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Art by Farangis G. Yegane

Text: Gita Yegane Arani (Palang LY)

Qualities of zoomorph expressions

Humanised animalisation: thoughts on the plush animal
toys phenomenon



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Humanised animalisation: thoughts on the plush animal toys phenomenon

Why are there so many stuffed animal figures or why do such animal figures enjoy a certain kind of popularity? Are stuffed animals in principle merely quite neutral stuffed figures with visually cute animal attributes or are they actually somehow

images of non-human animals? If they are animalized but actually neutral stuffed figures, then the animal features seem strongly indispensable after all. Why? What do these animal attributes represent in such figures?

Or if one sees it in such a way that stuffed animals clearly represent non-human animals (in the following abbreviated with 'nh-animals'), then one could ask oneself, why do we harbor a tendency of a deprecating relationship towards nh-animals, but without clearly admitting these attitudes to ourselves in our attitude towards the childlike-emotional? Why do we belittle such images of animals as something cuddly and where does the sensual component come from that we see in these optically animalized figures as figurative touch objects?

Perhaps it is precisely the fact that these figures are plush fabric objects created by us and the real animals are real existences completely autonomous from us that we like the plush animals, because nh-animals remain unthreatening for us in this curious imaging function. They are figures and not beings. With the real beings we are having an existential confrontation.

Representations show what we see or would like to recognize in something or believe to see or to recognize. Perhaps the animal templates of these images do not interest us particularly in the positive, because they are so different in factuality to us. They, as other biological animals, have evolutionized differently from us, and we prefer to leave all somehow possible explanations about the identity of nh-animals up to the experts, instead of exploring the complex communicative possibilities of our individual [or inter-subjective] human-animal interactions ourselves.

One could say that we have managed to settle our relationship to nh-animals by giving the relationship to them an emotional corner in the broadest sense, starting in the form of our mostly as a child lived relationship to figurative or abstracted images of them. And in the same breath our humanity initiates itself (in demarcation to the "rest of nature") in reducing the reality of a human-animal encounter to a negation of their independent lives' value and meaning, by seeing them as real existences solely in relationships conditional to us, as food products, objects of research, "biological organisms of varying complexity", totems or symbols, and perhaps also as comforters of the soul, as "biological secondary beings" to humans, etc.

In both our destructive and constructive considerations, however, what seems to fascinate us is that which constitutes the otherness [and manifoldness] of the “animals” we designate and identify. A quality of an otherness which we partly despise and love, but with which, seen over the whole plane, we can or want to deal so little integratively with regard to the question of ethical consideration, that we have to keep them reduced in our conceptual terms in order not to fall into confusion.

We might suspect that the position in which nh-animals are integrated into our cultures (in the thought edifices and levels of action of our humanness) is perhaps indeed based on an ideological compulsiveness of the exercise of violence (in its most fundamental sense) towards “the natural”, and that this coercive character of our relation to nh-animals excludes our willingness to understand a specific animal diversity (and its relation of diversity to us); and consequently we might see that with this missing engagement the possibility of an ethical integration into our fields of thought is being excluded.

Now I don't want to put everything in connection with the stuffed animal and animal figure “phenomenon”, but I see here an expression of an emotional relationship to the other “biological” animals, and through the examination of an emotional contextuality finally at least some questions open up in the broader picture.

Since the human-animal-relationship is factually not predominantly based on interactive voluntariness and the real existential value of nh-animals probably has to elude us on the grounds of ethical exclusion, perhaps, however, a fascination of that which is denied to us just by that arises: A fascination of the, even if arbitrarily, *uncontained*.

I think that through such a fascination, which can be expressed both positively and negatively, we feel challenged to include nm-animals in our aesthetic systems in this incomprehended position, and thus to try to get hold of them.

By a real existential value I understand the inner independence of nh-animals to humans, which is given by their interconnectedness of own intra-nh-animals, separated from us and by their self-lived environmental contexts; they are on the one hand so similar to us and on the other hand yet so different from us, in the contexts they form on this planet [as actual citizens of this planet].

The real nh-animals and how we like to see them.

Animal documentaries, for an example, predominantly show the mother-infant relationship, mating, hunting, and foraging behaviors of animals. What do nh-animals do other than the behaviors we focus our attention on from the standpoint of highlighting the supposed “instinctual behavior” in animals. Nothing that would be relevant for them (themselves)?

From our limited view about nh-animals, one can come to the assumption that every somehow “individualized” trait that can be attributed to a nh-animal or animal figure originates from an anthropomorphism, i.e. a humanization.

I believe, with regard to the stuffed animal or any other animal figure phenomenon, that a certain kind of “individualized” attributions are in fact in part and quite clearly so. They are partly and insofar anthropomorphisms, not because animals themselves are devoid of any individuality, but in the case of animal representations that work with accentuations of individuality characteristics, they remain, on the one hand, primarily humanizing optical “individualizers” that lie strongly within the framework of ideas about what is visible to us as an “individuality indicator” in a [“standardized”] human view of individualizing characteristics, that is: that which can be considered as an expression of certain characteristics: serious, silly, naive, sad ... expressed as beady eyes, clumsy feet, big nose ... in the manner of a figure language designed by us. But apart from our figure languages, on the other hand, at least concerning the purely existential, it is clear that nh-animal individuality exists in itself, although in probably greatly different forms.

Yet perhaps we also want to *replace the individuality expression of animals*, which probably runs differently (the animal individuality, which is foreign to us), with our chosen focal points in visuality, and the interferences, which arise in the animal-human images – which can be found in the stuffed animals and cartoon figures – sometimes exert the special fascination, because they in turn can run into the unlimited and ungraspable for us or get out of bounds (– into the undescribed pages of a future realistic non-anthropocentric [in the sense of an explicitly or implicitly hegemonial anthropocentrism that is] but rather animality-respecting future for example?)

On the other hand, the documenting images of what we call the reality of life of animals, i.e. e.g. the animal documentations, primarily throw light on observations made under purely biologicistic points of view, and thus secondarily consciously guard themselves against “humanizing” attributions, at least as far as the supposedly critical human attributes are concerned. The accentuation, e.g. on the mating and feeding behavior of animals, however, makes clear over and over again an attitude, in which further and for us more discreet activities of nh-animals are not supposed to be visible and deemed to be meaningless. To us, then, only a few behaviors of animals seem to be tangible (from a lack of a newly developed perspectival breadth), and so we infer that what is relevant to us, in our interest in nh-animals, is what is relevant to nh-animals.

Less voyeurism on the part of humans in the human-animal interaction please!

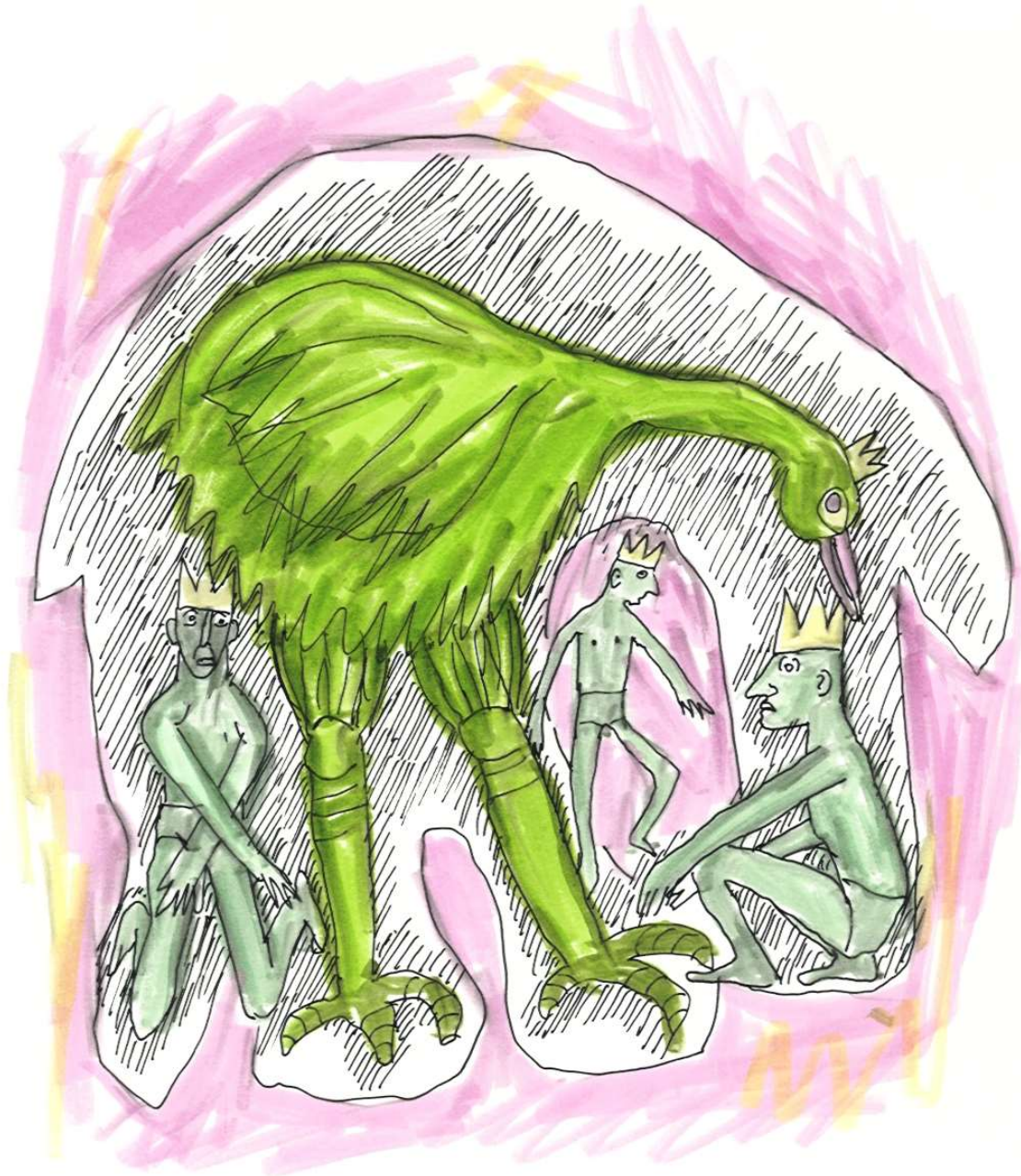
Biological highlights as they are presented in animal documentary films are omitted in an individuated human-animal encounter. Such encounters would have to be contrasted and decoded differently, and the mutual interaction would have to be translated differently. But possibly we lack some communicative nuances for this. At least for the time being a biologically oriented frame of reference should no longer suffice.

[...]

Perhaps it is in the psychologically complex phenomenon of the *verniedlichung* [the highlighting of cuteness] of animals that our distance to them is most strongly illustrated. The fact that we want to accept them solely as representations of their occurrence makes clear that our primary relationship to them is actually a secondary one: we are not interested on a level of uniqueness that can only express itself through an individualizable quality in a human-animal encounter, but rather we adopt the judgments and approaches of others or of the general public, and so forth. The relationship to non-human animals in their identity, is ethically from our side actually so de-individualized, as the real situations are into which we transfer these “other animals”.

I generally notice with many animal characters that they often have decidedly “humanized” features. Is it that something appearing animalesque can give a character a more “neutralizing” (or otherwise “distinctive”) veneer than a

character appearing exclusively anthropomorphic could? And is this due to the actual “animal-characteristic”? Do “human” figures, on the other hand, in turn carry traits that we associate with human characteristics, traits, and clichés that the more animal-like forms are free of, because they offer something else that we may, in part, prefer to associate with? Is this where the blending of the two attributes (“human,” “animal”) comes from? What do animal figures embody for us?



It is also interesting to note that while stuffed animals tend to appear with more “individual”, characteristic, but in any case anthropomorphized, anthropomorphic features, schematic animal illustrations, which are intended to refer more clearly to nh-animals and do not enjoy cuddly animal status for human cuteness needs ... that animal figures or illustrations such as pictograms for instance, that are intended to refer figuratively “factually” to non-human animals themselves, in turn employ optical forms of deindividuation in their representation.

Or is the cuddly animal phenomenon even a derivation or continuation of the exploitative aspect? That we use the beautiful sides, the sides of nh-animals that are pleasant to us, positive for us, for our purposes – whichever ones. That we have cemented the distance to nh-animals in such a complicated psychological form.

I once had an idea that all companies that use animal figurines and illustrations in any form should help the animals they use in illustrations for their advertising, etc., via financial support of animal rights organizations or animal sanctuaries, etc. Wouldn't that be fairer?

But you could say that we ennoble nh-animals by our views – whether as cuddly animals or as advertising symbols ... – but is that really so? If we would take now instead of the animals as cuddly animals or advertising images, other figures, people, flowers, crystals, stars or houses, etc., then the need, I am quite sure there, for animal images, would appear again somewhere.

Maybe we try to compensate our disturbed relationship to nh-animals by our ways of depicting them, and thereby delude ourselves that we have no problems with the primary identity of the “nh-animals”, but nevertheless that the real animals ‘just aren't’ proper cuddly animals like Maya the Bee, Mickey Mouse and the Tiger Duck. That we do respect the animal side of these figures, but the real animals are only biological “evolutionisms” or eventually animaux-machines (Descartes).

But, can one say at all that the animal side is given only by the Gestalt? Probably yes, because in order to be a human being, the shape is also sufficient – internally and externally – or? Or is the human being alone on some kind of meta-level? If so, perhaps one can just as well assume that being an animal and thus also the animal right [itself] also forms a kind of meta-level.

We give a meaning to the animal appearance only if it is graspable by us. Animals, however, are not graspable for us in the last consequence. Their distinctness and diversity elude our common standards of understanding. Even animal defenders make no secret of their tendency to misrepresent animals as pictograms or cute fauna evoking compassion or as eternal animal victims and thus to de-individualize and schematically summarize them – although this movement speaks of liberation and liberty. A high ideal!

But how would it be to see non-human animals as a “you” and as an “I” that one meets and respects, even if one has in principle little idea of such a “you” or such an “I” or at least cannot bring this realization to a collectivist understanding of animality, whereby one’s own idea, one’s own knowledge remains little communicable among humans [1]

I don't see any sense in reducing my view to prefabricated images – neither by biologisms, anthropomorphisms, nor by conceptual meta-levels that only exclusively capture one’s own thinking as thinking – as long as thereby a being-an-individual [-living entity]/subject is deprived of its value or its meaningfulness (as such), independent of human chauvinism and human de-animalization and objectification.

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[1] The implementation of an emancipatory opening of barriers ordered by society [and societies in their plural] functions above all at the point of breaking given sociologically located constraints, defaults and sets of rules within communicational norms and the realizations derived from them and the kind of agreements equilibrated by these factors. I dare to make this presumption in: *‘Animal Rights ABC: How can I assert my basic human rights to demand fundamental animal rights?’* as the possible and so far untreaded solutional path that could be included into the wider animal rights debate. See: Edition Farangis: Animal Autonomy E-Reader, Jahrgang 3, Nr. 2, 2022. <https://d-nb.info/1271492067/34> ; in German: *Tierrechte ABC. Wie kann ich meine menschlichen Grundrechte geltend machen zur Einforderung fundamentaler Tierrechte?* In: E-Reader: Gruppe Messel. Jahrgang 4, Nr. 7, 2022, <https://d-nb.info/1270042017/34>

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Edition Farangis
Untergasse 7 / Marstallweg 8
61250 Usingen / Taunus
Deutschland
mail@farangis.de
Tel. + 49 6081 6 88 24 49
www.farangis.de

Autor:innen: Gita Marta Yegane Arani (Tschördy / Palang LY).
Illustration: Farangis G. Yegane (Acryl auf Leinwand, Mixed Media)
Herausgeber:innen: Lothar Yegane Arani (Prenzel); Gita Marta Yegane Arani; Edition Farangis

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