



The cat came back¹

The collection of album and single covers presented here has no musical ordering principle; all the images have in common is simply their subject matter, namely, musicians and animals. But what is an animal doing on this cover? And what effect does that have on us? What does this joint appearance say about the relationship between humans and animals? Or, rather, what does it tell us about our view of these creatures? There are cultural differences. To begin with, two observations are noteworthy in this context. For one, the depiction of animals is not even allowed in some cultures, or is at least offensive—which is reflected in the origins of the covers—and for another, we noticed that many of the animals on these covers look directly at us, presenting a very special setting. After all, people usually look at animals—think of the situation at the zoo. Animals are at the mercy of our gaze, a one-sided dispositif that creates a power imbalance: because we are simultaneously denying them the ability to be subjects. Pet owners would probably object to this claim: of course I consider my cat or dog as an equal, even as a friend! These animals always have names and share their owners' daily routines and lives. Pets occupy a special

position within the animal world, which is also evident by the fact that they are depicted as characters in their own right on these covers, as persons, as it were. The term “person” is possibly derived from the Greek word “prosopon” for face, which also means mask or role in a play. The picture creations printed here actually do have something of a staged character!

Many of them show musicians and their pets, giving the album sleeves both a biographical and personal touch. The special relationship between the protagonists of these photos can also be seen in the body language. Human and animal are often shown in a loving “embrace” or at least physically close to one another. The intimacy of these images triggers emotions in viewers. What is also suggested is that if these people are so close with their pets, then they must also be good at making music. Is the use of animals as picture motifs thus purely a marketing strategy? Possibly, as along with the emotional component, animals as subjects also function as eye-catchers. In this case, cover designers want to attract attention with exotic animals. Wow, a dolphin, a camel, a tiger, an elephant! Sometimes this has an extremely funny effect. And it also raises the issue of the ethical justification of such an image.

Isn't the animal being abused here? In part, the animal is only on the cover because of a song title. The use as visual material illustrates that humans, the so-called crown of creation, obviously feel superior to animals. After creating the world and the animals, god created humans, man and woman, and told them to subdue the earth and rule over all living beings, which they promptly did. We can easily see where this domination has led. No amount of cute animals on album covers can change this tragedy. Interestingly, several of these albums are from the 1970s, an era in which we first caught a glimpse of where we are headed. For example, the Club of Rome published its report *The Limits to Growth* in 1972. Brigitte Bardot—depicted on the book cover—turned her back on the film industry to become the figurehead of the animal rights movement.²

The challenges of the Anthropocene make it increasingly clear that humans are not autonomous beings, but instead, can be defined only by their relationships to other, non-human entities. In addition, animals are not soulless machines to be exploited at will. Currently, we are experiencing a fundamental shift in our conception of what actually constitutes our species and our relationships to other inhabitants of

our planet. An increasing number of philosophers and scientists are challenging human exceptionalism. Among them is Donna J. Haraway, who in her book *Staying with the Trouble*, demands a new use for the term “companion species” and its extension to all living beings; for this, she uses the term “critter,” a word for animals, creatures, and beings. In her eyes, humans are also “mere” critters.

Especially today, the question of how we want to meet our companions and fellow beings has gained great urgency. Is that why these images touch us so deeply? Or do we perhaps have a bad conscience? Perhaps these images simply speak of the magic of the encounter between people and their fellow beings. In the hope that we can learn to inhabit this planet together as equals, we may well enjoy this whimsical collection of images.

¹ Title is from the LP album of John Greenway *The Cats Came Back And Other Fun Songs*, see page 29.

² Brigitte Bardot, 7" Single *Toutes Les Bêtes Sont À Aimer*, see front cover and the pages 231, 251.

