

Call for papers

Ethology and Anthropology: From « Umwelt » to representational worlds

In *A Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men*, published in 1934, Jakob von Uexküll refuted the idea that animals could be reduced to a mere mechanism, responding to stimuli by reactions. Taking the tick for example, he showed how it perceives the world according to what makes sense in its surroundings. The theory of *Umwelt*, "surrounding world" or "sensitive world", provides every animal, human beings included, with an own particular world. The idea that all animals are endowed with a sensibility, that they interpret their environment and act accordingly, raises the question of Von Uexküll's legacy, both for Ethology and for Anthropology. The hypothesis of a continuity amidst the animal reign was already present in the first worthy animal monograph, that of the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (1868). In his study on the life and works of the American beaver, he considers both human and non-human beings are endowed with a common mental principle. Such premises raise a challenging debate: what is the heuristic value of the "sensitive worlds"? What experimental or empirical approaches allow us to delineate both the "animal perspective" and the "Native point of view" such as defined by Malinowski? Are the "worlds" of social and solitary animals significantly different? What ecological, phylogenetic or cultural imperatives determine the constitution and the interpretation of these worlds?

Our objective is to build disciplinary bridges and to by-pass various epistemological bolts which hinder the intimate knowledge of animal societies. A methodological anthropomorphism, with a comparative aim, would indeed allow us to fill in the gap between the respective fields of social sciences and animal sciences in the broader sense of the latter word. The workshop will welcome young researchers with groundbreaking proposals.

A workshop will be held at Nanterre University (Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie) on Friday, October 10th, 2014
Three topics should be considered :

- The question of sensitive worlds, such as defined by von Uexküll, in connection with Gibson's theory of affordances (1979): that is the way a sensitive being constitutes its own environment through its perception;
- The question of meaning, or "zoosemiotics" (Sebeok and Ramsay, on 1969), as production and interpretation of the world by sensitive beings, including in its social dimension; the codification of the emotions, and the decoding which follows, derives from this question;
- Finally, the question of representational worlds, central issue for the field of anthropology, that is the postulate that worlds are not individual, but socially shared, thanks to systems of norms, values, classification. The expression of the emotions seems to be crucial in this capacity of sharing among non-human and human beings (Halbwachs, 1947). The issue here is to expose what we know about animal social worlds, as well as to shed light on what, in the ethnographical inquiry, is not a matter of language.

Proposals (1500 characters without spaces) should be sent before June, 30th, 2014

Information and abstracts proposals are to be sent to florent.kohler@gmail.com	Scientific Committee Alain Boissy (INRA) Eric Baratay (Lyon 2 University) Philippe Erikson (Nanterre University) Florent Kohler (Tours University) Michel Kreutzer (Nanterre University) Jean-Michel Le Bot (Rennes 2 University)
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