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**Умвельты животных в изменяющемся мире:  
зоосемиотические перспективы**

# ANIMAL UMWELTEN IN A CHANGING WORLD: ZOOSEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVES

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UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
press

Book series *Tartu Semiotics Library* editors: Kalevi Kull, Silvi Salupere,  
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This volume has been published with the support of Norwegian–Estonian Research Cooperation Programme grant EMP151 “Animals in changing environments: Cultural mediation and semiotic analysis”

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ISSN 1406-4278  
ISBN 978-9949-77-280-3 (print)  
ISBN 978-9949-77-281-0 (pdf)

University of Tartu Press  
[www.tyk.ee](http://www.tyk.ee)

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## Foreword

Animals *are*. A multitude of different species surrounds us in our everyday doings, and influences our behaviour and culture. Dogs and cats develop delicate and personal relationships with the families they belong to. Swans and geese are waiting to be fed by passers-by. The wing-strokes of doves and jackdaws give a subtle ephemeral atmosphere to our cities. Spiders, snails and snakes are met with surprise or disgust. Beavers are blamed for reshaping the landscapes, and wolves for killing livestock. People and animals engage and interact in a number of ways: from hunting and fishing to bird-watching, from the help provided by assistance dogs to family holidays in zoological gardens and animal parks. Children's first encounters with the written word often take place through animal stories. And many fictional animal characters are known and internationally celebrated by name: Lassie, Moby Dick, Bambi, King Kong, etc.

None of these interactions would be possible without semiotic processes: perception, communication and interpretation occurring between humans and animals. Sign relations or mediated relations that connect humans with other animal species are the very subject of this collective monograph. We make an inquiry into the semiotic character of different species, study the ways in which humans endow animals with meaning, and analyse how animal sign exchange and communication has coped with environmental change. In this research, our core disciplinary framework is zoosemiotics, the semiotic study of animals – the paradigm that was proposed by the eminent American-Hungarian semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok in the 1960s and that recently had its fiftieth anniversary. Our approach is essentially semiotic and biosemiotic. At the same time, we engage in dialogues with ecocriticism, Actor-Network Theory, posthumanism and other contemporary schools of the humanities, as well as with more practically oriented research topics in visitor studies, animal welfare studies and human-animal studies, not to forget ethology and conservation biology.

This book is a collective effort. Its authors belong to the research group in zoosemiotics and human-animal relations based in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu in Estonia, and at the University of Stavanger in Norway. The two opening chapters are written and edited collectively and present a framework of philosophical, historical, epistemological and methodological matters of zoosemiotic research. These initial considerations are followed by specific case studies that have been conducted by individual authors. The specific chapters, however, have been cross-edited and commented on by other

authors of the book so that the whole collection forms an integrated set of viewpoints.

*Animal Umwelten in a Changing World* follows the work of several subsequent research projects and grants and concludes the latest one, “Animals in changing environments: Cultural mediation and semiotic analysis”. The general history of zoosemiotics is discussed in detail in the first chapter. At the University of Tartu, the scholarship in zoosemiotics started, however, in 2000 when ethologist Aleksei Turovski first held a course in zoomythology and zoosemiotics. From 2006 onwards, courses in zoosemiotics have been taught by Timo Maran on a regular basis. Some of the authors of the present book received the grant “Dynamical zoosemiotics and animal representations” (2009–2013) from the Estonian Science Foundation. This was followed by the international research grant (EMP 151) “Animals in changing environments: Cultural mediation and semiotic analysis”, part of the Norwegian–Estonian Research Cooperation Programme (2013–2016). Meanwhile, Morten Tønnessen (2011) defended his doctoral dissertation on Uexküllian phenomenology in Tartu and later started his own research initiative in Stavanger, Norway. This added valuable insights to zoosemiotic studies from phenomenology and animal philosophy, environmental history/archaeology and multimodal discourse analysis.

In the framework of the research projects, three large international conferences have been held with a focus on zoosemiotics or semiotic studies of animals: “Zoosemiotics and Animal Representations” (Tartu, Estonia 4.–8.04.2011), “Framing Nature: Signs, Stories, and Ecologies of Meaning” (Tartu, Estonia 29.04.–3.05.2014), and “Animals in the Anthropocene: Human–animal relations in a changing semiosphere” (Stavanger, Norway 17.–19.09.2015). Related to the research grants, an anthology (Maran *et al.* 2011), three special issues of academic journals (Martinelli, Lehto 2009; Tønnessen, Lindström 2010; Maran 2014) and two essay collections (Tüür, Tønnessen 2014; Tønnessen, Armstrong Oma, Rattasepp 2016) have been published on zoosemiotic topics. In addition to these organising efforts, specific zoosemiotic case studies have been made on several topics by the participants of the research group: human–animal interactions in zoological gardens, communication in the teams of visually disabled persons and guiding dogs, animals in nature writing, semiotics of the animal condition in philosophy, the changing interactions of wolves, dogs, sheep and farmers, historical changes in the role of animals in human households, and developments in the cultural perception of novel species. Many of these specific topics form chapters of this book. Based on these considerations, the present monograph can be also considered as a report of the state of the art of zoosemiotic studies in the Tartu semiotic school.

The authors of the book are grateful to Aleksei Turovski and Dario Martinelli for their efforts in launching contemporary zoosemiotic studies, to the professors Kalevi Kull and Peeter Torop as well as other members of the Tartu Semiotic

School for their guidance and supportive intellectual environment, to Ivo Volt and his colleagues at University of Tartu Press for their help in issuing this volume, and to the Norwegian–Estonian Research Cooperation Programme (2013–2016; EMP151) for financing the most recent research.

*The authors*

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