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Abstract

Animal Welfare, Animal Rights and the Ontario SPCA: Negotiating a Human-to-Animal Ethic

I completed my practicum at the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), Sudbury and District Branch. My report comprises an exploration of the various modes used in the private and public domains to represent animals and the relationship between humans and animals. These various frameworks, which include adoption and familial discourses, anthropomorphism and visual rhetoric, have implications for the way in which we assign moral status to animals, and thus on how the SPCA and the author position themselves within the animal rights and animal welfare camps. I argue that these representations, and the resultant rights/welfare positioning, are quite unstable: they are constantly being negotiated in text, image and practise as individuals and organizations attempt to define the space between property and personhood that companion animals seem to occupy. In the public sphere, this negotiation has significant legislative implications, as the SPCA is currently involved in lobbying the federal government to change the wording of animal cruelty provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada.