Human and Nonhuman Animals, Mutually at Risk: A Study of the Swiss Information Media

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Abstract
Nowadays, relationships between nonhuman animals and humans are debated, often in relation to issues associated with the risks they represent for each other. On the one hand, new diseases and accidents indicate that animals are not as innocuous as they were long thought; on the other hand, the now questioned human impact on the natural environment is considered a risk for animals. This research analyzed these contrasting images of animals in the Swiss information media. Of the five main animal figures identified over the last 30 years, this paper focuses on the Undesirable Animal and the Victim Animal. These two figures have existed throughout the observed period; in contrast to Victim Animals, however, who appear fairly infrequently, Undesirable Animals have become more and more common in the last decade, usually in relation to a specific issue (such as the avian flu). This suggests that the media more often convey the dominant anthropocentric relationship to animals, reflecting a preoccupation with the protection of humans against dangerous animals, whereas the protection of animals from humans is considered less important. Recent controversies demonstrate, however, that the frontier between “us” and “them” is regularly renegotiated.

Keywords
information media, nonhuman animal representations, risk, undesirable animals, victim animals

During the process of modernization, humans have increasingly mastered nature in general and animals in particular. With the “civilizing process” described by Norbert Elias (2006), they have reaffirmed the supremacy of culture and the necessity of domesticating wilderness. At the same time, due to massive urbanization, a romantic relationship to nature and a greater sensitivity to nonhuman animals have developed. This led to the emergence—in Switzerland and other countries—of animal protection societies at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th and the promulgation of laws on animal protection. Some have described this evolution as a progressive move from anthropocentric relationships to animals, in which humans are considered as superior to them, toward zoocentric attitudes, which suggest that no
hierarchy should exist between animals and humans (Franklin & White, 2001; Franklin, 1999).

Various recent events seem to call into question the validity of this more empathic vision of animals and reveal ambivalent relationships with them (Gouabault & Burton-Jeangros, 2010). Animals have appeared to be primary vectors of viruses or other pathogenic agents (such as the prion) in the development of several new diseases that threaten humans; the “mad-cow” crisis, avian flu, and swine flu are important public health threats, with global consequences potentially affecting populations worldwide. These crises also highlight the frailty of the species barrier and remind us that, despite developments in science and technology, humans are not exempt from biological processes that develop outside their reach. In parallel, debates about the reintroduction of some wild species (such as bears or wolves, in some European regions) have highlighted that dangerous animals live out there in the natural environment, which humans may have thought was mostly innocuous. Furthermore, the publicity given to crime news about animals dangerous to humans—in particular, stories regarding dogs biting and even killing children—seems to confirm that animals are potentially unfriendly to us. All these issues, fairly visible and controversial in recent years, have contributed to transformations of animal representations. One could see in those preoccupations the mark of “risk society” (Beck, 1992), characterized by an awareness of extending threats and by the continuous development of measures aiming at enforcing security. In that context, animals once familiar and omnipresent in many life spheres, with pets in private homes, meat in food practices, encounters with wild species organized in leisure activities, suddenly seem insufficiently tamed. In the processes of blame attribution linked to the emergence of new risks (Joffe, 1999), nonhuman animals might become convenient scapegoats (Gerber, Burton-Jeangros, & Dubied, 2011).

At the same time, changing relationships to animals reflect the emergence over the last three to four decades of a new approach to nature: humans have become aware of the impact of their intervention on the natural environment and of the risks created by their activities, as reflected, for example, in the global warming debate. These changes have also placed human-animal relationships under scrutiny. Indeed, recent crises involving animals have made humans aware of the questionable ways they are treating animals: the “mad-cow” crisis exposed the conditions in which cattle are raised and then disposed of, and the massive killings of poultry in reaction to the diffusion of the H5N1 virus in 2006 was deemed unacceptable by many. Scholars working in animal studies have also been more and more critical of human behavior toward animals in various domains, denouncing cruelty and suffering imposed on
animals (Singer, 1975, 2005; Regan, 1983). The strengthening of social movements addressing animal issues (Buller & Morris, 2003; Franklin, 1999) confirms these growing preoccupations related to animals in modern society. Franklin (1999) describes the emergence of a new form of misanthropy that considers progress harmful and contends that human action has negative effects on nature—a perspective that shifts the focus, emphasizing the risks that humans pose to animals.

Nonhuman animals occupy an important place in modern human societies, in which they fulfill many important functions, both emotional and instrumental. However, at the crossroads of the continuous search for safety and the growing awareness of humans about their domination of animals and the effects of their actions on nature, animals have become controversial. Ambivalent attitudes toward animals have been triggered by several recent crises challenging the established images, such as the harmlessness of dogs living as pets in families or of cows eaten as hamburgers. In the opposite direction, antispecism positions also question dominant images of animals. Today the possibility of attributing uncontested meanings to animals is challenged, and the emergence of new categories, \textit{a priori} unthinkable, such as the “useful pest” or the “protected predator” (Manceron, 2009) confirms that classic categorizations and differentiations can no longer be taken for granted.

Such controversies highlight to what degree definitions related to animals are socially constructed—i.e., associated with a specific context and period. We consider that, in modern societies, the mass media, fiction, and literature play a major role in the debate surrounding animal issues. The way animals are portrayed in those venues suggests how humans relate to them and how they value them: proximity and distance, identity and alterity are negotiated both through intimate stories occurring in the private and emotional sphere of individuals and through news stories that capture the attention of the public. In the context of the recent evolutions described above, we hypothesize that the media directly participate in the production of ambivalent images of animals, among which issues related to risks play a prominent role.

In this paper, presenting partial results from a larger research project conducted in Switzerland,\textsuperscript{2} we aim at describing the contrasting ways animals are represented in the print and TV media. These images portray different types of interactions between humans and animals, some being neutral or positive while others are characterized by tensions. After a general description of the whole range of representations we could identify, this article will more particularly focus on two categories that call into question relationships between nonhuman animals and humans. These categories relate to the risk or danger that human and nonhuman animals can represent for each other. Indeed,
descriptions of nonhuman animals as a threat or as being in need of protection throw light on the debate about (dis)continuity between humans and animals, fueling the discussion about whether to maintain or abolish the division between nature and culture.

Methods

We collected material in fifteen (daily and weekly) information papers and from the three national TV stations, distributed in the main linguistic regions of Switzerland (French-, German-, and Italian-speaking) (Figure 1). In comparison to other national contexts, Switzerland offers a particularly interesting case study. It presents a multilingual media context (French, German, Italian) situated at a crossroads of European cultures. Moreover, the country boasts a high density of media usage, with regard to press diversity per inhabitant (ranked fourth worldwide in 2007) and TV-set possession (95% of households in 2007) (Cornu & Borruat, 2007).

We collected our sample from the period 1978-2007 (i.e., in between the adoption and revision of the Swiss law on animal protection), chosen to examine potential differences over this three-decade time span that started with a growing awareness of ecological issues in the late 1970s and ended with the accumulation of various animal-related threats, such as avian flu.

For each one of these years we selected material for an entire week (30 weeks in total). In order to measure the transformation of animal coverage we combined “nonproblematic” periods and periods troubled by a specific issue related to animals (for example, the announcement in March 1996 of the probable link between “mad” cows and a new disease among humans). In total we included 19 random weeks and 11 selected weeks corresponding to the chosen events or cases described in Table 1. We considered such a hybrid corpus selection necessary to approach representations of nonhuman animals in both everyday media content and crisis situations so as to best observe the diversity of negotiation processes around these social representations.

For each selected week (random and cases), articles and TV news containing references to nonhuman animals in the title or subtitle or in an illustration have been exhaustively collected, and only journalistic articles have been included. The total corpus is composed of 4,244 articles and 236 TV news extracts (n = 4480); 57% of this material comes from the German-speaking media, 35% from the French-speaking media, and 8% from the Italian-speaking media. Two thirds (68%, 3,029 extracts) correspond to the random selection and one third (32%, 1,451 extracts) to the selected cases. An inductive thematic content analysis has been performed: one code was attributed to each
Figure 1. Distribution of the selected media (press — and TV —-) in Switzerland.
This content analysis was performed using Atlas.ti, a software package oriented toward qualitative data analysis with a grounded theory approach. The codes or categories established in the content analysis process must respond to some criteria, among which codes must be exhaustive (a code can be attributed to each article), exclusive (only one code is attributed to each article), and objective (articles must be coded similarly by all coders). To enforce this last criterion, the team of three coders worked collectively, systematically adapting and discussing codes by consensus, thus building up and modifying the coding scheme, also recoding when necessary. In the analysis process, detailed codes were progressively grouped into larger categories.

Our choice of newspapers and TV stations (Figure 1) aimed at representing the three main linguistic regions of Switzerland. Due to the selection criteria we adopted to collect the media material (combination of random weeks and specific cases considered particularly enlightening for the analysis of animal

Table 1. Selected Cases in the Corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (dates of selected weeks)</th>
<th>Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986 (July 1-7)</td>
<td>Irradiated fish in lake Lugano, after the Chernobyl accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 (May 22-28)</td>
<td>Initiative* for “small farmers and against animal plants”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 (February 23-March 1)</td>
<td>Initiative* against vivisection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 (March 22-29)</td>
<td>Mad cow crisis: suspension of British beef import to the rest of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 (February 24-March 2)</td>
<td>Dolly, the cloned sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 (June 2-8)</td>
<td>Dioxin contamination of Belgian poultry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 (December 4-10)</td>
<td>Mad cow crisis: meat and bone meal bans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 (September 22-28)</td>
<td>Debate about ritual slaughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 (December 2-8)</td>
<td>Dangerous dogs: death of a child in Oberglatt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 (February 27-March 5)</td>
<td>Avian flu crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 (March 20-26)</td>
<td>Knut, the polar cub of the Berlin zoo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In Switzerland, citizens can actively participate in political decisions through the use of “initiatives”; once 100,000 signatures have been collected for a specific initiative, its content is submitted to be voted on by the whole country.
representations), the analyzed corpus is not representative, in statistical terms, of the total number of media articles dedicated to animals over the observed period. However we applied systematic criteria in the selection process (each article dedicated to animals over the selected weeks, through the systematic review of the 15 chosen newspapers); furthermore, random weeks have been selected throughout the various months of the chosen years.\(^5\) Finally, in regards to the cultural variety of Switzerland, the selected media (Figure 1) and the articles are distributed in proportions that approximate the partition of the three main linguistic regions of the country.\(^6\)

Results

Main Animal Figures in the Swiss Media

Five main animal figures emerged from the inductive content analysis, corresponding to the dominant representations of animals’ role in relationship to humans in the media. These figures are not evenly distributed among the whole corpus (Figure 2). To describe their content, references will be made to the subcategories they each encompass.\(^7\)

1. The **Undesirable Animal** \((n = 1,623, 36\%\) of the total corpus) includes animals presented as a threat to humans. Three subcategories have been distinguished: ill or contaminated animals (“mad” cows, birds infected with H5N1) are the most common subgroup (23% of the total corpus); actively dangerous or harmful animals (such as dogs who bite or kill children) are also fairly frequently present (11% of the total corpus); animals defined as “pests” (included in this category due to the mainly negative connotations associated with them) were only rarely mentioned (2%).

2. The **Shown Animal** is the second most common figure \((n = 1,452, 32\%)\), and the category includes animals for whom the main intention is to show them. Subfigures include “exhibited animals” (13%), such as those performing in a show (for example, in a circus); “signified animals” (10%), who are used to convey a message (reference to marmots as a symbol of Switzerland, for example); “studied animals” (5%), who are portrayed as a source of knowledge (description of some specific behavior); and “animals as curiosities” (4%), who arouse interest because of some originality or specificity (such as a two-headed snake).

3. The **Victim Animal** \((n = 830, 19\%)\) includes animals presented in the role of victim. This figure distinguishes between those who are presented as victims (10%) due to natural causes (accident, disease) or human causes
(pollution, farming, etc.), and those who are described as needing protection (9%), such as threatened species.

4. The **Utilitarian Animal** (n = 356, 8%) refers to animals presented in terms of the use humans make of them. It refers to “consumed animals” (3%), as with meat products, to “working animals” (2%), such as a dog accompanying a blind person (2%), to “farm animals” (1%), and to those used by scientists in laboratories (2%).

5. The **Companion Animal** (n = 219, 5%), a rarely present figure and therefore not refined in further subcategories, emphasizes relationships between humans and animals characterized by an affective and emotional bond. In our analysis, this denomination does not overlap with the usual pet category.

Figure 2. Main animal figures (n = 4,480).
Indeed, these five figures do not overlap with more traditional animal categories, such as those distinguishing pets from wild animals or these from farm animals. Such broad distinctions happen to be challenged in specific human-animal interactions, such as when a pet becomes dangerous (biting dogs) or a wild animal is presented as a companion (the “new pets,” such as snakes or tarantulas). Our analysis accounts for those variations, with a focus on the suggested interactions in the media content.

In combination, these figures highlight the diversity of the ways animals were depicted in the Swiss media over the observed period. Positive or neutral images of animals represent slightly less than half of the corpus and are mostly present through the “Shown Animal” figure. This category is fairly stable throughout the observed period, regularly providing images of animals in situations that do not challenge animal-human interactions. It clearly contrasts with the Undesirable Animal figure, which portrays negative images of animals. The attention the media give to this figure is likely to challenge human-animal relationships. Therefore we consider that this media figure offers a good opportunity to assess social attitudes toward animals, and their variations, since crisis periods provide new insights that are likely to challenge established views: “[T]he most typical manifestations [of social attitudes] appear in polemical communication situations: confrontations and controversies, time and crisis occasions offer precious observation resources” (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998, p. 19).

Results on the five figures do not reveal any major differences between the three main linguistic regions of Switzerland. Some specific events were covered differently by local media, depending on their location. But over the three observed decades, the Swiss media mostly seem to have adopted the same language regarding animal figures. Some differences exist, however, between weekly and daily media: the former tend to favor noncontroversial figures (namely Companion Animal, Utilitarian Animal, and Shown Animal) while the latter more often report on Victim Animals and Undesirable ones. This is rather expected: daily media are more interested in factual stories, which Victims and Undesirable animals are more likely to occasion. We also observed differences between rural and urban press, the first one favoring the Utilitarian Animal figure, while the second one insists more on the Undesirable Animal figure, as if a greater distance between humans and animals was generating more fear. Finally, due to the propensity of the popular press to scandal, emotion, and spectacular events, we were expecting a greater presence of Undesirable and Victim figures in this type of media, in comparison with broadsheets. However, the Swiss popular press prefers the Shown Animal figure, therefore promoting magazine-type coverage of animal figures.
The remainder of this paper will focus on the two figures we think attest to most of the current tensions between humans and animals—i.e., the Undesirable Animal and the Victim Animal. These two figures, which together represent more than half of the corpus (55%), confirm the importance of ambivalent images of animals in the media, especially around risks that human and nonhuman animals represent for each other. Moreover, nine out of the eleven selected cases (Table 1) are directly related to these two figures, which reflect the debate regarding the place of nonhuman animals in society.

Undesirable Animals: Humans at Risk?

Attitudes toward animals fluctuate and change over time. This is the result of the emergence of new issues or events that challenge taken-for-granted images of animals. Our selection of media material was aimed specifically at assessing whether these images have changed in the media between the late 1970s and the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

Among the articles selected in “random” weeks, the continuous presence of “undesirable” animals throughout the period must be highlighted. They appear in proportions varying between 6% (minimum, in 1987) and 33% (maximum, in 1979) of the total number of extracts per year (see gray bars in Figure 3). This indicates that “undesirable” animals are not new; in the last 30 years they have been constantly present in the media.

Several recent issues have made their presence more obvious, and indeed, six of the selected cases in the study concern the Undesirable Animal figure (irradiated fish due to the Chernobyl accident in 1986, “mad cow” disease in 1996 and 2001, dioxin-contaminated Belgian poultry in 1999, dangerous dogs in 2005, and avian flu in 2006). For each one of these cases, nearly all the collected extracts were coded as Undesirable Animals (see black bars in Figure 3). It is worth mentioning that, over the years, the number of extracts associated with these selected cases has been increasing, with as many as 321 extracts dealing with avian flu over the selected week in 2006. The 2005 incident of a child killed by three dogs also generated a large production, with 300 extracts in one week.

This supremacy of risk issues coverage is also confirmed when we compare them to the other selected cases: dangerous animals find more echoes in the media (as measured by the number of extracts during one week) than any other cases such as a political debate on vivisection (1989, 66 extracts), Knut the Berlinian ice bear (2007, 31 extracts) or the issue of ritual slaughter (2001, 16 extracts). This suggests that the dangerous animal is obviously more “media-resonant” than other animal figures. And this recent interest of the media in animal crises can be seen as a confirmation of the “increasingly contentious
Figure 3. Evolution of the Undesirable Animal figure between 1978 and 2007 (% of total articles/year) (n = 1,623). Note: black bars = selected cases; gray bars = random weeks.
and conflictual nature of human-animal relations” (Franklin, 1999, p. 2). This controversial state of affairs seems to fuel the media coverage of animal issues.

The likelihood that media coverage of specific cases, including those involving dangerous animal figures, has increased, especially over the last decade, must be evaluated by considering the evolution of media coverage in general. The continual extension of global media coverage in Western societies seems undisputable, but precise, quantitative measures of this trend are still lacking. This extension can be read, however, in light of reflexivity, which, according to Giddens (1990), “consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (p. 38). Risk issues clearly undergo such a process, since new crises are read in light of previous—particularly unsolved—issues. The repetition of emerging new infectious diseases certainly has triggered reflexivity, and, interestingly, the role of communication itself in the management of these diseases has started to be addressed (Brown, Nerlich, Crawford, Koteyko, & Carter, 2009; Holmes, 2008).

Among articles related to the Undesirable Animal, no major tendency can be highlighted regarding the distribution of the three subcategories—ill or contaminated animals, dangerous animals, and pest animals—over the 30-year period (Figure 4), except the increasing prominence of ill or contaminated animals, who often were at the front page, with zoonoses, and were therefore selected as cases. The increasing importance of ill/contaminated animals, who have again been involved in the 2009 swine flu, can be interpreted as a radicalization of the Undesirable Animal figure over time. A progressive change of attitudes toward pest animals (Campion-Vincent, 2002) through the rehabilitation of some of them (such as the dolphin) throughout this period makes the importance of animals as vectors of disease even more obvious.

The important coverage of zoonoses reflects the complexity of these recent issues, in that such diseases not only expand rapidly beyond national borders but also reveal how limited expert knowledge is. According to Adam (2000), in those circumstances the media play an important role in knowledge construction; she even suggests that “newworkers are not only prime sources of public information but also the principal social theorists of contemporary industrial societies” (p. 122). Furthermore, media discourses play a crucial role in the elaboration of symbolic sense around such events (Joffe, 1999). In that regard, human responsibility is often pinpointed in the media. The mad-cow crisis was often considered as a just punishment for human mistakes, mostly with regard to the feeding methods of cows (Dubied & Marion, 1997). In the
Figure 4. Evolution of the Undesirable Animal subfigures between 1978 and 2007 (% of Undesirable/per year) (n = 1,623).
case of a young boy’s death on his way to school after being attacked by three pit bulls, the media debated at length the measures to be taken with regard to dogs. The analysis of the accident mostly blamed the dogs’ “owner,” however, highlighting several of his “outsider” characteristics (Darbellay, Gerber, Burton-Jeangros, & Dubied, 2008).

As mentioned above, Undesirable Animals were more often present in daily newspapers, in broadsheets, and in urban contexts. The complexity of covered issues, necessitating important investigations by reporters (Adam, 2000), might partially explain the specificity of this coverage. Animals involved in recent threats are indeed integrated into broader reconsideration of human relationship to the natural environment. In the potential “end of nature” described by Giddens (1998), by which he means that few aspects of nature are untouched by human intervention, the place to give to animals is today debatable. According to Franklin (1999) this “globalized human control of nature” implies that humans get the moral responsibility to take care of animals, in their diversity. However, events unfolding in recent years have called into question the human capacity to do so. Such questions around risks and tensions in human-animal relationships are likely to be more appealing to an urban and educated public. Questions regarding the responsibility of humans toward nature in general and animals in particular lead to the flip side of the animals as risk with the Victim Animal figure, which focuses on the harm of the environment and humans.

Animals as Victims

Debates about animal protection have existed for some time, as demonstrated by the creation of animal protection societies at the end of the 19th century. Our study shows that the media have continuously addressed this animal figure throughout the three observed decades. The lowest coverage was in 2003 (with 10% of the random articles), the highest in 1985 (36%) (Figure 5). Out of our eleven selected cases, three relate to debates considering the animal as a victim. The first one is a political initiative in 1989 to protect small farms and restrict animal farms; the second one relates to an initiative against vivisection (1993); the third one refers to a debate on ritual slaughter (2001). None of these three issues led to massive media coverage—89 articles in 1989, 66 in 1993, and 16 in 2001, which was fewer than the cases related to Undesirable Animals.

In this figure, animals are depicted as victims of different causes, such as cows being killed by a train. A second subfigure includes articles with an emphasis on protection—already enforced or that should be enforced—for example, when a journalist reports on the new interdiction against using toy
Figure 5. Evolution of the Victim Animal figure between 1978 and 2007 (% of total articles/year) (n = 830).
Note: black bars = selected cases; gray bars = random weeks
motorboats on a Swiss lake to avoid causing nuisance for ducks. The second subfigure of the “(to be) protected victim” has been on the rise during the middle decade of our observation (1987-1995), notably related to the emergence of a debate around the living conditions of the animals of the national circus, Knie, a debate that has been more important in the German-speaking part of the country than in the French-speaking part.

Like the Undesirable Animals, the Victim Animals tend to be more present in daily newspapers (as opposed to the weekly press) and reference newspapers (as opposed to the popular press). This confirms our contention that animals presenting risks to humans or at risk from humans are the more controversial categories of the current social debate on animals, a debate that is more valued in the daily press and in broadsheets.

This Victim Animal figure is clearly associated with ethical considerations regarding human-animal relationships. In Switzerland, animal experimentation has generated a rather important political debate, with this issue being brought to a national vote three times (in 1985, 1992, and 1993); in each case, the citizens accepted the continuation of animal research. Over the last 15 years, however, attitudes have been changing, and experimentation is less and less supported by the public (Crettaz Von Roten, 2008). This progressive transformation of attitudes is not very prominent in media coverage of animal issues. This suggests that media mobilization around reducing the separation between animals and humans (through the acknowledgment of the continuity between them) is less important than it is with regard to issues where humans are threatened by animals. Even though social mobilization around animal issues has become more active over the last years—sometimes through provocative action such as the spray-painted threats on the house of a leader of Swiss pharmaceutical industry in August 2009—these actions have not been prominent in media coverage of the last decades.

Conclusions
This analysis of a large media (press and TV) corpus in the Swiss media over the period 1978-2007 provides important insights on the images of animals and their evolution. It confirms the ambivalence of human attitudes toward animals that we hypothesized at the beginning of our project. We have been particularly interested in documenting the growth of Undesirable Animals through several recent events that seized the attention of the public at large. These events did indeed get important coverage in the media, which confirms that they capture moments when attitudes are challenged (see Rouquette &
Rateau, 1998). We did find, however, that throughout recent decades, both animals as danger and animals at risk have been constantly present in the media. Because of Switzerland’s cultural and linguistic diversity, it is possible to test cultural differences within its own borders. A survey of attitudes toward animals conducted with a sample of the Swiss population (Fehlbaum, Waiblinger, & Turner, 2010) concluded that no major differences exist between the main regions, in this case, German- and French-speaking areas, in regards to opinions of various animal-related issues such as conservation, meat eating, cognition, and pets. We extracted our media corpus in a selection of TV and press media that can be considered representative of the main regions. Our analysis confirms that over the last 30 years issues and topics associated with animals have not differed significantly along those cultural lines. In their analysis of one Tasmanian newspaper over the period 1949-1998, Franklin and White (2001) observed a slight decline in anthropocentrism, a small increase in zoocentrism, and more prominent coverage of risks associated with animals, with a focus on the vulnerability of animals. Our study provides results for a more recent period (the first decade of the 21st century), during which animals have frequently been described as a risk for humans. While we did not directly test the anthropocentrism-zoocentrism opposition, we observed that the Undesirable Animal is usually considered in anthropocentric terms. When risks are involved, the supremacy of humans seems unchallenged, and such situations may reinforce the need to (re)establish a clear symbolic or material border between humans and animals. When described as in need of protection, the Victim Animal figure is considered primarily in zoocentric terms, but animals portrayed as plain victims are again mostly approached in anthropocentric terms, with a focus on human responsibility for mistreatment of them. Such anthropocentric images tend to maintain the notion of a hierarchical division between humans and animals. A more specific analysis of a subsample of our corpus (Gerber et al., 2011) highlighted the importance given by the media to human management in response to animal-related crises. This supports the notion of moral responsibility of humans toward animals mentioned by Franklin (1999). On the whole, our research project showed the complexity and diversity of issues related to animals. These are not only very present in the information media; they are also at the center of a social and political debate that keeps evolving over time, through the emergence of new issues. The controversial issues that we analyzed here show the perpetual redefinition of the respective positions of human and nonhuman animals and the fluctuation of the frontier established between “us” and “them.”
Notes

1. In Switzerland, animal protection societies were created in 1856 in Zürich, in 1868 in Geneva, and in 1904 in Lugano. A law on animal protection was passed in 1978 (the same year UNESCO proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights) and revised in 2006.

2. Representations of Animals in the Swiss media, 1978-2007: From the “nice pet” to the “threatening Other,” http://www.unige.ch/ses/socio/publications/rapports/owf.pdf. In addition to the two authors of this paper, the research team was composed of Emmanuel Gouabault (postdoc researcher) and Karine Darbellay, David Gerber, and Valérie Gorin (research assistants). We thank them warmly for their respective contributions to the project. The project was funded by the Swiss Veterinary Office and was conducted between September 2007 and February 2009.

3. We adopted a fairly large definition of nonhuman animals, including imaginary animals (like dragons), but articles whose title contained a metaphor (for example, the term scapegoat) or that used an animal name as an emblem (for example, reference to the “Grasshoppers,” the Zürich soccer team) were not included in the selection process.

4. Advertising and comics are not included in the corpus.

5. For the specific cases, collection of the material started at the beginning of the concerned event—i.e., the day after the new situation arose or was announced.

6. Two thirds of the population speaks German as a main language; one fifth, French; and 7% Italian (other languages spoken by inhabitants from other cultural backgrounds account for the rest).

7. With the exception of the “companion animal” category, the smallest one, for which there are no subcategories.

8. Among the 15 press titles included in the analysis, 9 were daily newspapers and 6, weekly papers; 84% of the selected articles were extracted from daily newspapers and 16% from weekly papers.

9. Sixty-five percent of the corpus was extracted from urban newspapers.

10. Because of the difficulty of categorizing each press title along this division, this analysis was limited to a subsample of the total corpus, including four main daily newspapers: 25% of the total corpus was extracted from Blick and Le Matin (popular press titles) and 16% from Le Temps (previously Journal de Genève) et Neue Zürcher Zeitung (broadsheets).

11. Only Knut, the polar cub of the Berlin zoo (2007) and Dolly, the cloned sheep (1997), are not directly related to these two figures.


13. This event led to important debates on dogs and safety measures, at both the national and regional (canton) levels.

14. See note in Table 1.

15. Founded in 1803 by the Knie family, this circus is the most famous at the national level. It yearly tours the whole country and mostly benefits from a positive image in the public.

References

