

ENLIVENING EXHIBITIONS

Zoos, Open-air Museums, and the History of Living Animals in Human Sceneries of Display

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In the following article, open-air museums and zoos are examined as enlivened multispecies spaces by connecting two recent threads of research, put in historical context: human–animal studies and exhibition studies, that both put the concept of *relationality* centre stage. This offers a slightly altered perspective on the history and entanglements of these institutions, exploring the crucial aspect of animating sceneries and enlivening these places. By way of conclusion I will use the multispecies and exhibition context to reflect upon doing and undoing human–animal entanglements in time and space, past and present.

Keywords: popular culture, open-air museums, zoo, historical animal studies, exhibition studies

Exhibiting Human–Animal Relations

Zoological gardens and open-air museums are popular spaces of human leisure, offering the special feature of watching and encountering living nonhuman animals. Museums and zoos are relevant sites of the tourism and leisure industry, offering recreation and entertainment; they house established cultural practices of a particularly modern form of husbandry, are spaces of cultural learning and pleasure, display ensembles of plants, animate beings and architecture, and offer synaesthetic experiences. Last but not least, their central themes are environments in the broadest sense. Both are “places that enable embodied learning, key to helping audiences develop their sense of how they are inter-connected with physical environments” (Newell, Libby & Wehner 2017: 5). Thus, they remain important mediums to spread perceptions and knowledge re-

garding nature and animals. The well-reputed journal *Nature* stated recently that people learned more about environmental topics, such as climate change, in museums and zoos than they ever would in the classroom (Dance 2017).

Open-air museums and zoos are certainly both quintessentially cultural places, but their components are also natural elements, not least the “living collections” (Svanberg 2016; FRI 2017) of animals. Historical animal studies and multispecies studies offer a productive perspective of these places as “spaces of interaction between humans and animals” and institutionalized “meeting grounds” of multiple species (Swanson 2015: 240; cf. Pearson & Weismantel 2010: 22). However, animals must not be mistaken as static supernumeraries to enliven smooth, “authentic” stories we like to tell each other about a past, a version of nature, foreign lands, or

our current ethics of sustainability and species conservation, but actors with their own lives, senses and realities.

Rereading historical sources from the early twentieth century, a time period crucial for the development of popular culture (cf. Maase 1997), this contribution aims at putting zoos and open-air museums in a broader context of modern “animalistic” exhibitions and leisure practices in general. While the history of zoos is commonly connected to urban sites, colonialism and exotic animals (giraffes, polar bears or rhinoceros being emblematic representatives of “charismatic species”; DeMello 2012: 53; cf. Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier 2002), open-air museums are commonly perceived as rather “rural” places, exhibiting domesticated or “local” animals (species ranging from reindeer to rabbits). This distinction parallels the split between *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde*, anthropology/ethnology and folklore studies, remarkably. Areas of responsibility and illustrative spaces for these sciences were created in the nineteenth century. Animals’ housing at zoos have usually referred to spatially distant environments, often from other continents. Animals in open-air museums, on the other hand, live in a holistic, historical scenery, featuring the local, vernacular architecture of a bygone age.

My contribution seeks to put these almost hackneyed topoi of urban and rural into a relational context, that is, they will be looked at together and with their nonhuman actors. The wide-ranging entanglements of modern “amusement topographies” (Nolte 2016: 7) have, so far, seldom been taken into account. A focus on animals opens a path to exploring these networks, since the living beings were circulating actors in the nineteenth-century diverse landscape of leisure culture, as were their “cultural coatings” (Marvin 2010: 59). This remains true until today. Practices of entangling and disentangling spaces and beings by allotting certain species to certain spaces (urban or rural, “natural” or human-made) are further common characteristics of these institutions. At any rate, given their popularity, they offer effective framings and organize the human experience of living animals in spatial narratives (Ito 2012: 189). It

is important to conceptualize these facilities and offered frames as connected, multivocal, multispecies spaces, in favour of an entangled history of space, animals and humans. It is noteworthy that even this scientific view, the change of points of view, “filters through political discussions, popular culture, and everyday conversations; all this becomes part of the contemporary *zeitgeist*” (Kaijser 2019). Open-air museums and zoological gardens are just two of the many venues where knowledge and perceptions of nonhuman animals are organized, performed, promoted and disseminated (cf. *ibid.*).

In more recent museum studies, the “relational turn” suggests profoundly conceptualizing exhibitions as “connected, plural, distributed, multi-vocal, affective, material, embodied, experiential, political, performative and participatory” (Grewcock 2014: 5). The same holds true for human–animal relations and multispecies ethnography. As a relational ethnography (Desmond 2014; Kohn 2007), it pays attention to the various sensual, experiential, embodied, connected, plural “worlds” or fields and entanglements of humans and animals, and conceives of them as relational beings in a “shifting assemblage of agentive beings” (Ogden, Hall & Tanita 2013: 6), in a scenery of multispecies contact zones (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010: 246). Thus, it is vital to interrogate these *humanimal spaces* (Nayar 2014) as relational, considering the manifold actions of different social actors, and varying political, economic and cultural contexts (Grewcock 2014: 3). Finally, museums and the practice of curating are always based on a concept of montage and create atmospheres between objects, generate an aura by staging an atmosphere that extends beyond the individual objects (Bjerregaard 2015), or, put in a multispecies perspective’s way, individual subjects. There seems to be a revived discourse on animals and human–animal relations as part of museum curating (e.g. May 2018; cf. Löhne, Friedrich & Kiefer 2009; Stinn 2009), yet zoos seem to have taken up the recent scientific discussions on human–animal studies to a lesser extent.

In order to determine the relationality of zoos and open-air museums and their respective *mise-en-scènes* of animals, I will first take a closer look at

the early decades of the establishment of zoological gardens and the Swedish open-air museum Skansen during the nineteenth century. As a second step I examine and interpret the presentations of animals and interactions between humans and animals at these sites from a multispecies point of view. To do so, I will try to connect two recent threads of research: human–animal studies and exhibition studies, which both put the concept of relationality centre stage (cf. Marvin & McHugh 2014; McTavish 2013). In a third step and as a résumé, I will reflect upon possible potentials of intertwining exhibition studies and multispecies studies, upon doing and undoing, and presenting multispecies entanglements in time and space.

Zoos and Skansen in the Nineteenth Century

Even if seemingly different in their outlooks, open-air museums and zoos sprung, so to speak, from very similar *zeitgeist*. The onset of industrialization, a change perceived and discussed as threat, became the counterpart of a romanticizing perspective which promoted nature as “origin” and “wholeness” (Löfgren 1985). These developments are said to have been fundamentally connected to a modern “quest for authenticity” that Regina Bendix has defined as “at once modern and antimodern. It is oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity” (Bendix 1997: 8). This was true for both zoos founded in the nineteenth century and the world’s first open-air museum Skansen, which opened in Stockholm in 1891. Artur Hazelius, its founder, had buildings and objects from all parts of Sweden transported to Stockholm’s peninsula Djurgården. Hazelius aimed at presenting regions in miniature, while several other open-air museums, which were subsequently established throughout Europe, explicitly referred to city or town history (cf. Carstensen & Frost 2016). In general, these museums became popular places for preserving and reconstructing historic buildings, teaching history and offering recreational activities. Zoos that opened in the middle of the nineteenth century in almost every bigger city of Europe promoted, on their part, a “world in miniature” (Nyhart 2009; cf. Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier 2002).

By the turn of the twentieth century, the famous zoologist Gustave Loisel listed Skansen among zoos and menageries in his monumental three-volume oeuvre *Histoire des Ménageries*, published in 1912. Director Alarik Behm repeatedly published articles on animal life in Skansen in the German zoo’s journal *Der Zoologische Garten* and by the 1920s, the institutions were listed under the same category of “Vivaria” in the *Index Biologorum*, a follow-up of the *Zoological address book* issued by the German Zoological Society (e.g. Behm 1905, 1909; Hirsch 1928: 373–374). The institutions shared the interest in animal trade, practices of exhibition, and were connected via the very animals that lived in their enclosures. Not least, there was a common need for fostering knowledge on husbandry skills. Concerning the question of the animal “other”, Skansen also exhibited animals labelled “exotic”. Zoos for their part have always put “native” animals on display just as well. Skansen and zoos alike could take up on trends of the modern “topography of sociability” (Wurst 2011): since the end of the eighteenth century, it was the garden in particular, offering stimulations of the living, the growing, the new, varieties and intense sensational experiences, that became a central form of entertainment culture (ibid.: 25). As destinations and places of recreation, as sources for emotions and dreaming, nature, as theme, played an increasing social role (cf. Giesecke & Jacobs 2012), including a decisive purpose of “impression management” on the part of landscape designers, owners of parks and animal exhibitions (Nadenick 2016: 91).

By the nineteenth century, botanical gardens, aquariums, clubs and societies, world’s fairs, animal fights (though decreasing in range), pet keeping, the hobby world of small animal breeding in allotment gardens and private spaces constituted various areas in which human–animal relations were negotiated and – in varying contexts and to a different extent – presented. These were by no means isolated areas of animalistic leisure culture. Rather, the interest in animals, their breeding, and a need for fostering knowledge on husbandry made them intersections in animal-related “cultural circuits” (Rosenberg 2012: 920). A global trade linked zoos, circuses, travelling

menageries, animal trainers, aficionados and private animal keepers, as well as natural history museums (Buchner 1996: 148). Given the remarkable diversity and overlapping contextual framings, perspectives and practices involved, it was, as stressed by Emily S. Rosenberg, impossible to “tame” any single, fixed meaning. Rather, “this era was characterized by a cacophony of several possible outlooks” on natural artifacts (Rosenberg 2012: 920).

As for the spatial arrangements, Skansen in Stockholm was partly modelled on an open-air museum that was established near Oslo in 1867 (Hegard 1984), though founder Artur Hazelius pushed the idea farther. Even the underlying idea for the museum in Oslo might have had forerunning ideas in the *Dörflemodel*/ornamental farms (cf. Schmidt 2009) of the early modern courtly parks which often featured animals like birds or cattle and small dairies (Hillström 2011: 35; cf. Hegard 1984). Zoos, on the other hand, were very often inspired by British landscape parks (not least the first European zoo in London, founded in 1828, that often served as a model for other European zoos) and regularly referred to ancient animal parks. A pastoral idyll was a salient feature of the Romanticism found in both zoos and open-air museums (cf. Shafernich 1994: 10; Nyhart 2009). They alluded to animals being “authentic” and pristine, be them “native” or “exotic”, whilst what could actually be observed was animals becoming (for better and worse) attuned to the sites they were destined to live at. Multispecies ethnography and *thick descriptions*, which cultural anthropology is so well versed in, of human–animal entanglements make us become aware that, in any form of animal husbandry, both animals and humans are active parts. They acquire skills (ever given the human dominance over animals) and actionability in a net of interactions, as ethologists Geoff Hosey and Vicky Melfi point out (Hosey & Melfi 2012: 14; cf. Roscher 2016; Kuester & Reid 2017).

In the founding era of these stationary and open-air institutions in the second half of the nineteenth century, these were by far not the only spaces where people came into contact with animals. In a competitive setting of increasing entertainment of

fers, Skansen even became a serious competitor in the amusement business, for example the Tivoli close by, an amusement park founded in 1850 – and bought by Skansen in 1901 (Loisel 1912: 276; cf. Lilieblad 2009: 256). The Tivoli had traditionally offered a wide range of amusements, such as singers, musicians, jugglers, dancers, comedians, fireworks, theatre groups and animal trainers, carousels, a skittle alley, a playground slide, several restaurants and a menagerie with exotic animals (Bergshand 1886; cf. Lilieblad 2009: 59; Svanberg 2010: 24). Whilst the majority of open-air museums founded in the twentieth century were situated in more rural areas,¹ Skansen was still a semi-urban site, situated roughly two miles from Stockholm’s city centre. Consequently, it was competing for an urban public, which had at its disposal a rapidly growing and diversifying line-up of leisure products during the late nineteenth century. Skansen’s and zoos’ closest competitors presumably were companies and sites exhibiting living animals, like travelling menageries that were widespread and extremely popular in Sweden, the German lands and Europe in general (cf. Svanberg 2014: 38–46). They literally brought foreign animals, as Helen Cowie puts it, “to the door of the masses” (Cowie 2013: 115) and fragments of previous or parallel existing entertainments with animals also were established at Skansen and several zoos: refreshments, festivities, concerts and animal performances. Magdalena Hillström notes that the

prevailing image, that Skansen first and foremost presented Swedish folk life presupposes a certain strategic blindness. In order to re-create a homogenous vision of Artur Hazelius [the founder of Skansen, W.R.] the obvious heterogeneity of Skansen has been suppressed, both by Artur Hazelius himself and by his many biographers. For instance, that fact that Skansen also was a zoological garden is regarded as an accidental addition to the real purposes, contrary to the fact that Hazelius himself was very conscious about that wild animals would attract [sic] a larger public than old houses [...]. (Hillström 2011: 35)

In the view of contemporaries, Skansen was “at the same time an open-air museum and a zoological garden” (Hasselgren 1897: 148; cf. Svanberg 2010). In the beginning of the twentieth century, Alarik Behm, director of Skansen’s animal park at the time, who had built up the animal park of Skansen together with founder Artur Hazelius (Medelius 1998: 328), emphasized the background of “intimate connections” with Nordiska museet (Behm 1905: 20). As a “supplement, to the Nordic, cultural-historical open-air museum, we are bound to only show Nordic animals to the public. However, a small department of exotic animals has been here ever since” (Behm 1909: 97; cf. Loisel 1912: 277). It was not until the 1920s that the “exotic” was spatially separated from the “native” and the Skansen terrain was reserved for “Nordic” animals only, whilst the “foreign” species were, tellingly enough, removed to the former Tivoli ground (Medelius 1998: 326), the former space of animal spectacle.

As for zoos, Nigel Rothfels argues that they, “despite their rhetoric, did not differ much from the earlier collections in their commitment to science, education, and public recreation; all three of these goals were also claimed by the earlier collectors” (Rothfels 2009: 482). The aspirations of “rational amusement” that zoos and Skansen claimed to offer, were not entirely new either. These institutions were part of a general increase of “rational amusement or education mixed with entertainment” (Kalof 2007: 119), and some travelling showmen definitely thought of themselves as experts in the study of nature just as much (Rothfels 2009: 482; Cowie 2013). Considering the contexts in which zoos and Skansen emerged, we have to take into account the diverse horizons of transgressions across the modern entertainment industry. Museums constructed walk-in exhibitions, taxidermists refined their techniques to make stuffed animals look “alive” (Kalof 2007: 147; Nys 2008) and “authenticity” was a common claim of many exhibitors of animals – the liveliness of the animal world seemed to heighten an authentic experience of the “true nature” exhibited (Mergenthaler 2005: 30). The question here, as Regina Bendix has long argued, is not one of what really is authentic,

but to define who needs authenticity and why, as well as how it has been assigned and then used by different groups (Bendix 1997: 21). An increased aestheticization of everyday life (Maase 2002: 97–101), the modern public’s growing demand for sensually pleasant experiences was of particular importance and affected all of the aforementioned types of animalistic entertainment, and the animals themselves. In addition, “[f]rom world’s fairs to private cabinets, from public museums and galleries to commercial demonstrations, panoramas, menageries, and freak shows, science was presented to nineteenth-century audiences as spectacle” (Carroll 2007: 271). Nordiska museet and Skansen spectacularized folk life and stressed the undertaking’s importance by underlining the threat to it by contemporary processes of industrialization, claiming to preserve “Nordic” everyday life of ordinary people. Human and animal actors were, from Skansen’s very beginnings, fundamental components of the *mise-en-scène* of a Sweden in miniature, indulging in nostalgia for an imaginary, yet not less effective idea of the preindustrial, nonurban world. The concept of a “world in miniature”, as mentioned above, was also central to the Europe-wide zoo movement of the nineteenth century (Nyhart 2009: 79ff.).

Intersections and entanglements can also be revealed through a closer look at the acquisition and representation of animals. Right from its opening, Artur Hazelius had exhibited a group of Sámi together with their reindeers at Nordiska museet. Since many people were fascinated by the – though folklike “Nordic” – “exotic” humans and “their” animals from the North, both Sámi and reindeers came to be exhibited at world exhibitions and animal parks (Silvén 2008: 10). In the 1870s, animal trader Carl Hagenbeck had been approached by his friend, the animal painter Heinrich Leutemann, who pointed out the huge appeal it would have if animals were accompanied by humans from the same, faraway lands (Hagenbeck 1909: 74).

In 1874, Hagenbeck made a Sámi family accompany his purchase of reindeers to Germany, carrying along their sleighs, tents, clothes and several other commodities of daily use. The broad success of

the Sámi panorama led Hagenbeck to develop further anthropological-zoological exhibitions (*Völkerschauen*), exhibiting humans and animals together in seemingly “original” and vernacular settings. The established research on *Völkerschauen* mostly treats these as a result of racism, colonial attitude and exoticization (e.g. Blanchard et al. 2011; Andreassen 2016); the research on the role of open-air museums puts them in the context of nation-building by “nationalizing” folk culture (Bohman 2014; Löfgren 1989). I would argue here that it was a crave for physical experience of “other” lives, more “liveliness” and entanglements that characterized the dynamics of these interspecies-exhibitions. We can see a clear parallel here to more recent, and sometimes deplored, phenomena of what Uwe Meiners called the “agency of historicist illusion and simulation” at open-air museums, economic pressures leading to pleas for “more animals, more activities, ever more life” (Meiners 2008: 170) and, on the other hand, the demand for “multisensory interactions of humans and animals in the zoo” (Flack 2016: 33). As for the zoo, historians have pointed out that over time, visitors increasingly desired to develop a sense of friendship with the animals inhabiting the enclosures in many European cities (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier 2002: 217). Conceiving of animals as “our friends in nature” is said to have been equally important for modern constructions of class and nation (Löfgren 1985).

Constructing panoramas of seemingly friendly interspecies-connections was one of animal trader Hagenbeck’s biggest business successes and became a popular form of modern entertainment that lasted for about sixty years. When Hagenbeck visited Skansen in 1899, he was inspired by the seemingly “natural” enclosures for some of the animals. He consequently adopted the idea of displaying “free”-range animals for his animal park, which was opened in Stellingen near Hamburg, Germany, in 1907. Housing more dangerous animals, like lions and tigers, moats were constructed developed to keep the animals at safe distances – their width and depths were calculated upon observations on trained animals at the circus (Steinkrüger 2016).

Inspiration in this case was not at all one directional, for Skansen’s popular “bear hill” had been, as it turns out, inspired by Hagenbeck’s anthropological-zoological exhibitions (Medelius 1998: 327). The similarities of enlivened exhibitions at world’s fairs, zoos and animal parks were no coincidence, for these institutions followed a similar business model (Santesso 2014: 47). World’s fairs especially influenced museums, circuses, botanical and zoological gardens as permanent sites of entertainment (Wörner 1998: 237ff.). Later on, Hagenbeck realized an increase in business whenever he let certain animals, for example seals, elephants and monkeys, be exhibited in sceneries alluding to something human-like: playing instruments or with cookware, “dancing” and interacting with human beings. The concept of Skansen and zoos alike was built on affecting and instructing visitors through emotional appeals (Nyström 1998: 79). It presumably was part of a critique that hit both zoos and open-air museums – that they were not “serious” institutions of science because of their peculiar mixture of education and entertainment. Their popular appeal then relied very much on affect and emotion, nostalgia and exoticism (comprising the supposedly “familiar” homeland as well as spatially distant areas) (Sandberg 2003: 237).

Beyond the somewhat stale conceptions of high and popular culture, “serious” education and “simple” entertainment, we must approach this phenomenon directly, in its positivity. Herein lies its importance, as Lawrence Grossberg accentuates: “Critics often ignore popular culture’s immediacy, its physicality and its fun: its very popularity. [...] One has to explore the work popular culture is doing, which is very different from merely celebrating its fun” (Grossberg 1992: 78). When thinking about animals in popular exhibitions, such as open-air museums and zoos, one must also consider the multimedia experience of nineteenth-century’s society. The increased availability of mass media, magazines, picture books and sheets, travel accounts, encyclopaedias and novels promoted certain images of animals. Indeed, they were constitutive actors of the modern entertainment culture. A large part of the public media pres-

entations of animals combined a sort of rudimentary zoological knowledge with diverting and enjoyable stories (cf. Robbins 2002: 156). The popularization of natural science profoundly relied on visualization and illustrations that were to reinforce a truth of transmitted knowledge. It even led to the development of animal painting as a distinct genre (cf. Gall 2011). Illustrations published in daily newspapers or popular magazines came to function as an advertisement for the animalistic sceneries at zoos and Skansen alike, and they rather likely influenced what people were to expect from a visit to the respective institution, what they deemed authentic (cf. Schwartz 1998). As sources, these illustrations tell us about the ways in which animals at zoos and the open-air museum were presented and interpreted by certain actors, often enough influenced by their respective social status and aspired position of expertise in an ever-growing field of popular science.

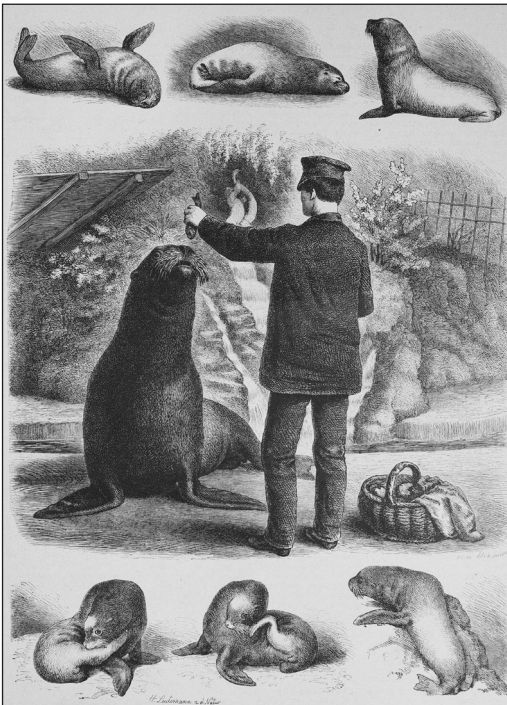


Figure 1: “The Sea lion at Berlin Zoological Garden.” Drawing by Heinrich Leutemann, published in *Die Gartenlaube* 52, 1876. (Wikimedia Commons)

Animal illustrations are then crucial sources for studying how popular culture intersects and is entangled with high culture. Illustrations of Skansen and zoos in contemporary newspapers and magazines mostly presented the enlivened sceneries as idyllic, peaceful and somewhat frolicsome places. Interestingly enough, many of them featured a sort of situational arrangement, conveying still lives, yet lively stories of an entangled world of humans, animals and objects. A drawing of Skansen’s “Laplander Camp”, published in the *Ny Illustrerad Tidning* in 1891, presented a bricolage of landscapes, buildings, commodities, humans and animals enlivening and authenticating each other in these “shifting assemblages” (Ogden, Hall & Tanita 2013: 6). The human–animal entanglements and interactions seemingly became all the more important at zoos, which, especially in their early decades, mostly presented solitary, individual species in separate enclosures. Illustrations on zoo animals published in the bourgeois German magazine *Die Gartenlaube* often featured images of human–animal interactions. This did not only serve the symbolic presentation of a putative peaceful, caring and nurturing relationship between the species. Interactions were in a very practical sense essential for animating animals who, stripped of their flocks, herds, colonies and packs, their hitherto familiar surroundings, evolutionary and habitually formed routines, often enough acted – within the exhibitionary logic – unhandsomely stereotypical or hardly showed their liveliness at all.

“The Cold Silence of Death” and the Enlivening Panorama

In the human–animal “shifting assemblages” of open-air museums and zoos, the spatial design was essential for the mise-en-scène and its enlivening as well as for the animals’ basic health. However, the panoramic landscapes of Skansen and those that zoos began to construct in renovations from at least 1900 onwards took up a mass amusement medium that is said to probably have been the most successful, suggestive and gripping medium of the nineteenth century (cf. von Plessen 1993). The uninterrupted illusionistic unity of the design principle

of the panorama, an “all-embracing view”, consisted of fragments, disparate and random, serving wants of arranged sceneries (Hyde 1988). To make this principle work, to create a powerful, immersive experience, it was essential to get engaged with its illusionary character, to consider oneself in the midst of a topography that one would never have been able to experience on the spot; be it the bygone “Sweden in miniature”, which Skansen offered, or a miniature of distant fauna of faraway lands that was exhibited in zoos (cf. Tzortzi 2017). Mark B. Sandberg has made the convincing point, that the “authentic” space which had been designed to offer sensations of immersion, has always been a space “whose very presence [...] already testified to a portability that subtracted out crucial aspects of the physical world in which it was formerly nested” (Sandberg 2003: 232). The immersive experience of strangeness, a dialectic of belief and disbelief (Griffiths 2008: 17) heightened the conception of encounters with “nature” and animals. As for open-air museums, visitors of the early years did not simply buy into the idea of an authentic rural past to be experienced at the site, but “seemed attracted precisely to the in-betweenness of the experience, to the sense of temporary roleplay the new museological system offered” (Sandberg 2003: 233). Interactions among various nonhuman and human species particularly contributed to a kind of roleplay. There seemed to exist a “permeable boundary zone between animal and human life”, the boundaries between the species temporarily blurred (cf. Desmond 1999: 195), and also those between time and space (cf. Sorensen 2006: 61). The panoramic, “all-embracing” bricolage seemed to make animals, time and space comprehensible, and ever available.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Naumann, cofounder of the *Werkbund* (German Association of Craftsmen, an association of artists, architects, designers, and industrialists, established in 1907), reported on a visit to Carl Hagenbeck’s “Eismeer-Panorama”, a panorama of the arctic sea, put up at the 1896 trade exhibition in Berlin (cf. Ames 2008: 150–161). Naumann’s notes give an impression of the contemporary experience of permeability and the dialectics of belief and disbelief

in the consumption of panoramic, enlivened exhibition sceneries:

Actually, what is naturalism? In the Hagenbeck exhibition, 10 polar bears climb on ice rocks of wood and oilcloth. The imitation of the miracles of the Arctic Ocean has wooden crevasses and cracks and still it works excellently, because it is a framework for the living. Often have we seen polar bears, seals, kingfishers, and the like in zoos, but here, for the very first time, we have experienced the natural impression of the living, where we saw the Eskimo, like a shepherd behind the herd, running and climbing after distant polar bears. The single polar bear is nothing at all, but the herd is something, because in it there is love and rancour, father and sons, in short there are living relationships. To portray these is the most important thing. Without these relationships of life, the wooden ice is awfully boring, it becomes important through those relationships, because it frames the scene that nature paints. See how the Eskimo feeds his birds, as a dozen seals watch him expectantly and as it were pleadingly, see the gulls hopping from cliff to cliff, and you will confess that out of the menagerie of days gone by a type of spectacle has developed a true story instead of dead imprisoned figures. (Naumann 1909: 15f.)

The artificiality was obvious, but since Hagenbeck managed to present animals as “free” instead of incarcerated, as being engaged in lively relationships with humans, seemingly on familiar terms with other animals as well, it made the strongest impact on the immersed observer. It was the “Eskimo”, the appearance of a human being, interacting with the animals, which intensified the impression of “natural” liveliness of the scenery, *connected* them and ultimately created an “alternative nature” (Gjerløff 2010: 35). The relationships and environments of animals living in exhibition complexes, after all, were fundamentally based on an “art form of encounters” (Kalof 2007: 34), yet the artificiality seemed to almost have become a better “nature”. Human configurations of animal life, notes Nigel Rothfels, presented

a condensation, a kind of thick experience that made “real” nature look comparatively boring (Rothfels 2002a: 215f.). It was typical of open-air museums just as much that they formed a “functional architecture of synaesthetic compression” (Korff 2000: 99) of animate and inanimate objects, a “cohesive collaboration” (Shafernich 1993: 43). Visitors could partake in this assemblage, enhancing their emotional experiences (Korff 2000: 99; cf. Howes 2014; Levent & Pascual-Leone 2014). Panoramic enclosures ultimately responded to the interest for watching animals, as noted by landscape gardener Arthur Stehr in 1908, “in such an elaborate and convenient form that makes it possible for the observer to envision, to be immersed in this illusion of the true homeland”. Stehr termed the animals exhibited in zoos as “enlivening staffage” (Stehr 1908: 421). Species were caught from the woods of Norway, the shores of South Africa, the Baltic Sea and Galapagos Islands to be – in a manner of speaking – spatially-aesthetically edited, integrated in human framings and enclosures, science and entertainment practice. Zoos and open-air museums were not so much merely commenting upon landscape and nature, but creating them in the first place, designed after and attuned to human concepts, imaginations and desires (cf. Mills 2000: 80).

When the zoologist Gustave Loisel included Skansen’s animal park in his *Histoire des Ménageries*, he first off deplored that Nordiska museet’s display was not “inhabited for real” (Loisel 1912: 279). “Like every museum”, Loisel noted, Skansen’s museum exhibitions had something “of the cold silence of death” (ibid.). In contrast, the various living species exhibited at the animal park and human–animal interactions (women feeding hens, “indigenous” humans closely interacting with “their” animals) created a special atmosphere. Outside the museum’s buildings, there was frolicsome life, traditional dances, colourful costumes, lively animals and plants. Loisel, like other contemporaries, was inspired to phantasmize about the distant spaces and lives, animals and humans alike were supposed to serve as authentic representatives thereof – and in their very liveliness seemed to prove the exhibitions’ authenticity. In the same manner, David Friedrich Weinland, first direc-

tor of Frankfurt Zoo (which opened in 1860), had put emphasis on the sensual experience of living animals as opposed to stuffed specimens in natural history museums. Natural science, to his mind, originated from basic human senses: “what we see, hear, feel etc.” (Weinland 1860: 2). A stuffed animal, he was convinced, would always provide a poor and insufficient impression of nature (ibid.: 3). Weinland compared stuffed specimens with statues and rhetorically asked: “Could we properly enjoy the sight of a marble statue, if it was not for our phantasy that leads us, that we gained by experiencing and observing, and which enables us to pour some blood into these admirably cold forms, recognizing our own soul in the mimic expressions turned to stone?” (ibid.). Both zoos and Skansen relied on previous entertainment encounters that featured animals and were trying to boost the authentic experience by offering rides on elephants, carriage rides with ostriches, and popular shows (e.g. the feeding of sea lions and monkeys; Rothfels 2002b: 45), horse-riding, sledding with reindeers and huskies or even bisons (which was presented as a success in taming, Loisel 1912: 277). Keepers and zoo/museum directors alike habitually entered the animalistic sceneries or took them out of their enclosures, interacted with the respective beings, most often via feeding the animals, and both institutions sold animals and animal products (Behm 1905: 21; Vosseler 1911), which of course also provided additional income for the institution.

The possible species to be encountered in Skansen were manifold. In 1905, the inventory consisted of 69 different species of mammals and 159 different species of birds, ranging from polar bears, reindeer, fallow deer, hares, yaks, cranes, black grouses and lynxes to wolves, brown bears, elks, otters, ermines, brent geese and jaybirds (Behm 1905: 20f.). By 1912, the park had increased its inventory to 77 different species of mammals and 236 different species of birds. The acquisitiveness of zoo directors who aspired to an animal collection of the whole world to put it on display “in miniature”, outnumbered this collection in thousands. For instance, Frankfurt Zoo by the beginning of the twentieth century housed approximately 3,700 animals on an area

covering nine hectares (Scherpner 1983: 37, 117). Neither the animals nor the paying public profited from this almost maniac practice of “collecting the living” that zoo directors stiffly labelled “scientific”, trying to achieve the respectability of natural history museums. Cramped in multiply subdivided dens and cages, living in the tremendously unhealthy microclimate of coal-heated houses, animals constantly fell sick and died by the dozens (Lamp 2009: 188, 196). The animals housed at Skansen might have been slightly better off, since the climate was less foreign to the majority of them. Yet the prosaic requirements that came along with the keeping of nondomesticated animals surely were challenges to both open-air museums and zoos. The possible interpretations of animals, their behaviour and basic needs varied according to species, involved diverse actors and social frames. In general, the exhibition of animals always constructed a class society of its own, affecting different species in different ways. Mammals were often the “biggest crowd pleasers”, which, according to Jane C. Desmond, is probably influenced by bodily similarities (skin, fur, hair, facial structures, similar thermoregulation and breeding systems, and their voices) that facilitates an identification, an imagination of what their senses are, and what we imagine to be their sense of perception of our shared environment (Desmond 1999: 166f.). Mammals’ “biological structure is *comprehensible* to us in a way that other animals’ are not. [...] At the phenomenological level, some animals just live in a different world than we do” (ibid.: 167). Sharing a common world was quintessential for the husbandry *and* mise-en-scène of animals at open-air museums and zoos – be it as a kind of early *soon-to-be-history reenactment* that took place in Skansen’s mise-en-scène of Sámi and reindeer, or the up close and personal elephant rides in zoos. Humans working and living close to animals were intermediaries in this sense, agents and the sociocultural *missing link* between human and animal spheres. They embodied an interface, inhabited a zone of entanglement, and so could spectators, in fantasy, as their surrogates (cf. ibid.: 195). Animal exhibitions never exhibited animals, but human–animal relations.



Figure 2: Walrus at Skansen’s animal park fed and animated by director Alarik Behm and an animal keeper in front of the audience, 1908. (Photo: Hemming Hultgren. Nordiska museet, NMA.0048348/Wikimedia Commons)

***Cui bono?* The Potential of Entangling and Detangling Human–Animal Histories**

Ultimately, how could museum studies, science and society possibly benefit from a focus on multispecies entanglements, from investigating interconnectedness between exhibitions and between the species?

Be it a truism, *farm animal*, *workhorse*, *rotisserie chicken* or *circus seal* are, beyond terminology, preliminary notions and results of historical processes: they account for a sociocultural relation between human and nonhuman animals. A multispecies ethnography/multispecies historical anthropology, in line with Eduardo Kohn’s “anthropology of life”, “is not just confined to the human but is concerned with the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves” (Kohn 2007: 4). As much as the analysis of popular culture means a lot more than “celebrating its fun” (Grossberg 1992: 78), it is, according to Susan Leigh Star, “both more analytically interesting and more politically just to begin with the question, *cui bono?* than to begin with a celebration of the fact of human/nonhuman mingling” (Star 1991: 43). Therefore, conceiving of the history of animal exhibitions as an *entangling* (and not *entangled per se*) history would mean moving beyond presenting animals as a cypher (for urban or rural, exotic or native culture & nature), as a compilation of their position in the human-made taxonomic

system (*Zalophus californianus*, *Mangalica* or *work-horse*), applying a certain ordering to the world's varieties, defining them by size and weight, feeding habits, pairing season, threatened status, entertainability or the like.

If exhibitions are to be spaces of experience in favour of social and cultural learning, as the New Museology has claimed, a multispecies-orientated perspective of experiencing *lives*, can add a redefinition of the relationship that these institutions have with people and their communities (McCall & Gray 2014: 20), including the “community” of humans and nonhumans that these institutions present and promote. The Critical Museology of the 1980s and 1990s examined primarily the political dimension of ethnographic collections of Western museums and the need for articulation and public discussion on exhibitions' goals (Vergo 1989: 45). New Museology, according to McCall and Gray, “is a discourse around the social and political roles of museums, encouraging new communication and new styles of expression in contrast to classic, collections-centred museum models” (McCall & Gray 2014: 20). The current, multiple ecological crises of postmodern society especially challenge those institutions concerned with and exhibiting environment, “green” issues and human–animal relations – not only considering conservation but as part of a dynamic story of entangled environments of humans and nonhumans. However, zoos and open-air museums may, in fact, be presenting images that deny the role of debate within historical research and provide a concept of multispecies entanglements that is mythical in its own way (cf. Mills 2000). The animals presented may, in that sense, be seen as icons of reifying images of manifold urbanity, on the one hand, and small-scale, accessible rurality, on the other – the image of rural life closely knit to living with working and producing “farm animals”, of “exotic animals” as part of urban, cosmopolitan ways of life and self-images of a global consciousness. These demarcations, however, cannot be drawn quite as tidily if we start out with “a perspective taken from a position alongside animals” (Fudge 2017: 264), with everyday practices involving living animals in the various

modern exhibitions and put them in a historical, *relational* context.

By widening our perceptions and analyses of exhibition complexes and including living animals, we are prompted to perceive these beings themselves as having lives and histories and being an active part of human-made and animal-shaped settings, or “worlds”, for that matter. The fact that they are alive, sentient beings makes them all the more important for interdisciplinary exhibition studies, both in intellectual and scientific terms and those of responsibility and respect. Animals are, as the Bokrijk Museum in Genk, Belgium, puts it, “living heritage” (cf. Bokrijk Museum, undated). Animals in zoos are also as much of a “living heritage” as all animals ever kept and bred by humans. They hold, by their very presence, the histories of human–animal entanglements, the ever active worlding, the ways lives shape and are shaped. This would have to be part of the narratives on *cultural heritage*, just as museums, zoos and other venues need to be looked at as spatial arrangements “mapping the social”, in concrete and symbolic terms, in reciprocal interactions as well as by power structures and hierarchies. Jens Wietschorke's appeal to conceive of *Volkskunde*/cultural anthropology as a relationship science (*Beziehungswissenschaft*) offers profound reflections on interrogating the respective lives involved – by creating contexts, revealing webs and reflecting upon the researcher's own relationships to the world (Wietschorke 2012) and, I may add, worldings.

Anthropology's concept of “multi-sited” circulations of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space (Marcus 1995: 96), combined with the emergence of *multispecies ethnography* (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010), can prove especially helpful for making the various layers of entanglements visible: by “tracking” or “tracing” animals, their actual lives and cultural meanings through the modern exhibition complex. We shall look at “the specificity of lived natural-cultural entanglements in thick contact zones”, for example the museum, zoo, farm, laboratory or woods, “with their own very particular histories and possibilities” (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster 2016: 13). The central question of multispecies

ethnography is how “different knowledge practices – different modes of attentive immersion – bring different worlds into being” (ibid.: 12). Open-air museums and zoos are important spaces of “immersion”, of transferring knowledge; their societal role goes beyond a conservation of heritage. A distanced, detailed analysis of animals’ allotment to certain cultural spaces can help one to understand the ever contextual, contemporary and contingent constructions of human–animal relations.

As regards the public role of open-air museums and zoos, paying attention to the animal “others” could have “the potential to draw others into new relationships and accountabilities. Like all other accounts, multispecies stories are active technologies of worlding” (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster 2016: 16). Thus, the complex texture of spaces entangling human and nonhuman actors, the simultaneous modern and anti-modern story of a menaced world, about the end of an – ever imagined – idyll (traditional country life, lives of old livestock, lives of Bengal tigers and their environment), might be the beginning of another story, of interconnectedness between nature and culture, past and present, that has yet to be told.

Note

1 Some exceptions being Den Gamle By, Aarhus, Denmark (1912), Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village in the suburb of Detroit, Michigan, USA (1928) and The Estonian Open-air Museum, Tallinn, Estonia (1957).

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