

Dransart, Penelope (ed.). 2015. *Living Beings. Perspectives on Interspecies Engagements (Association of Social Anthropologists Monographs Series)*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic. 213 pp. Pb.: \$37.95. ISBN: 9780857858429.

Edited by Penelope Dransart, this volume is composed of papers that were first presented at the conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth (ASA) in Lampeter, Wales in 2011. As the title of the book *Living Beings. Perspectives on Interspecies Engagements* suggests, the focus of its contributions lies on the diverse engagements of humans with other 'living beings' such as mammals, insects, and trees.

The discussions presented in this volume fit well into the currently resurgent anthropological interest in the realm of the nature and the natural. This book, however, brings together perspectives that move far beyond the usual scope of anthropological writing. By combining contributions from social anthropologists, philosophers, and artists, it not only offers unique insights into diverse interspecies engagements but also serves as an example for the fruitful collaboration of multiple disciplines.

The authors of this volume have chosen a range of different theoretical approaches. While some emphasise agency or employ actor-network theory, others rely on phenomenological approaches or use relational ontologies as a base for a critical assessment of current theoretical trends in the field of study. The contributors to this volume stand united in their general scepticism towards notions that assume static, hierarchical oppositions between living beings such as humans and animals. As a result, hierarchies are brought into question within their unique cultural context in order to highlight complexity and the possibility of the 'simultaneous presence of different ontologies' (p. 7).

In *Chapter One*, Penelope Dransart starts the discussion with an introduction to the relevant concepts of this volume such as 'living being' and 'animality' alongside a short description of their historical and theoretical backgrounds. The metaphor of the 'turn' thereby serves as a structuring element as Dransart introduces the reader to the theoretical framework and to the individual chapters of the book.

In *Chapters Two and Three*, the role of animals is explored within two very different philosophies. Veena Das explores the 'enigmatic analogy between death and animality' (p. 18) on the basis of Vedic texts on animals and the practice of animal sacrifice. She concludes that it is precisely the 'figure of the animal' that 'is important [...] for understanding the violence that joins life and death' (p. 25). Sarah Boss, in contrast, introduces the reader to the Christian philosopher Ramon Llull and his cosmology of life, the 'ladder of nature' which turns out to be marked by hierarchy just as much as it bears the notion of a unity of creation. While animals and plants are clearly 'below human beings in the order of creation', humans can only 'find happiness in God' by 'lead[ing] morally good lives' that is by showing respect for all of God's creatures (p. 42-43).

The next two chapters are not concerned with the relationship between humans and animals but revolve around the power of trees. In *Chapter Four*, Safet HadžiMuhamedović explores the 'entanglement of people and trees' (p. 66) through

the history of the Oak of Guernica. In the course of his analysis, this tree turns out to be not only standing as a powerful symbol of Basque identity, kinship, and safety but further emerges as a bearer of agency in the form of 'active silence' (p. 65). In *Chapter Five*, Ronit Grossman-Horesh introduces the movement of sacred song circles in Tel Aviv as an attempt 'bringing the forest into the city' (p. 74). Here, the forest serves as an imaginary locus enabling spirituality, transnationality, and egalitarian community within the confinements of a modern city.

The subsequent two contributions both make use of art to approach 'the connection with living things' (p. 92). While Carole Baker uses photography and phenomenology to develop a conceptual framework for experiencing nature, Alana Jelinek and Juliette Brown introduce *The Field*, 'a long-term, collaborative, interspecies art project' (p. 113) designed to explore ethics in a non-hierarchical way.

A similar notion of the ability of nature in shaping human ethics is presented in the paper by Rachel Ben-David who comes to see the growing trend of Bar Mitzvah safaris to Kenia and Tanzania as a 'search of authenticity' (p. 141) in the age of materialism. Safaris are thereby analysed as a means of reconnecting secular Israeli youths with "natural' family values' (p. 140).

A safari is marked by the distance between animals and their human observers. In D.S. Farrer's study of Chinese martial arts such as 'Southern Praying Mantis', however, human and animal become one. Here, practitioners do not imitate but 'must awaken the animal for the becoming-animal to emerge' (p. 159), a skill only mastered by a chosen few.

The last two contributions of this volume could be said to address different expectations towards humanness and human behaviour. David Cockburn discusses anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism within the study of the language of primates, namely the language of bonobos. In a concluding chapter, Penelope Dransart finally explores the relational ontology of the Yaghan people of Tierra del Fuego through their ways of dressing. The dressing with animal furs and oil was regarded as a 'sign of a primitive condition' (p. 185) by Europeans. Yaghan explanations of dress, however, understand these garments as a 'social skin' (p. 185), to highlight 'interspecies collaboration', and 'relate human existence to that of nonhuman and supernatural beings' (p. 199).

Altogether, *Living Beings* provides a multitude of interesting and innovative ways to rethink the relationship between humans and other-than-human beings. By pushing methodological and theoretical boundaries, the ideas presented in this volume will be especially inspiring to readers who are interested in interdisciplinary research projects with art and philosophy.

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