



Starting from Scratch: The Origin and Development of Expression, Representation and Symbolism in Human and Non-Human Primates

John Matthews

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This book compares the beginning of symbolic thought in human infancy with that of our close primate relatives, the chimpanzees. The author investigates the precursors of symbolism by studying the actions and interactions of a small group of these intelligent, non-human primates who live in Singapore Zoo.

Drawing upon his years of detailed observations, Matthews offers an in-depth analysis and interpretation of chimp behaviour to present an unprecedented account of the beginnings of symbolic thought. The book shows that the actions the chimpanzees perform have structural and semantic similarities with the actions of emergent expression and representation we find in human infancy. Of great importance is the finding that chimpanzee mark-making activity is not an artefact of human interference, but part of chimpanzee culture. Young chimpanzees seem to be introduced to acts of pretence and imagination by older and more experienced ones and taught the rudiments of expression, representation and symbolism.

The implications for our understanding of symbolism, language, art and education are enormous, as are those about our origins and our place within nature. The book is written in an accessible style for both specialist and non-specialist readers, and illustrated with the author's drawings and photographs.

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