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WHAT MAKES THEM HUMAN? THE ALLOCATION OF MENTAL STATES TO PRIMATES BY ZOO VISITORS

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The study took place at the Paris zoo (Jardin des Plantes). It was aimed at identifying the anatomical, behavioral and communicational cues that prompt anthropomorphism among French zoo visitors. Anthropomorphism has been studied mainly through questionnaires that indicated that the allocation of mental states to animals depends mainly on the perceived kinship (Gallup & al, 1997). But what happen in real life situations, when perceptual, emotional and behavioral cues come to play? We compared the allocation of mental states by visitors to two primate species that differ in human-like appearance and behavior: brazza monkeys (*cercopithecus neglectus) and orangutans (Pongo pygmaeus*). *Both species were exposed in adjacent and similar cages and in similar groups (2 to 4 individuals). For data collection,* the author stood among the visitors with a video camera and kept filming the animals while recording the visitor's speech and comments about the animals. About 4000 utterances were recorded, of which 3295 were analyzed. Results show that the monkeys are allocated more mental states than orangutans (chi2 = 3,83, pour p(chi2>3,84)=0,05), but the mental states differ in kind. Further qualitative analysis shows that anthropomorphism is the main pattern that connects the zoo visitor to the animals. It works metaphorically ("he's playing keyboard"!) and allows the visitors not to take the animal's behavior and mental states seriously. A better understanding of anthropomorphism as it happens in the zoo helps to understand how the zoo functions as a device for learning the occidental way of relating to animals.

Keywords: anthropomorphism, cultural attitudes to nhp, human-nhp relationships, the zoo as a learning device