarcations and exclusion processes.⁶ Here, animals functioned as surrogates, their bodies subject to the exercise of political control. Political power structures were clearly introduced or reinforced by way of controlling animals. Historically, this becomes apparent with the high profile of animal spectacles in Roman political life or the medieval animal trials.⁷ Neither animals themselves nor their classification were subject only to an abstract symbolism. On the contrary, power was manifested through their physical subjugation, the interaction with the real, bodily animal. This remained valid for modern times. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, for instance, animals were

widely used as a tool to demonstrate political order. The reorganisation of a society now expressed by new economic structures and newly formed (political) classes was a case in point.⁸ It was first and foremost the working classes who were shunned for their perceived animality.⁹ This was also bitter reality for colonised peoples in the age of imperialism.¹⁰ Animalisation was the dominant trope in political as well as social exclusion. The same was true for exclusion based on racist belief systems. Furthermore, control over animals more often than not functioned as an extension of the policy-making process. Research has shown for example how colonial safaris within the British Empire, especially the hunting of big cats, was a political means for controlling colonial subjects, replacing native or princely hunting traditions, such as those exercised by the former Mughal rulers, with what was perceived as European and civilised forms of hunting.¹¹ A political history of the modern age, Kathleen Kete surmises, would just not be possible without paying attention to these animal-related encounters.¹² This is certainly the case for a political history of the Third Reich, where animal-related tropes dominated political discourses.¹³ Some animals, such as certain dog breeds, were Germanised so as to become part of Hitler's plan for a thousand-year empire. But here again it was animals' material bodies that served to make these discourses a living reality.

New political history: what's in a name?

To follow Ranke's dictum, telling 'history how it actually happened, showing what really was', has played into the hands of those writing the history of 'great men' and 'events', but it has seen itself challenged by various moves within historiography, starting with the Annales school, but followed by the rise of new historicism and the development of social history more generally. The established strand of political history was thereby marked as outdated, precisely because it failed to recognise the communicative spaces and practices shaping political action.¹⁴ But here again, animals remained outside the scope of historical considerations. Moreover, what has been labelled the 'new' political history did not have the lived relations of humans and animals in mind when insisting that practices of everyday life be included in the understanding of political communication. On the contrary, letting all too many actors into the frame of (cultural) history has been guarded against, for fear of 'cultural relativism'.¹⁵ If everything has a history, the argument went, what is the point of writing it? If everything is political, what is non-political?¹⁶ Focusing on animals as historical actors has thus become the subject of a wider historiographical debate around who to include and on what perspective to take in 'political' history. Still, it is worth turning, for the practice of writing animal lives, to the communicative spaces, the performances and the symbolism and semantics that the new political or cultural history of politics promised, beyond the more narrow definition of political theory, even if one must be aware of a potential watering down of the 'political'.¹⁷ The existing structures of political power must always be carefully looked at. Saying that, we need clarification about what is meant by new political history before entering into a debate over how it can be made fruitful for writing animal history.

Firstly, it needs to be asserted that the terminology of political history was and still is strongly dependent on certain specific national traditions within the field of

history, as well as on different political traditions as such. So whereas from the 1970s onwards there appeared to be a consensus that the *established* political history of the Rankean tradition had failed to incorporate socio-political structures, mentalities as well as cultural symbolism available to historical agents, there was much less agreement on which theoretical and methodological direction to take.¹⁸ Where the French Annales School in its search for ‘total history’ wanted to do away with political history as such, the ‘new political history’ of the American tradition focused on more quantitatively orientated projects as well as on the ‘infrapolitics’ of the oppressed. In Britain, for a further contrast, political history was undermined by cultural history precisely because the construction of the political self and political space came to the forefront of the historian’s interests.¹⁹ This ‘cultural history of politics’ was influenced particularly by subaltern studies.²⁰ The constitution of identities and meanings also came into the focus of British historians.²¹ The German historical profession and their insistence on the *Sonderweg* (literally: ‘special path’) took yet another tack, following both the history of everyday life and historical anthropology and turning political history into what has been termed ‘the cultural history of the political,’ in which the symbolic constitution of politics as well as the ‘material organisation of political communication’ was considered.²²

Admittedly, these differences appear insignificant in comparison with the ‘old’ political history, but they are, at least in principle, willing to include ‘agents of an entirely different kind’ than human actors in their historiographical framework.²³ Furthermore, all include or tolerate a focus on communicative spaces, which may well include non-verbal communication and the space of social interaction.²⁴ Moreover, even with their diverse access to their fields of enquiry all approaches of a new political history find a common ground in their daring to go beyond pure culturalism inherent in many studies within a history aware of the cultural turn.²⁵

Unfortunately, this still seems to remain ‘theoretical’, as more often than not historians following the new political history approach cling to the analysis of stately institutions, or, as Steinmetz and Haupt put it: ‘governments, monarchs, parties, or parliaments (. . .) still get the bulk of attention in many new political histories’.²⁶ Nevertheless, the potential that the new political history offers in terms of opening up communicative spaces and scope of action beyond the institutionalised political process, especially for everyday practices, should be of interest as a heuristic tool for animal historians. Firstly, and rather traditionally, it offers the chance to look at how animals figured as subjects of political legislation, but secondly it can look at how animals figured in political semantics, and thirdly, much more in tune with an animal perspective, it can look at the bodily presences in everyday encounters that are the essence of the political.

These lines of argument can be illustrated for the attempts to write about animals in the Third Reich. Looking at domesticated animals who were said to be the beneficiaries of the Nazi animal welfare project, the myriad layers of politics resulting in their status are obviously open to analysis. Dogs and horses figured especially prominently in the political and propagandistic repertoire deployed by the Nazis. The *Reichstierschutzgesetz* (animal welfare law) of 1933 referenced the ideology of National Socialism more generally but also the alleged ‘racial predisposition of the Germanic people to animal welfare’ specifically, was mainly directed at their

well-being.²⁷ The legislation listed many prohibitions against the use of animals and was allegedly passed to protect animals for their own sake.²⁸ In this context, a new political history approach seems to be valuable both for an understanding of a history of everyday life of the Third Reich as well as a history of animals. This further prompts the question of how animals' lives were constituted in the face of a totalitarian system which posed as the animals' friend: what can be said about their everyday experiences? Did these ideologically charged presumptions affect the animals' living conditions and, if so, in what way? The safeguarding and procreation of animals was declared one of the most important policies to be pursued as a matter of national defence.²⁹ But how was this reflected in their bodily experiences? And, of course, how can we get an animal dimension into these heavily politicised arguments?

This appears to be quite a task, considering that political theory has regarded the animal not as a participant in interactions defined as political, but rather and exclusively as an object of political decision making.³⁰ This is not surprising given that in an Aristotelian reading the *zoon politikon*, the political animal, is only ever of human form, whereas the animal is without a voice (*zoon alogon*) and therefore not part of political processes as such.³¹ Mainstream political theory does not regard animals – neither entire species nor individual animals – as capable of being political. The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives among other entries the following definition for politics: 'the total complex of relations between people living in society'.³² This society is thus understood as solely made up of humans. This is in line of what has been critiqued as an exclusionary zoopolitics, namely a Derridean analysis of the place of politics as the proper arena of the human. The dualistic framework of humanity and animality is therefore constitutive for humans to think of themselves as political and rational animals, in opposition to the animal that must be neither political nor rational.³³ Social theory has lately begun to include other entities, however, among them non-human animals, as basic bearers of agency. These theories have also left their mark on the new and cultural history, especially discourses of entanglements and performances. Seeing the political discourse as a social practice, that is, as essentially meaning the negotiation between the self and the other surely brings the animal onto the table of a new approach to political history.³⁴ This is where we might return to new political history defined as 'sociocultural history with the political brought in again'.³⁵ The entanglement of symbolic and physical acts, the performativity of ideology and subversion as well as the material side of politics, thus serves to characterise a historical programme well worth the attention of animal–human historians. In order to do this we must try to do away with a 'people-centred view that all but obscured the political work done by things, technologies and practices'.³⁶ With reference to this 'political work' it must be stated that by including the animals into a history of everyday life, one is not at all being 'counter-political', as some historians of the political claim the 'everyday' to be.³⁷ On the contrary, looking at microhistorical levels allows us to see how the political power structures have sieved through to the individual entities, the individual life, the ordinary. Looking at how politics mould specific entities at specific times is valid if we want to understand the reciprocity of social transformations. This is of course where animal historians and animal studies scholars generally have turned to actor-network-theory, and Bruno Latour specifically, to bring the animal as non-human-actor or agent into the frame.³⁸ However, we must

not be tempted to take Latour as the only valuable authority in considering how material living beings influence other material living beings. There are a variety of historical-minded approaches that help to balance the important influence of the material. As Frank Trentmann writes: 'For historians, the question is less about *whether* than *how* we can bring matter back into a mind-centred study of politics, and what we might add.'³⁹ The same is relevant for animal histories and some of the suggestions proposed by Trentmann become valid here also. Firstly, he proposes the biography of things as a fruitful way to elaborate on objects as 'containers of association and values that carried with them potential repertoires of political action'.⁴⁰ The steps taken by animal biographers follow a similar direction yet also try to hint at the individuality of animal-human encounters. The alternative proposes to look at 'governmentality' in the material manifestation of power-relations found in the shaping of places, buildings and so on. The vibrant field of zoo history already shows how such a political order is exercised through the presence, ordering and classification of animals.⁴¹ Challenges of course remain in determining exactly how power structures differ, for example in transnational perspectives. The zoo as a European phenomenon of the nineteenth century, exhibiting both the imperial as well as the bourgeois world in miniature form, has long ago been adapted and culturally transformed in order to be applicable to other cultures and other political systems. The value of a new political history approach infused with cultural history is that it is able to show how, for example, change in political systems trickles down to its single elements by highlighting how political symbols, rituals and practices become obsolete in view of new ones or remain stable even if the historical or cultural conditions change.⁴² As an example, consider the establishment of a 'German Zoo' within the Berlin zoological garden in 1937, showcasing only Germanic animals, or Germanised animals such as wolves, bears and eagles: this is a phenomenon that distinctively followed the making of other political landscapes and hierarchical orders.⁴³

Between the symbolic and the 'real' animal

As outlined above, new political history looks at semantics as well as material realities. This is where it seems most helpful for animal historians. When writing a history of animals, numerous writers seem to have been struck by the dilemma that they only appear to have access to human representations of an animal, rather than the animals themselves.⁴⁴ This in turn has led to frequent debates on the sources that animal historians use and the equally obvious problem that these sources are predominantly human-made and thus partial in an anthropocentric way.⁴⁵ However, what is assumed here rather high-handedly by critics of animal history is that a representation of an animal is not a real animal, but merely a symbolic construction. It is surely a legitimate historiographic response not to follow the path of the purely constructivist view and instead look for the real animal as a political actor within history. It is a challenge worth taking and one which I would argue is feasible, if only by pointing out in what instances and under which historical conditions animals in historical narratives merely figure as representations of human imagination. Analysing how animals served to convey metaphorical and visual meaning at particular points in time, within particular, diverse contexts is but one aspect in need of consideration when examining the

political animal from an historian's perspective. Having said that, it is still important to illuminate what specific symbolic representations of the political were conveyed via the animal. This is why we should not do away with representationalism but *include* its insights in the overall analysis.⁴⁶ I want to stress that a new political history of animals is interested in getting to the core of animals symbolically and narratively, to uncover how animals function as regulators in the context of political and social knowledge and to categorise them according to their status as objects of cultural semantics. This has always to be considered, however, together with the need to bring together material traces and discursive iconographies. For animal history this means going beyond demarcating the 'animal' as the generic 'other'. The ultimate aim is to consider the material interactions through which the symbolic functional role of animals is manifested.

To return to the project of writing a political history of animals in the Third Reich, one would need to disentangle the distinctive discursive lines of animals and animality that fitted the nomenclature of National Socialism. So one of the most persuasive discourses apostrophised animals as part of the '*Volksgemeinschaft*' (folk community), something that raised their status above those humans declared subhuman. Notwithstanding this status, however, when the material animal was needed as a resource, this place in the folk community was routinely undermined. This happened for example in 1934 when an antivivisection clause passed as a propagandistic tool by the then still existing Prussian state, was secretly abolished in order to make way for the animal testing needed for war preparations.⁴⁷ Changing the law did not here change the semantic use of the animals, and their representation. Discourse and material realities could thus differ significantly, and it is the job of the animal historian following the lines of a new political history to uncover these discrepancies.

The practice/performative turn in animal history

Taking actor-network theory into account, animal studies scholars have routinely pointed to the potential of animals as agents in the process of generating knowledge. This should be expanded to the potential of animals to figure as agents in political processes as well. As Donna Haraway suggests, the interactive process of material-semiotic actors is to be understood and to be recognised as the 'apparatus of bodily production'.⁴⁸ Thereby, one is able to shed a light on the relational existences of humans and animals, their collective relationship.⁴⁹ While agreeing with Haraway that animals also shape and create their worlds socially, this interactive process between animal and human can be made subject to exploring the possibilities of exercising political influence without remaining stuck in subject-object dualisms.⁵⁰ The move from language to performance is thus to be seen in accordance with the shift from the representational to the material animal. As Karen Barad points out with respect to science studies, 'the move towards performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (that is, do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions'.⁵¹

A central vantage point of animal historiography highlights the diverse power structures underlying the human–animal relations that implicitly – because they are

not controlled by the animals themselves – impress on political action.⁵² In this sense, what is being proposed is in tune with approaches taken by the new political history in the course of which symbolic practices, semantics and rituals are analysed with a view of their inherent power relations and transformations, clearly operating outside of an understanding of politics solely based on political institutions.⁵³ This approach also agrees with wider shifts within the cultural historical profession, which turned from ‘culture as discourse to culture as practice and performance’.⁵⁴ This is to some extent also true for political history. The single-minded focus on ‘events’ has been done away with in favour of a programme taking into account whole chains of events, processes and decisions, something that was accomplished by British and American historians long before it came to be accepted in German political historiography.⁵⁵ What seems to be important here is that by looking at *practices*, we do not turn a blind eye to human practices in favour of animal practices, but recognise instead, as Frank Trentmann stipulates with regard to the interaction of things and humans, that ‘much everyday life involves routines that have a history and dynamic of their own and are often shared’.⁵⁶ By concentrating on shared experiences, the potential of focusing on practices involving animals becomes clear. Not only were these practices as part of everyday life far more subtly political than say the mass demonstrations and mass events carefully choreographed by the Nazi leadership, they also help to paint a much more vivid picture of what it meant to be human or animal at a particular point in time.

So the terminology of politics that is taken into account here explicitly targets encounters of conflict and negotiation processes, the articulation of interests, but also the pushing of boundaries. A new political history influenced by cultural studies approaches of accepting new and divergent actors in turn allows for a shift in perspectives by including the political animal and a political historiography of animals respectively. By that I mean that political order is constructed through symbolic action and performances. These actions are repeatedly exercised on animal bodies. However, they are also shared performatively by the animals themselves, in their role as ‘meaning-making figures’.⁵⁷ They thereby function as a ‘potential repertoire of political action’.⁵⁸ The ritualised petting of animals for example, which Adolf Hitler routinely practised with his dog, is, as Adorno and Horkheimer have so famously pointed out, a performance of political power: ‘The idle stroking of children’s hair and animal pelts signifies: this hand can destroy’.⁵⁹

Performance as relational agency

Performativity relies on bodily interaction, it relies on some sort of relation, be it intentional or accidental. In this process the face-to-face interaction unfolds into what I would term relational agency. This relational agency exists between all beings or species, but in particular between concrete specimens of species, between a distinct animal and a distinct human. By way of taking into account the relations that surface between animals and humans, one is also able to show in which manner animals in diverse constellations of relationships have impressed on human subjects. A history of such relations would therefore do away with subject-object attributions and accept animals as active partners in this conjunction. Haraway therefore regards

relationships as ‘the smallest possible unit of analysis’.⁶⁰ David Gary Shaw also talks of ‘unities – in which especially close, disciplined actors are produced’, and Steinbrecher of ‘interaction fabrics’ between animal and human, enmeshed in non-verbal communication which could be accounted for by historical analysis.⁶¹ Every relationship, including that of animals and humans, Steinbrecher claims, should be contemplated as interactive and reciprocal.⁶² This aspect is underlined by Emma Power in her interpretation of the domestication process. Domestication, she argues, is not a process by human actors forced onto animals, but, on the contrary, a dynamic practice which relied on the exchange between the species: ‘Domestication is not a finished or stable relation, but must be continuously negotiated and held in place’.⁶³ Co-evolution, to take up another term made prominent by animal historians in recent years, is therefore not to be seen as purely biological but as a cultural process as well. The network of relations must therefore be viewed both with regard to the individual as well as to society. As Edward Russell states: ‘Historians would have nothing to study without coevolution, because human beings probably would not exist’.⁶⁴ By this, animals are elevated to ‘intimate partners’ in the historical development of the human species, as active contributors within the ‘co-constitutive relationship’.⁶⁵ In this sense, agency is always to be characterised as essentially relational: ‘There is no agency that is not interagency’, as Vinciane Despret reminds us.⁶⁶ Within animal historiography this relational approach sits well with the methodology taken by social as well as political historians, in which the microhistorical focus on social action is always aligned to the macro level of social and political institutions. This also holds true for a particular approach to the study of practices, or *praxiography*. ‘Praxiography might provide new ways of opening up historical power relations by looking at the relationship between practices of knowledge production and the representation of the body that is produced’, argues Pascal Eitler.⁶⁷ For the exercise of animal history, this means to take seriously the shifts that occur between the semantic typifications and the material realities that accompany certain practices. This praxiography without a doubt subscribes to the recognition of inscribed power relations in practices and to the political aspect of the relations shaping those practices. These practices change over time and thus not only allow for a study of different relationships between humans and specific animals but also considers the implications for specific animals or animal species. It is the effects of such practices on the production of animal bodies, that this approach is interested in.⁶⁸ Praxiography also clarifies the fact that writing the history of animals implies typically narrowing down the scope of writing to the history of those animals with whom humans live in close contact and with whom they build relationships. It asks also for a ‘small-scale history’ which takes the ‘micro-processes of everyday life’ seriously.⁶⁹

Concentrating on practices instead of actors, as Pascal Eitler suggests, makes this clear precisely because it helps historians to ascribe the production of subjectivity to acts exercised by actors.⁷⁰ The same has been said about privileging practices before structures: ‘practice emerges here as the space in which a meaningful intersection between discursive constitution and individual initiative occurs’.⁷¹ Focusing on the situated spaces, the encounter, the practice rather than on proving an actors intentionality has led to whole sets of studies promoting the ‘doings’ of the participants and entities respectively: doing gender, doing culture and doing politics are just a few of these approaches.⁷²

Applying the material culture approach: bringing Haraway into history

The practice turn has recently also been made fruitful with regard to taking a new look at material interactions in the shape of both material culture studies and what has been termed new materialism. The latter can be defined using the words of Clever and Ruberg:

Instead of assuming (hierarchical) differences between entities beforehand, new materialists study the performance of differences in these ever-changing, shifting realities. This directs the focus to encounters, practices, and moments where matter and culture are *acting* together, producing meaning or a reality in that moment.⁷³

In this reading, new materialism widens the scope of activities and practices to be considered without however rendering the differences meaningless (and thus ignoring power structures). In short, it ‘pays attention to matter, movement, and difference’.⁷⁴ Whereas material networks history relies on the concept of the ‘co-construction’ of networks, which can be historically analysed, Haraway uses the concept of co-constitutive relationships to explain the shared history of humans and animals.⁷⁵ As these relations rely on both material (bodily) as well as social (and therefore both cultural and political) interactions, Haraway speaks of ‘naturalcultural contact zones’ that constitute the loci of historical interplay between the species, or between specific members of specific species in temporal-spatial specific contexts to be more precise.⁷⁶ She also famously claims that the ‘material-semiotic nodes or knots’ require consideration when aiming at the full meaning of animals and this may also be applied to the historical study of animals.⁷⁷ However, when practising such a history we are still in need of sources that illustrate the symbolisms as well as the material functions of animals. This is why the material has once more been at the centre of animal historians’ attention.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the specific localities assume a whole new relevance when looking at animal history. It is no wonder then that some of the most exciting new works in historical animal studies are composed by animal geographers.⁷⁹ Haraway sees these places, however, just as a gateway to the ‘mortal world-making entanglements’ she is really interested in.⁸⁰ These entanglements, she claims, influence all beings regardless of their status as objects or subjects. And this is why she speaks of a co-history of humans and (some) animals.⁸¹ This resonates with the central themes of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), but seems more applicable since it refers to the corporality of the entities, which in turn are defined and produced by multiple material practices. Nicki Charles and Bob Carter have recently also propagated a reading of agency as inherently entangled, in which collectives and face-to-face relations appear ‘historically contingent and variable’.⁸² As James Epstein adds: ‘The politics of meaning and the meaning of politics are intertwined’.⁸³ The meaning of animals, their symbolism, is therefore also bound up with their place both in political rhetoric and practice. Furthermore, politics have a ‘material essence’ both with regard to action as well as reaction.⁸⁴ As Trentmann makes clear: ‘The material is recognised as a conduit of political processes that helps shape (and not just reflect) political identities, concerns,

and fields of action'.⁸⁵ Melanie Rock and Gwendolyn Blue have also argued for an extension of the political publics to include animals because of their inherent materiality and of the space they occupy in these multi-species political discourses, an 'assemblage of bodies, practices and technologies that are brought together by a particular issue'.⁸⁶ This is of course again in tune with Latour who wants to introduce to the political arena all those non-human things that people are attached to.⁸⁷

Animal history as body history

One aspect of the material that can be made fruitful for animal-human historians is the turn to the body. Historical approaches touching on the body have been made prominent time and again since the late 1990s to the point where Roy Porter called it 'the historiographical dish of the day'.⁸⁸ Aligned with a re-application of Foucauldian programmes of biopolitics, which is as a disciplinary force in contrast to zoopolitics directed at both animals and humans, the body is seen as shaped and governed by discursive strategies resulting in practices which can readily be regarded as political.⁸⁹ Here again, however, a reading influenced by a cultural history approach of the body as essentially constructed led to a debate on the solely representational character of the body as source and a call of historians to consider the corporeality of the human body with real experiences which needed consideration. This also holds true, of course, for animal histories, albeit the fact that body history curiously concentrated until recently solely on the human body. Stressing the corporality of animal bodies with real experiences is an important step for a validity of material encounters without however falling back to biological essentialisms which enforces the status of animals as the ultimate, naturalised other. Sensing the danger of such essentialism, Pascal Eitler calls instead for seeing 'bodies as a kind of surface in its ongoing materialization and not as a kind of container in its seemingly ahistorical stability'.⁹⁰ This is where approaches of a new political history come in, where the negotiation processes that precede these 'ongoing materializations' are analysed. Thereby, 'an understanding of the body that is neither static nor coherent' can be accomplished.⁹¹ As Etienne Benson points out, it is also possible to filter out the solidity and corporality of the animal in written sources without returning to representationalism and thereby to a semantic field fully occupied by human exceptionalism.⁹² A new political history of animals would then, just as body history, not be confined to collecting empirical data in the archives, nor to 'decoding "representations"'. It would 'make sense of the interplay between the two'.⁹³ It is after all the living interdependency between the animal and the human that affects human life profoundly. These interdependencies and effects are not to be reduced to the social, however, but need to be expanded to the realm of the political, as they are both the result of conflictual relations and normative regulations. Animals in these interdependencies should not be reduced to mere 'presentationalisms' void of agency or, indeed, political meaning.⁹⁴ This is because not only the social but also the political is constantly influenced by our bodily interaction with animals.⁹⁵ Having said this, it can be regarded as one of the most convincing arguments for including animals in the register of political history that they figure so prominently in rituals, meticulously structured and choreographed evidences of power, in which they have been given a distinct role and denied agency or where

their agency was forcefully infringed upon as part of the political semiotic system. The politics of controlling the body, ‘the power realities produced by the exercise of the state’s authority over the bodies of its subjects’, for example, a field of enquiry that was opened up by historians of the body, is thus also accessible to animal history.⁹⁶ This is especially relevant with regard to the history of the breeding of animals, a topic most relevant when writing a political history of animals in the Third Reich. From as early as 1937 breeders were asked to specifically create horses that would conform to the demands of both military and economy and to eradicate any deficiencies still to be observed especially in draught horses.⁹⁷ Those ‘deficiencies’ ranged from height, ossifications and spavin to ‘wrong’ temperament.⁹⁸ What was asked for instead was, aside from the right build, a pliable, modest character and an undemanding nature. The body was thus a battlefield for the economic and political agendas of the Third Reich: and this was particularly true for animals.

Conclusion: applying the new political history approach

Practising animal history through including the concepts of political history means accepting the animal as a subject of political interaction. It comes, however, with a distinctly challenging programme for the historian as it combines discursive and empiricist approaches. These approaches are in turn influenced by what has been called new political history or the cultural history of the political. Methodologically, this approach tries to bridge the gap between the course followed mainly by literary scholars and historians of ideas on the one hand, which foreground only the representational character of animals, and an actor-focused research promoted by social historians on the other. It is vital to incorporate what one could term the discursive middle, in which the conditions and practices that *produce* the semantic field in the first place are closely scrutinised. This is why a threefold approach is proposed here. Firstly, historians need to critically recount the spatial and physical presence of animals and their actions, all of which can be found in the diverse sources available to animal historians. Secondly, the specific production of animals – both physically through breeding and selection as well as symbolically by the ascribing of properties and characteristics – as a result of human–animal relations needs to be considered. Thirdly, the endowing of animals with a discursive *charge* should be reflected upon. To be able to get to the impact and impressions of the ‘real’ animals, it is necessary to consider their entangled meanings at specific times. Naturally enough, we need to consider how the discursive shifts in turn impact on the material object. A political history of animals would therefore turn to the power–relations inherent in specific animal–human constellations. It would look at the (social) practices solidifying or questioning the production of power relations and thereby at the production of specific animals at specific times. Thus it would ask for the communicative spaces semantically underlining or undermining these practices.

Reflecting on the writing of a new political history of animals in the Third Reich we can see how this would mean looking at how the changing power relations from one regime to another carried implications for various human–animal relations, enabling and requiring a comparative approach. For example, the *Gleichschaltung* (the political streamlining of political institutions and societies) heavily affected the

agrarian, veterinarian and animal welfare institutions but it also influenced the life of animals politically and physically. The changing breeding laws, the privileging of certain breeds and certain species for that matter, changed the life of those animals.

The symbolism communicated via animals again played heavily on the semantics of Nazi politics. Dogs and horses were routinely declared as comrades in the fight, especially on the front lines, and attributed with 'Germanic' qualities. These politics were ritually enforced, for instance, by 'paying tribute' to war horses or publicising letters of Wehrmacht soldiers praising horses' courage, loyalty and honour. The political language defining animals focused on their role in society, even if it was merely symbolical. The shift from being comrades to being a member firstly of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (folk community) and secondly of the 'community of fate' had drastic effects on animals' treatment.⁹⁹ Some animals were included in the mythology of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Besides dogs and horses other working animals such as oxen and cows were seen as doing their bit to further the nationalist ideology by working for the German cause.¹⁰⁰ Discursively inserting some animals into this community was part of Nazi propaganda. This is not a particular feature of the Third Reich, of course, but national socialist propaganda made special use of animals, incorporating them into the 'speech acts' that have long been the field of investigation by political historians. Their impacts on the lives of animals (or even on that of humans) is still a field in need of further investigation and one to which animal historians could contribute significantly. The semantics of 'vermin' for example were triggered not only by the discourses on hygiene that characterised the end of the nineteenth century and which surely encouraged the debates on racial hygiene in the Third Reich, but also impacted on the life of animals declared to be vermin.¹⁰¹ It is of some importance in this context that the German term for breed is the same as that of 'race', as the Nazis transferred many of their ideas on racial politics from the animal kingdom. Classifications and forms of social order were thus intrinsically intertwined.

Moreover, in 1942 when food became scarce, a discussion arose which generally questioned the keeping of pets. Hitler intervened personally in fear of the emotional consequences for the German people. Instead, a law was passed in May of 1942, banning Jews from keeping pets, be they dogs, cats or birds. As Maren Möhring concludes, these animals taken from the Jewish population were seen as contaminated, as surplus mouths to feed and thus could not count on being included in the realm of animals declared worthy of protection under animal welfare legislation.¹⁰² There were two sides to this coin, however. When in February of 1940 a mass mustering with over 5,000 dogs took place, the *'Hundewelt'* claimed that all 'bastard dogs' or mongrels were to be refused enlistment and also that it would not be worth feeding them.¹⁰³ It was only the pure-bred dogs who could hope to die a hero's death at the front. The same was true for horses, of which only the 'pure race' was valued. Breeders were called upon not to trait on bloodlines causing the 'production' of inferior animals, a practice which would counter the political cause of National Socialism.¹⁰⁴ The ubiquitous political semantics of racialised inclusion and exclusion found in such source material strongly hint at the importance of animals for the wider rhetoric of the Third Reich. The very accessibility of animal bodies made them test subjects for practical eugenics.

These semantics were also enforced by the bodily performances of the animals, which in turn were used to claim the willingness of animals to contribute to the Nazi project. Bodies in action again helped to underline metaphors. Long after the Third Reich had fallen, the German shepherd dog has remained the symbol of Nazi brutality and of the fatal allegiance of Germans to the regime.¹⁰⁵ The visual aspects of this semantic field thereby open up a whole genre of sources for the historian to use. Pictures of prized breeding animals, military honours or mobilisation and conscription of dogs and horses were frequently to be found not only in animal welfare magazines, but also in the publications of the agrarian institutions. Moreover, the political and societal institutions helping to frame these semantics are a starting point for analysis. In claiming, for example, that the love of animals was inherently German, both the animal welfare as well as the veterinarian lobby supported the regime in their projects of exclusion and inclusion.¹⁰⁶ Political institutions influenced animal lives and were concurrently influenced by their symbolic values and presences.

Lastly, the material consequences resulting from political decision-making processes and political acts of speech might differ from the intentions of the laws passed or the normative settings and the propaganda that followed from intentionally covering up the material realities. Declaring horses and dogs comrades, for example, hid the fact that thousands of horses died in the first days of the war alone. As early as 1939, horse breeder associations were alarmed about the waste of animal life, more often than not caused by overworking.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the *Reichstierschutzgesetz* did not prevent animal experiments. On the contrary, animals were routinely used for experimentation justified by the war efforts. Furthermore, not all dogs were lucky enough to be included in the mythology of camaraderie. The slaughtering of dogs for food was still a common practice especially in rural regions. Veterinarians were thus frequently called for the inspection of dog meat to state whether or not it was fit for human consumption. Even if the total numbers of dogs slaughtered (2,328 in 1935) seems small it still contradicted propagandistic efforts to raise the status of the dog as a part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹⁰⁸

All in all, what has been argued for in this chapter is that by turning to the political, using approaches offered by the new political history that consider semiotics, symbolism and representation but also corporal interactions and practices and the ‘real’ animal, a ‘co-history’ of species can be presented, one that does not ignore the living experiences of relationships. To exemplify my arguments I have made use of sources from the Third Reich and thus positioned my line of thought in the context of high politics of a totalitarian regime. There is, of course, room for looking at other political animals at other times and in other, less extreme, regimes. Philip Howell has, for example, placed his history of dogwalking the Victorian city into the political framework of liberalism and thereby the ‘creation of the responsible subjects’.¹⁰⁹ Through the practice of walking dogs certain liberal freedoms were performatively evoked. Muzzling of dogs on the other hand was at the same time seen as infringement by the authorities or as a sign of a well-disciplined, civilised people. The debate over muzzling, as Howell suggests, can therefore be read with regard to the ‘governmentality’ of the liberal city’.¹¹⁰ A new political history of animals understood as a cultural history of the political such as presented in both examples would look therefore at all aspects of the political and it does so from multiple perspectives. Not only does it focus on

the framework, but also the processes and institutions involved, considering structures as well as agents. In doing so, it agrees with new materialist approaches while moving from representationalism to performativity.¹¹¹

Notes

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- at war: breeds, breeding, and Britishness, 1914–1918’, *Society & Animals* 21, 6 (2013): 546–567; A. Skabelund, ‘Breeding racism: the imperial battlefields of the “German” shepherd dog’, *Society & Animals* 16, 4 (2008): 354–371; D. Brantz, ‘Stunning bodies: animal slaughter, Judaism, and the meaning of humanity in imperial Germany’, *Central European History* 35, 2 (2002): 167–193.
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