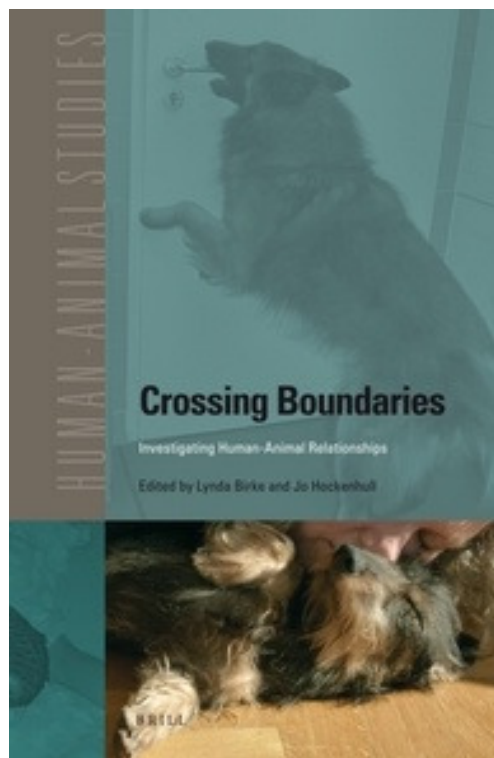


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Humanimal Methods and Methodologies

Lynda Birke and Jo Hockenhull, *Crossing Boundaries: Investigating Human-Animal Relationships*. Leiden: Brill, 2012. 255 pp. €95.00; \$124.00.



If we are to follow Derrida (and his cat) and recognize the multiplicity of beings so frequently caught up in the collective noun “animals,” we as researchers need to revisit, adapt, and create methods anew. The methods that build insightful accounts of the social and cultural dynamics of one group of animals (such as humans) do not necessarily transfer onto different species. The ways we understand pigs, bonobos, or dogs do not automatically map onto one another. This is a truism — but it reminds us how crucial questions of methodology and method are in the development of the transdisciplinary research area, (Hum)Animal Studies. This collection by Lynda Birke and Jo Hockenhull is an important intervention in the literature, as it brings these issues

to the fore and examines the politics and processes of crossing (many) boundaries. The book brings together a range of scholars from across the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences to discuss what and crucially, how they investigate Human-Animal relationships.

The collection offers accounts of how relationships between humans and animals are formed and how they work in everyday spaces from laboratories to farms to homes. The chapters describe how people bond with specific animals, become companions, and become aware of the “mindedness” of the animal other (3). At its core, the book asks “how can researchers work most effectively to investigate how relationships are forged” (4). It achieves this goal. In doing so, it does not produce a single methodology and method that might be utilized to insert the animal into existing understandings of our social world. Given the diversity emphasized above, such a disciplining project is bound to fail. Rather, what the chapters offer is a series of accounts of what and how we might learn across disciplinary and species bounds as we do research into human-animal relationships. The accounts are sometimes far-reaching, sometimes vulnerable, regularly challenging, thought-provoking, and engaging.

In Chapter 2, Nicola Taylor reviews the various ways that sociology has engaged with animal presence. Taylor reminds us that methods and methodologies are political, as the way we approach research and the tools we use shape which animals are included and excluded from research, and, significantly, how they are included in the research. József Topál and Márta Gácsi echo this point in chapter 8, as they observe that dog lovers, zoologists, and ethologists all create different dogs. Rather than arguing that any one method or constellations of methods is more appropriate, Taylor suggests that the success of methods should be assessed through the degree to which they overcome unhelpful binaries (48). Successful methodologies, therefore, might make “new” species visible, or make species visible in different ways. For example, they might engage with less “linguistic orientated” texts, such as film or images. In this way, researchers might make space for and centralize animals by not relying on linguistic methods that exclude them a priori (46-47). Moreover, we can take a further step and recognize that “linguistic orientated” methods such as literary analysis or interviews do not exclude animals per se — dogs might literally and figuratively bark throughout interviews with their owners —, rather, it is how we read the voices and noises of animals as they interrupt linguistically orientated readings. But making such a methodological step,

while it changes how animals might be included, can also bring us up against disciplinary heritages.

Henry Buller in chapter 3 continues the focus on the politics of methodologies, as he attends to food and eating as “an active expression of, and not a replacement for, animal vitality” (61). This move is political, in that it both makes a statement about how we approach human-animal relationships and offers a different vocabulary for intervening in the politics of contemporary agricultural practice. Continuing this line, Buller highlights that such new methodologies also need new methods that “re-vitalise” (65) research. While Buller documents the power of these methodologies in farm systems, he also articulates the difficulty of mobilizing them in arenas where traditional forms of social science, science, and accounting are entrenched.

Chapter 4 discusses relationships between people and guide dogs, and offers insight into an area where animal agency is central. Marc Higgin uses ethnography and interviews to describe not the social world of a guide dog or a person guided by a dog, but a shared social world. A world where dog and human move *forward together* (86). Higgin made space for animal presence in the linguistically orientated methods of interviews by trying to pay attention to those un-articulated moments in the human-dog interaction, and feeding them back into the research process. In addition to being an interesting account of the co-construction of human-guide dog subjectivities, the chapter also operates as a good vignette of the relationships assessed through this book. The relationships are *specific* — by which I mean often between humans and one species, breed or individual; they are often *sustained* — that is they are built up through repeat encounters over time; they often have particular spatial dynamics in that they are *located* on a farm, in a laboratory, or at home (though of course these categories are not mutually exclusive, as discussed by Pär Segerdahl in chapter 7), and are often grounded in *corporeal* meetings. These corporeal meetings might be the specificities of organs (such as measuring heart rate in people and horses to monitor interspecies commonalities and dissonance in Humanimal meetings, chapter 1), the corporeal action of eating and assimilation of flesh that is embedded in Buller’s discussion of animal vitality, or the corporeal bonds built through guiding as discussed by Higgin in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 makes this corporeal element even more explicit, as Diane Dutton emphasizes kinesthesia in human-animal relationships. In her chapter Dutton uses phenomenological theory to discuss how phenomena emerge from intersubjective encounters across species divides. According to Dutton, a phenomenological approach

foregrounds the embodied character of the human-animal encounter. It is animal bodies, bodies that move, respond, and direct our attention that should be at the center of Human-Animal Studies. Such a focus can transcend old boundaries, as it emphasizes kinship and commonality across species bounds. Phenomenologically informed methodologies and methods might also offers routes to better science. Intercorporeality – an articulation of the social and material elements of embodiment – defines our interactions, including interactions between species. Recognition of intercorporeality, fundamental as it is to how relationships are forged, might lead to better understandings of humanimal relations.

Resonating with some of what was raised in the preceding chapter, chapter 6 calls for increased attention to the emotive and transformative elements of human-animal encounters. Sue Dawson develops methods of “Organic Inquiry,” foregrounding emotion in companion animal relationships. In many ways, this chapter deals with questions of method most directly. It documents what the author *did* in her attempts to investigate human animal relationships in a frank, open style that does not always characterize our discussions of methodology and method in Human-Animal Studies. Using meditation, stream of consciousness writing, and expressive artworks, Organic Inquiry methods attempt an “active engagement with the sacred” (115). Organic Inquiry is a personal account which foregrounds situatedness. The question of “what happens when different notions of the sacred collide?” is left hanging, but the chapter does explicitly engage with questions of method in ways that some of the other chapters do not.

This volume, along with recent publications such as the collection brought together by Kirksey and Helmreich under the theme “multispecies ethnography,” Timothy Hodgett and Jamie Lorimer’s recent paper, and Buller’s review of animal geographies all address questions of humanimal methodologies and methods. Within these wider debates, I would call for greater attention to the distinctions between questions of methodology (i.e. approach) and method (i.e. what tools we use). I would submit that such distinctions are important; while we might be able to agree on common methodologies that give us better descriptions of our more-than-human social worlds, methods are always more species/individual specific. For example, Buller in his timely and far-reaching commentary discusses how Hayden Lorimer’s (2006 and 2010) work on reindeer and seals “draws in ethology, historical archives, walking, running and, in the latter paper, the occasional exchanges of look” (Buller 5). While we might agree that

multi-species ethnography might be an appropriate *methodology* for a range of species, the *methods* used to develop geographies of reindeer or seals might not transfer to for example slugs (Ginn) or ticks (Hatley). As Buller notes, much of the development of Humanimal methodologies and methods involves “animals to which we, as humans, are already close and friendly with” (6). I would suggest that animals that are not so “nearby” might require the use of different methods. This varied relevance of particular methods to different species (and individuals) calls us both to question how methodologies and methods create different animals (as discussed most directly in chapters 3 and 8 of this volume), and also to ask how the animals we engage in animal studies shape the methodologies and methods we use?

As mentioned earlier, the relationships attended to in this book are very particular, and consequently the animals are limited those who are capable of the specific, sustained, located, and corporeal meetings addressed. This is not to point to a “lack,” the collection already does so much, but rather to foreground how attention to animals that “easily bear our ocular scrutiny” (to borrow Myra Hird’s fabulous phrase) plays out in terms of methodologies and methods. This dynamic I would argue has at least two strands. The first is the meeting of animals and disciplines, the second a question of agency. The first point is that there are significant methodological and method limits on which animals we can engage in animal studies research. Many of us do not have the microscopy skills or the access to laboratories that would be required if we were to engage with questions of life that is not “big like us” (Hird). These limits are in part disciplinary. The organizational structures, financial institutions, and disciplinary interpretations of “good science” mean that some animals can disrupt some methodological machines more than others” — different animals can feature in different disciplines differently (see earlier discussion of Taylor, chapter 2 and Topál and Gácsi, chapter 8). This is why the conversations included in this volume are so important, and why the transdisciplinary conversations of Animals Studies are so exciting.

My second point is that with regard to method and to a certain extent methodology, animals have an opportunity to intervene in the research process. This agency, might be limited, but given that, as Birke and Hockenhull note in chapter 1, the burden of learning to communicate across species lines so often lies with animals (19), we should focus on, amplify, and maybe celebrate this moment when animals can be more active in the research process. My argument here is that as we conduct a research project from a particular disciplinary standpoint, employing given methodologies and accepted methods, when those methods fail because of the creaturely presence we are attempting to engage, we witness animal agency in the research process. My articulation of the

dynamics between methodology, method and species echoes Segerdahl's discussion of the multi-species cultures created through ape-language research. As he documents the various success and failures in ape language research he illustrates how methodologies and methods are "binding" and "blinding."

In a discussion of the chimpanzee Nim's "failure" to acquire forms of human language, Segerdahl describes how this was a product of the methodological blindness of the lead scientist involved in the project. That lead researcher, Herbert Terrace, employed a methodology invested in the human-animal divide that attempted to impose language across the divide through special training methods. The scientists were then "surprised" that the result of their experiments was an ape demonstrating learned responses to specific stimuli rather than a language-capable ape. Nim was caught in a kind of "double captivity," to use Segerdahl's phrase (143), caught in physical captivity and unable to exceed the language bounds imposed by the methodology. In contrast, Segerdahl's description of Sue Savage-Rumbaugh's work with the bonobos Panbanisha and Kanzi documents a meeting that is physically and methodologically less constrained. According to Segerdahl, play was an important mechanism by which Kanzi learnt language. And while play is never free from bounds, in this setting it was disruptive and shaped a method that enabled Kanzi to learn language, rather than to be trained as Nim was. Sue adapted to Kanzi, engaging with him in a variety of locations beyond the training of the laboratory or classroom. As Segerdahl observes, Savage-Rumbaugh's methodology transcended the laboratory and the humanly controlled conditions of laboratory work. These "bonobos developed language in the kitchen, in the forest, in the car, in Sue's home: in everyday activities going on all the time in their cross species relations with humans" (147). In contrast with Nim, who was engaged through training methods, Kanzi was engaged through playful methods that enabled him to learn language that could then be tested in the laboratory. From Segerdahl's chapter, it appears that the disruption caused by Kanzi wanting to play resulted in Savage-Rumbaugh changing her approach to language acquisition and consequently how she developed theoretical debates. In my reading, this demonstrates not only how different methodologies and methods enable animals to feature in research differently, but also how the animals might have agency and bring about changes in method and methodology. My argument here can be seen as a less ingestion orientated and more general mode of revitalising as discussed by Buller in Chapter 3.



While not engaging with questions of agency per se, chapter 8 also ties together issues of species and individual animal histories with questions of methodology and method. Psychology and ethology approaches are blended in the chapter through an adaption of the “strange situation test”. Crossing boundaries between research on humans and dogs, Topál and Gácsi, use this test to analyse and predict dog behaviour. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how this method might map across species bounds as it engages with data for wolves and dogs with different histories, comparing data on puppies, adult dogs and shelter dogs. By so doing it offers further evidence of how both species and individual animal histories are important in our discussions of methodology and method.

In the final chapter in this collection, Françoise Wemelsfelder offers a clear story about crossing boundaries in animal welfare science. She documents how different methodological perspectives such as foregrounding communication in discussions of subjectivity and using body language as a key indication of animal expressiveness required the carving out of conceptual space in the welfare science paradigm. Wemelsfelder points to a paradox in mechanistic science whereby the traces of animality are removed from descriptions of animal life, thereby creating a void into which anthropomorphisms are drawn. The banishing of animal viewpoints according to Wemelsfelder result in mechanical understandings on animal sentience that are necessarily anthropomorphic. In contrast, Wemelsfelder’s methodological shift acknowledges the animals’ animality, and through the implementation of methods of assessment that “may be unconventional, [but also] work scientifically” (240) she produces both better science and better animal welfare. This dual benefit of “better science’ and “better relationships” is the overarching theme of the book and core to what can be achieved through attention to humanimal methodologies and methods.

We need conversations like these to develop better descriptions of our shared social worlds, to develop better policies and better relationships with humanimal cohabitants of every kind. They give us space to discuss how transdisciplinarity meetings might enable methodologies that negate unhelpful binaries, they give us space to develop tools that might include different animals or engage animals differently. They give us opportunity to grapple with animal agency as we revitalize disciplines.

The principle aim of this book is to examine *how* researchers can work effectively to examine how human-animal relationships are forged (5). The collection clearly achieves that aim as the contributions discuss and negotiate the crossing of boundaries such as those between species or the challenging of assumed lines drawn from disciplines,

through methodologies to methods. Some of the chapters are more empirical, some are more experimental; some are the conclusion of years of experiments with methods some are documentations of the processes of methodological change. The book as a whole represents an important contribution to a fundamental discussion in animal studies – namely an attention to not only what we do when we do animal studies, but also *how* we do it.

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