**Abstracts**

**Plenary speakers**

**‘“I still do love the taste”: the language of beliefs about eating animals.**

**Guy Cook, King's College London’**

This paper draws on data from an ongoing three-year Leverhulme research project '*People', 'Products', 'Pets' and 'Pests': the discursive representation of animals*. The project is collecting an extensive and unique database of the language used in communications about animals. The aim is to identify a variety of linguistic and discursive strategies associated with a wide range of purposes and points of view. There are three kinds of data: a digitally stored corpus of texts which can be searched automatically to reveal frequent choices and patterns of wording; transcripts of interviews with people professionally communicating about animals; and transcripts of focus groups. Interviews and focus groups have explored interviewees' own and others' choices of language, and how these relate to their views about the relation between humans and other animals, discussing philosophical issues such as the rival cases for human exceptionalism and animal rights, and ethical decisions about such activities as animal experiments, hunting, and factory farming. The rearing and killing of animals for food is a major theme.

Drawing upon this data, my paper explores the language used to justify and promote the eating of animals. It reflects on the power of 'tastiness' as a major factor in continuing meat consumption, the emotions and values which this factor reflects, and its relation to other criteria invoked in arguments for and against eating animals.

(The quotation in the paper's title is taken from a mixed focus group of vegetarians and meat eaters discussing their different diets.)

**Brett Mizelle, ‘The Cultural Work of “Bacon Mania” and Transformations in the Making of Pigs and Pork in America’**

This presentation uses the current vogue for all things bacon related as a way in to analyse transformations in pigs and the production of pork in the United States. I argue that although the invisibility and marginalization of animals involved in meat production are the norm and the stories and representations essential to the functioning of industrial agriculture are almost uniformly nostalgic and traditional, that has not always been the case. Farmers and meat processors have often sought greater visibility to demonstrate how modern and progressive their means of production were. Spectacles of meat production and consumption have also marked moments of transformation and have helped sell meat in an increasingly consumer-centred culture. By looking at the hypervisibility of bacon in modern life, including the “bacon mania” that celebrates an industrial animal product, I illuminate the political structures that sustain the investment in separating humans from animals and nature from culture that underwrite the meat-industrial complex.

**Panelists**

Panel 1: Bird Taste

**Hollis Taylor, ‘Avian Aesthetics in the Antipodes: A Taste for the Beautiful’**

Is birdsong music? Do birds compose? Do they dance or make art? A set of theoretical perspectives developed in Western discourse is regularly deployed to support the agenda that aesthetics is an area of human exceptionalism. To date, function carries the main explanatory burden of animal activities. However, there is no reason to consider that function and aesthetics are mutually exclusive. For instance, birdsong is functional, as is human music—but each is more than the rules and functions behind it. Australian lyrebirds are nature’s greatest mimics, and they also dance. The complex songs of Australian pied butcherbirds are some of the most beautiful in the world and could revolutionize the way we think about birdsong, exceptionalism, and the core values of music. A male bowerbird’s abilities embrace architecture, painting, collecting, decorating, landscaping, stage directing, dancing, and vocalizing. In short, he impresses. Meanwhile, the female serves as an art critic and tastemaker, contemplating what the other sex has created and confirming the influence of sexual selection. Denial of an aesthetic sense in animals narrows our understanding of whom we are and of whom we must become to survive.

**Bel Deering, ‘“A Seagull just stole my doughnut” *or* Humans versus herring gulls in the fight for food’**

Whilst interspecific kleptoparasitism is a valuable behaviourin the herring gull survival skill-set, it does not always endear gulls to hungry residents and visitors in seaside towns. Snacking humans take umbrage when their chips and doughnuts face an aerial onslaught, and newspaper headlines regularly call for culls to end the ‘menace’ of these ‘marauding monsters’. Clearly then, there is some tension between gulls and people when they enjoy the same tastes in food. There is also tension within the human species between those that feed gulls and those that label this as anti-social behaviour. This paper explores the seasonal drama of human-herring gull relations through interviews with people who feed or fear gulls, and with reference to media coverage of the eating habits of these seaside birds. It shares stories of gulls trespassing the nature-culture boundary in search of food and unpicks the narratives that cast some birds as heroic in their brave struggles, whilst others are pilloried for their base greed and gluttony. Food conflict is just one of many flashpoint areas that can spark cruelty towards gulls, and here I outline how our shared tastes in food can be reconstructed to frame gulls in a more positive light.

**Kate Whiston, ‘Whatever takes your fancy: aesthetics and taste in pigeon fancying in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries’**

*“In the show pen it is more or less a matter of taste; some prefer the darker shade, a few the light ones” (Mr Fletcher on the Dragoon pigeon, 1914).*

This paper uses the archives of *The Feathered World* magazine (est. 1889) to investigate beastly aesthetics in the breeding and showing of fancy pigeons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Governed by various breed associations and the National Pigeon Association (est. 1885), fanciers strived for perfection of over 350 breeds of fancy pigeon, each appreciated for their distinctive aesthetic qualities, such as shape, colour, markings, and feathers. Pigeon fanciers aimed to create the ‘ideal’ bird, manipulating the aesthetics of pigeons’ bodies and exerting control over their appearance. The notion of an ‘ideal’ was highly mutable, dictated by changing crazes and fashions. Writing in 1880, renowned fancier Robert Fulton wrote that pigeon showing was “the cultivation and pursuit of *ideal beauty* in its highest forms…the constant effort to approach a standard of perfection impossible of attainment…progress, ever approaching completing, yet never completed (Fulton, 1880:1). Therefore, fancy pigeons, one could argue, were profoundly cultural objects, created and modified by fanciers’ highly *subjective* fascination with appearances, eccentricity, and aesthetics.

Panel 2: Eating

**Gabriela Leddy, ‘Milk, Bread, and Blood: A Witch’s Balanced Diet for Familiars in Early Modern England’**

In the first known early modern English witchcraft pamphlet, Elizabeth Francis is recorded as saying that she fed her familiar, a cat named Satan, bread and milk and was told by her grandmother to give the familiar blood. Familiars were thought to be demons in animal forms (most often cats, dogs, frogs, and mice/rats) and were often seen as a condemning sign in witchcraft trials. Often accused witches claimed to feed their familiars with milk, bread, and blood—an action which became a felony in the Witchcraft Act of 1604. The first two of these objects seem to hint that, at least in popular belief, these creatures were more animal-like than demon-like and needed sustenance. However, the presence of blood-feeding, which occurred more frequently as the period went on, raises questions on how animalistic these beings were and what the consequences of this blood-feeding had on the established human-animal hierarchy and species difference. It will also consider how diet might have been a distinguishing factor if contemporaries truly belied the old saying, 'You are what you eat'.

**Michelle Bastian, ‘Developing a taste for leatherback’**

In Costa Rica, endangered populations of jaguars have started to develop a taste for turtle meat. Often they predate green turtles, but they have also been known to kill and eat leatherbacks. Given that these turtles are themselves under extreme population pressures, local conservationists have been left with the conundrum of what to do when one endangered species starts eating another. Inspired by the work of Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren on the ‘time of extinctions’ this paper looks at the changing relationships between predator and prey in a context of habitat loss, population declines and climate change. In particular it draws out the relationship of temporality to sustenance. To eat you must know the time - when food arrives, when it ripens, when it decays - and manage your time in accordance. What happens, though, when once dependable rhythms are coming undone and food no longer arrives when it used to? Using a narrative style that interweaves multiple times, this paper explores the re-creation of time at ‘the dull edge of extinction’ (van Dooran 2014).

**Victoria de Rijke, ‘Synaesthetic Taste Metaphor in *Ratatouille’***

The first Disney/Pixar collaboration after a corporate buy-up, Brad Bird’s 'Ratatouille' (2007) set in Paris, argues animators and animals have taste. The hero of the film, Remy the rat, first a garbage food taster for the rat pack to avoid mass poison, then a gourmet chef for a fine French restaurant, challenges centuries of human taboo of the rat as unclean vermin of the kitchen. The rat, researched perhaps beyond any other creature, demonstrates it forms food preferences from infancy, develops play strategies in relation to food shortage or glut, learns taste aversions associatively in response to dietary needs, has as many taste receptors as a human, and is confirming the growing notion that neurotransmitters in mammalian taste buds function in cell-to-cell communication. How do we picture taste playfully? Could forms of scribbling be a beastly aesthetics? Applying the science playfully, this paper aims to explore how early avant-garde film experiments with synaesthetic music drawing shapes or scribbles for sounds influenced the visualization and orchestration of taste at play in two tasting scenes from the film 'Ratatouille'. The relationship of scribble to taste metaphors and the avant-garde will be explored visually, supported by critics (Adorno & Leslie), writers (Kafka & Pullman), artists (Klee a & Twombly) and a small brown rat.

Panel 3: Feeding

**Chrissie Wanner, ‘Feeding and (In-)Breeding: 'Tasteful' Solutions to Inheritable Health Problems in Pedigree Dogs?’**

The quest for pedigree dog health supports a sizable industry of veterinary-scientific treatment and intervention. Nowhere is this more evident than in the extensive dog food market, which provides owners and breeders with means and imperatives to care for their animals through the provision of highly specialised therapeutic food. Many products designed for pedigree dogs are breed-specific, with manufacturers drawing on veterinary knowledge of inheritable disease and genetic health to suggest that animals bred to particular shapes, sizes, and dispositions require bespoke solutions for the resulting health problems. In contrast to these specialized foods, the trend for ‘raw diets’ continues among breeders who reject veterinary-scientific options in favour of ‘natural’ alternatives. Today, raw food also has its own specialist market, which capitalises on different understandings of the best way to care for a dog and taps into wider discourses about organic and natural food movements. This paper will consider how the availability of specialised dog food shapes understandings of canine health and disease among breeders and owners of pedigree dogs. It will examine how these foods are incorporated into practices of animal care and how providing specialist food has become a signifier of ‘taste’, knowledge, and expertise among dog breeders.

**Eliza Marków, ‘Animals eating out of our hands as seen on You Tube’**

When trying to figure out the very complex relationship between humans and animals, fairly recently there has appeared another source of material for study, other than real life  observation, namely short videos posted on You Tube. Out of an extensive number of types of videos involving animals such as pets acting in funny ways or cute baby animals, one particular theme has drawn my attention. The act of feeding all sorts of animals – wild or captive, domestic or exotic, is a particularly interesting phenomenon. From hand-feeding stingrays through sharing a sandwich with pigs in the Bahamas to a hamster eating a tiny pizza or dozens of French hounds being fed simultaneously, these videos are proof that people not only want to watch animals, but they also want to watch them eat, devour, munch and nibble. In this paper I would like to look into the motives behind people’s fascination with videos featuring animals being fed by humans. On the one hand it may be a rather obvious manifestation of executing humans’ power over animals, on the other hand however, it could be indicative of people’s nostalgia towards and the feeling of guilt about nature’s virtually lost wildness and freedom.

**Eva Giraud, ‘Transformative Tasting? Messy experiments in performative food activism’**

Drawing on participatory action research derived from vegan food give-aways and cookery skill-shares, this paper intervenes in debates about the transformative potential of embodied engagements with food. Embodied practices – from interactive cookery demonstrations at food festivals (Roe, 2013), to backyard chicken coops (Carolan, 2011) – have been depicted as holding potential for social change. By operating on an affective level, these practices have been argued to foster felt-responsibility towards non-human animals. They have, however, also been accused of being highly classed, and of promoting exclusionary forms of ethical consumerism, rather than moving towards more profound transformations of our relationships with food (e.g. Guthman, 2008). In response to these criticisms, this paper focuses on radical food activism – turning to food practices pioneered by anti-capitalist activists – and asks whether these approaches offer a more productive mode of food politics. It argues that, although important insights can be gained from these forms of activism, which complicate existing analyses of affective engagements with food, such practices also have certain limitations that need to be overcome if radical food activism is to meet its transformative aims. The paper concludes by fleshing out some productive tactics for navigating these limitations in practice.

**Biographies**

**Plenary speakers**

**Guy Cook** is Professor of Language in Education, King's College London. He has published widely on discourse analysis and applied linguistics. He was co-editor of the journal *Applied Linguistics* from 2004-2009, and Chair of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (2009-2012). He is currently PI of the project '*People', 'Products', 'Pets' and 'Pests': the discursive representation of animals*. Earlier research projects investigated the discourse of food policy (labelling, GM crops, organic farming, school meals).

**Brett Mizelle** is Professor of History and Director of the American Studies Program at California State University Long Beach. His publications include books, articles, book chapters, and reviews in the fields of nineteenth-century American history and the history of human-animal relationships. His book *Pig* (Reaktion Books, 2011) charts how humans have shaped the pig and how the pig has shaped us, focusing on the unresolved contradictions between the fiction and the reality of our relationships with pigs. His most recent article, included in the collection *The American Circus* (Bard Graduate Center & Yale University Press, 2012), traces the contestation over the training and exhibition of horses and big cats in the history of the American circus. Work in press includes a book chapter in Marguerite S. Shaffer and Phoebe S.K. Young, eds., *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) centered on contemporary American food production and consumption that connects environmental history and American Studies and an essay on mass killings of pigs and the challenges of multispecies justice that will appear in the journal *Society and Animals*. He is currently working on a book-length animal studies project on the discursive and material making and taking of animal life in nineteenth-century America.

**Panelists**

**Michelle Bastian** is a Chancellor’s Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. Her work focuses on the role of time in social methods of inclusion and exclusion. She explores this through a number of case studies including Transition Towns, critical remakings of clock time and community responses to resource depletion and climate change. Her recent work has been published in *Time & Society*, *Theory, Culture & Society* and *Environmental Philosophy*. Find out more at [www.michellebastian.net](http://www.michellebastian.net)

**Bel Deering** is a social-science-flavoured biologist who manages RSPCA Mallydams Wood, a wildlife rehabilitation and education centre in East Sussex. She is currently running a Lottery-funded community engagement project at the site that aims to forge stronger and more positive relationships between people and animals in the Hastings area.

**Eva Giraud** is a lecturer in Media, Communication and Culture at Keele University. Her research explores the dynamic between on- and offline activism, with a focus on the work of environmental, anti-capitalist and animal rights activists. This feeds into a broader interest in cultural theory that contests existing relationships between humans, animals and the environment. She is currently finishing a monograph that explores the relationships between posthumanism and activist practice.

**Gabriela Leddy** is in her third year of her PhD at the University of York. She is researching the familiar and witchmark in early modern English witchcraft pamphlets under the supervision of James Sharpe. Her work analyses how the familiar and the witchmark relate to human/animal boundary definitions, religious anxieties, and gender expectations in the early modern period.

**Eliza Marków** is a doctoral student at the Institute of English Studies of the University of Warsaw. She studies human-animal relationship only and her main interest is the growing presence of animals, in popular culture, show business and advertising.

**Victoria de Rijke** is an Associate Professor at Middlesex University, London, and Co-Chief Editor of the Children’s Literature in Education international journal. As well as fictional picturebook works such as 'The A-Z of Dangerous Food', (2012) with RebviK, she has explored cultural metaphors of animals and children, such as 'The Quack Project', a study of duck dialect and animal onomatopoeia, 'The Revolutionary Quack' (2007) in Children’s Literature Annual No.1: Marxist Perspectives and ‘Creaturely Life: a biopolitics of Fable’ for Politics and Ideology in Children's Literature, (2014) Four Courts Press. She is also author of 'Duck' as part of Reaktion Books Animal series (2008).

**Hollis Taylor** is a Chancellor’s Research Fellow at the University of Technology, Sydney, and in June 2015 will take up a research position at Macquarie University. Previous fellowships include at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin Institute for Advanced Study and at the Laboratoire d’Eco-anthropologie & Ethnobiologie of the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris. Her dissertation, *Towards a Species Songbook: Illuminating the Song of the Australian Pied Butcherbird (Cracticus nigrogularis)*, straddles the fields of zoömusicology, ornithology, and composition. She performs her award-winning (re)compositions of pied butcherbird songs on violin along with a variety of outback field recordings. She has delivered her popular lecture on animal aesthetics on three continents. She is the author of *Post Impressions: A Travel Book for Tragic Intellectuals,*which documents (in text, audio, and video) Jon Rose and her bowing fences throughout Australia. Her book *Is Birdsong Music? Outback Encounters with an Australian Songbird*is forthcoming from Indiana University Press. She is webmaster of [www.zoömusicology.com](http://www.zoömusicology.com). For more information: [www.hollistaylor.com](http://www.hollistaylor.com/)

**Chrissie Wanner** is currently completing a PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. As an undergraduate, she developed an interest in multi-species communities and began conducting ethnographic research among UK owners and breeders of pedigree dogs. Her previous work has focused on the working sled-dog community and the use of new reproductive technologies in dog breeding, while her current doctoral research examines breeders’ concepts of health and disease in pedigree dogs, contrasts between said concepts and veterinary understandings, and the resulting social and moral conflicts.

**Kate Whiston** completed a BA(Hons) Geography degree at the University of Nottingham in 2012, and moved onto a masters in cultural geography and landscape studies (MA Landscape and Culture), also offered by the School of Geography there. Her dissertation was a study of animal geography, exploring contemporary human-pigeon relationships in pigeon racing and pigeon showing. Shewas supervised by Professors Charles Watkins, and David Matless. She then progressed to her PhD, still at the University of Nottingham’s School of Geography, in October 2013. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, supervised by Professors Charles Watkins and David Matless, her PhD investigates the cultural and historical geographies of pigeon fancying in Britain, 1850-1939. In September 2014 she presented a well-received paper entitled ‘A Fancy for Pigeons: The Cultural and Historical Geographies of Pigeon Fancying in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’ at the ‘Everyday Life Symposium’ at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Furthermore, she has had an abstract accepted to present at the ‘Beastly Pasts and Places’ session at the forthcoming International Conference of Historical Geographers in July 2015.