



## Animals

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*What role do nonhuman animals play in human social life? This question has long interested anthropologists, who have provided various answers, themselves reflective of broader theoretical trends within the discipline. For much of the twentieth century, animals were regarded as material and/or conceptual resources for humans, with different anthropologists regarding one or the other aspect as more important. More recently, anthropologists have sought to incorporate animals into their accounts as participants in human social life, rather than merely resources. Such approaches question the human exceptionalism of conventional social scientific thinking. Given the roots of sociocultural anthropology in this exceptionalism, however, attempts to move beyond it within the discipline encounter certain methodological and analytic problems, the proposed solutions to which have taken a variety of forms.*

### Introduction

Humans and other animals have lived in close proximity, and in some cases, in symbiosis, for the entire [history](#) of our species. Reflecting on this phenomenon, anthropologists have asked a range of questions about the diversity of ways in which nonhuman animals feature in human lives: as sources of food or [labour](#), as divine beings, as workmates, friends or bitter enemies. Yet, hovering on the edge of these questions is a more fundamental one. Anthropology, its name suggests, is the study of one particular animal: *anthropos*, the human. But what, if anything, makes humans distinctive? An entire branch of anthropology, biological anthropology, has been investigating that question by focussing on humans as one animal amongst others. Sociocultural anthropology, by contrast, has until recently taken the distinctiveness of humans for granted as a starting point, and proceeded to investigate social and cultural phenomena which were broadly assumed to be distinctive of our species. In particular, the human capacity for complex linguistic and symbolic communication was often a key reference point. It served in anthropology both to set apart humans from other animals, and to explain the role animals play for us, namely as resources for human symbolic activity. As we discuss in the second part of this essay, this division of labour – between the biological study of humans as animals and the social study of humans as radically unlike other animals – is beginning to show signs of strain. On the one hand, biologists have been studying nonhuman society and culture; on the other, scholars in the social sciences and humanities have increasingly sought to study nonhumans as persons or subjects. These two developments are hardly comfortable bedfellows, either for

anthropology as classically conceived or for each other.

Until recently, however, the discipline's interest in nonhuman animals ran along one or both of two very broad thematic axes. One asked about the role of animals as material, economic, and political resources for humans in society. Another investigated the role of animals in human cultural, symbolic, and conceptual schemes. The opposition between the two was famously cast by Claude Lévi-Strauss, a prominent proponent of the second line of enquiry, as one between seeing animals as 'good to eat' and seeing them as 'good to think' with (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 89). The oscillation between the two approaches and their recombination can be seen by briefly scanning the role of animals in successive anthropological paradigms.<sup>[1]</sup> Around the turn of the twenty-first century, however, a number of approaches emerged which sought to add a new parameter – the consideration of animals not as resources (whether material or conceptual) for human society, but as actual participants in human sociality. In this light, animals are not just good to eat or good to think with, but also good to live with (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010: 552). The second part of this entry takes up this second set of questions, and considers the attractions and tensions inherent in attempts to take account of the active role that animals play in human social life.

### **Good to eat, good to think**

Anthropologists have shown an interest in the importance of nonhuman animals for human society and culture since the earliest days of the discipline. Two nineteenth-century notions – 'totemism' and 'animism', formed the mainstay of those early discussions. Both terms were used to describe what nineteenth-century anthropologists understood to be social and cognitive practices common amongst non-western peoples. Totemism (derived from an Ojibwa term *totam* or *totem*) was used to describe the association of a species of animal or plant with a clan or subsection of society. [Animism](#) described the broader worldviews in which nonhuman entities, including objects, plants, and animals, were considered to have souls akin to those of humans. These general categories, derived from more or less loosely interpreted accounts of non-western people's behaviour by missionaries and travellers, became the focus of enduring debates about the origins of religion. Following a now-discredited evolutionist logic, these societies were thought to represent a more 'primitive' stage in a singular progressive historical path leading to the 'advanced' or 'modern' societies of Europe (Kuper 2005). Totemism and animism were thus imagined by nineteenth-century anthropologists as the earliest prefigurations of modern religious organization and religious sentiment. For some, like McLennan or Frazer, religion originated in totemism, understood loosely as a worship of animals and plants as gods. For others, like Tylor, the origins of religion lay in animism – a more general propensity to see the nonhuman world as endowed with spiritual forces (McLennan 1869-70; Frazer 1887; Tylor 1871, 1899; Bird-David 1999).

Leaving behind the evolutionist question of the historical origins of religion, Emile Durkheim (1915) drew

on some of these earlier works to a different effect. He noted, like Tylor, that the key feature of totemism was the way it marked out different groups within the same society by associating each of them with a particular totemic emblem. In this way, as Tylor had pointed out, totemism regulated the relationships within and between different subsections of a social group. For Durkheim, totemism played a functional role in the maintenance of social solidarity: members of a clan would unite around their totemic emblem through collective rituals which created a powerful sense of togetherness. This grounded Durkheim's broader functionalist theory of religion. In worshipping god(s), Durkheim suggested, people unknowingly worshipped and maintained the structure of society itself: totems reflected and maintained the sub-divided structure of clan-based societies, just as monotheistic gods became a single focus for a broader, undivided church.

Returning to the earlier distinction between 'good to think' and 'good to eat', it is important to note that for all of their many disagreements over the nature and import of totemism, the anthropologists above were primarily concerned not with actual flesh-and-blood animals, but with mythical, symbolic, or ritual animals – in other words, with animals *as imagined by* non-western peoples. It went without saying that they considered these imaginations and conceptions to be erroneous, whether in a crude sense, as when Tylor suggested that 'primitive animism' denoted a childlike naivety, or in Durkheim's more sophisticated suggestion that animal totems (and indeed God(s) more generally) derived their power not from some inherent mystical qualities but from the social groups they stood for (Bird-David 1999).

An attention to animals as material resources was introduced by British functionalist authors such as Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. They combined Durkheim's insights on the social functions of totemism with an attention to the rationality and pragmatism of non-western people's concern with the natural species which surrounded them. This was a particularly important lesson for Malinowski:

In totemism we see therefore not the result of early man's speculations about mysterious phenomena, but a blend of a utilitarian anxiety about the most necessary objects of his surroundings, with some preoccupation in those which strike his imagination and attract his attention, such as beautiful birds, reptiles and dangerous animals (Malinowski 1925: 4).

Radcliffe-Brown's primary focus was on totemism's role in ordering social arrangements, but he shared the Malinowskian idea that particular species became totems in the first place because of their pragmatic utility to humans.<sup>41</sup> Radcliffe-Brown thus envisioned totemism as a complex sociological device for weaving nature into human society. Through classification and personification, natural objects would come to find a place within the human moral order, thereby anchoring human society within its surroundings. Totemism, for Radcliffe-Brown, wove together practical ecological relationships (hunting and the exploitation and management of natural resources) and human social organization. In effect, the [relations](#) between people and the natural objects which surrounded them became social relations (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 131).

Radcliffe-Brown's concern with the pragmatic utility of animals (and plants) in totemism – the sense in which they were, as it were, 'good to eat' – was thus a very small part of a much more complex picture. This structural-functionalist approach stands in contrast, for instance, to the later 'cultural materialist' arguments of Marvin Harris about the ecological and economic roots of the sacredness of cows in India. As Harris put it, the essence of his theory is that '[t]he practice arose to prevent the population from consuming the animal on which Indian agriculture depends' (Harris 1978: 208).<sup>24</sup>

While structural-functionalists such as Radcliffe-Brown were attentive to the material and economic basis of social arrangements, they were not directly seeking to explain cultural phenomena through economic ones. Evans-Pritchard's (1940) analysis of the role of cattle in Nuer society is a case in point. His classic account of Nuer politics begins with a chapter on cattle, noting that cows are the Nuer's main means of subsistence, and represent the economic bedrock of Nuer life. The daily round of the Nuer people's activities, and their broader patterns of movement and residence, are driven by the cows and bulls around which their economy gravitates. Evans-Pritchard examined the way in which this then came to shape a particular sense of space and [time](#) (the famous 'cattle clock') for the Nuer; the aesthetics of cattle colours and names and the ways these became interwoven with appreciations of individuals; and, most crucially, the role of cattle as mediators of social relationships. From marriage payments to compensations for homicide, cattle played a key role as a medium of exchange in the establishing and repairing of social relations. In sum, it is hard to speak of a primacy of the economic. Rather, as Radcliffe-Brown had suggested for totemism, animals as natural entities are interwoven into human social relations. Evans-Pritchard writes memorably of the Nuer that '[t]heir social idiom is a bovine idiom' (1940: 19).

It is in the context of his extended review of existing arguments on totemism (1963: 89) that Lévi-Strauss made his famous quip about animals being chosen as totems because they were good to think with and not because they were good to eat. It is important to stress, as explained above, that the functionalist approaches Lévi-Strauss was critiquing cannot be reduced to a mere utilitarianism. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss's own structuralist interpretation of totemism owed much to Radcliffe-Brown's. However, where the latter had insisted on multiple kinds of functional interrelations, the former picked out and focused on the conceptual structure of totemism. The key thing about animals in totemic systems, Lévi-Strauss noted, was that they formed a *series* of natural entities which corresponded to a *series* of social entities, in the same way that flags, for instance, form a series of colours and patterns which stands for a series of nations. To bring this picture into view, one had to stop looking for relationships between particular clans and particular totems – be it in terms of use value or aesthetic proclivity. Totemism had nothing to do, for Lévi-Strauss, with a privileged relationship between particular people and a specific animal – such as that maintained, for example, between the Nuer and their cows. He noted that in many totemic systems, the list of entities invoked as totems included animals, plants, and objects of no discernible value or even aesthetic significance, while many such 'pragmatically' significant animals were omitted. Once the particular

relationship between individual totems and individual groups of people was seen as entirely *arbitrary*, one could suddenly bring a broader logic into view: it was the entire system of totems and the entire system of clans which related to one another.

His vision was directly inspired by then-current theories of structural linguistics. Language, in this view, was similarly made up of natural elements (a range of noises made by humans) of which some were arbitrarily selected as particularly significant, then arranged into patterns to create a grid which could in turn be used to convey meanings. Totemism was a language whose words were animals (and plants and objects): it allowed people to 'speak', or rather – more profoundly – to think, about the complex relations of difference and similarity between subsets of their societies. For Lévi-Strauss, totemism was just a particular instance of a much broader phenomenon, which he termed 'the logic of the concrete':

[the] use of one concrete phenomenon to talk about another, more abstract, realm is part of a much more widespread aspect of human thought; by means of analogy, the complexity, fluidity and inaccessibility of the real world can be visualised and approached through various 'as if' devices (Bloch 1996: 532).

This structuralist approach gave rise to some classic anthropological arguments, such as Mary Douglas's famous analysis of the logic of the food prohibitions in Leviticus (Douglas 1966). As with Lévi-Strauss's analysis of totemism, Douglas begins by challenging the various utilitarian (economic or medical) explanations for these food prohibitions. Instead, behind the seemingly random list of prohibited animals – the pig, but also the camel, shellfish, and so on – Douglas detected (or devised) a logical structure according to which excluded animals were each in their own way being singled out as anomalies from a broader type or rule. If typical sea-creatures were fish, this made shellfish (scale-less and fin-less sea creatures) atypical, and if typical ungulates (sheep, cows, goats) had split hooves and chewed cud, animals which had one but not the other of those features (such as pigs or camels) were anomalies. The master logic of the entire system was one of categorization and perfection – a setting apart of the perfect from imperfect, which echoed the setting apart of the chosen people to whom Leviticus was addressed, from the other people surrounding them. Thus without being 'totemic', this system also used animal categorizations to reflect on and symbolise human sociological ones. Whatever the merits or otherwise of this particular analysis,<sup>14</sup> it clearly illustrates the generative possibilities which open up once animals are read as symbolic tokens within a broader pattern.<sup>15</sup>

Another very different approach to animals as symbolic resources for the human imagination came from American symbolic anthropology. Clifford Geertz's famous essay on the Balinese cockfight (1973a) showcased the way in which cultural performances could be read and interpreted as one might interpret texts, namely as multi-layered, symbolically rich narratives (1973b). Geertz described actions, listed plays-

on-words, innuendos, and jokes, and divined [affective](#) attitudes of his Balinese informants, to put together an interpretation of the meaning of the Balinese cockfight as ‘a story the Balinese tell themselves about themselves’ (Geertz 1973a: 448): a rich drama of explosive violence and meticulous control, animality and human prowess, equality and status, challenge and response. Unlike structuralist analyses, of which he was quite critical, Geertz’s interpretivism was not committed to formally elegant structural schemes. The symbolic meanings of cocks, and of cockfights, were as messy, complex, and multi-layered as meanings usually are. Geertz also claimed to be operating in a realm of public signification – picking out the sorts of interpretations which his own informants might generate and recognise – rather than delving deep beneath the visible surface to find (or conjure up) hidden patterns. However, this was still an account of animals as essentially ‘good to think with’. A key point for Geertz, as for Lévi-Strauss or Douglas, was that the Balinese cockfight cannot be explained in functional terms:

The cockfight [...] makes nothing happen. An image, a fiction, a model, a metaphor, the cockfight is a means of expression; its function is neither to assuage social passions nor to heighten them [...] but in a medium of feathers, blood, crowds and money, to display them (Geertz 1973a: 443-4).

### **Good to live with**

‘Symbolic’ and ‘materialist’ analyses of the role of animals have occasionally been pitted against each other, as in some of Lévi-Strauss’s critiques of the functionalists, or in the above-mentioned ‘sacred cow controversy’. More often, however, and increasingly in the final decades of the twentieth century, anthropologists chose to study animals as both conceptually and materially significant in a number of ways. One might cite, for instance, Michael Stewart’s complex account of the economic and symbolic role of horses in the lives of Hungarian Roma (1997), or Sharon Hutchinson’s elaborate analysis of the shifting meanings of cattle, and their changing roles as social mediators and instruments of power, as the Nuer economy became monetarised (1996).

Nevertheless, these approaches, however richly [ethnographic](#), still treated animals as secondary in an important sense. Human beings and their social relations sat at center stage. Animals featured as resources (conceptual and/or material) *for* the humans about whom these anthropological stories were written. A bevy of self-consciously critical interventions around the turn of the twenty-first century identified this as a problem of perspective. As John Knight put it, many felt the time had come to treat ‘animals as *parts* of human society rather than just *symbols* of it’ (2005: 1); to treat animals, in other words, as actual participants in social interactions, or, quite simply, as persons.

This reconceptualization of the place of the animal echoed a broad interdisciplinary conversation at the turn of the century within the social sciences and humanities. In anthropology, this ‘animal turn’ has become particularly associated with the idea of ‘multispecies ethnography’ (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010).

The term ‘multispecies’ refers to the broader range of organisms considered by these ethnographers, including insects (Raffles 2010), fungi (Tsing 2015), and microbes (Paxson 2008), and represents an attempt to move beyond the human-animal binary which has long structured western thought. Where, as we have seen, animals featured in earlier anthropology insofar as they were ‘good to think’ or ‘good to eat’, scholars associated with multispecies ethnography (a term they do not necessarily themselves employ)<sup>[6]</sup> coalesce around a focus on animals (and other nonhumans) as ‘entities, and agents, “to live with”’ (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010: 552). Here many anthropologists have been particularly influenced by the writings of the feminist philosopher of science and technology, Donna Haraway (2008), who has used her own relationship with her dog to think about the ways in which humans and animals are shaped by interactions across species boundaries. In thinking about the agency of nonhumans, anthropologists have also been influenced by the work of Bruno Latour (e.g., 2005).<sup>[7]</sup> It is possible to delineate various strands to this emergent paradigm, the tensions between which can sometimes be occluded by a shared sense of excitement. In what follows, we discuss some of these strands, and the ways in which they both complement and diverge from one another.

One might find an unexpected precursor to these recent concerns in Radcliffe-Brown’s suggestion that, through totemism, ‘a system of social solidarities is established between man and nature’ (1952: 131). But where anthropologists once sought to explain away the ‘erroneous’ ideas of social solidarity between humans and nonhumans, recent work often regards such thinking as a timely corrective to the ‘dualism’ characteristic of western thought, which allegedly lies behind contemporary environmental catastrophe, as well as the brutalities of the ‘animal industrial complex’. For some scholars (e.g. Best *et al.* 2007), however, much work done under the rubric of ‘animal studies’ is flawed because of its political quietism, and the ways in which its practitioners ‘[remain] wedded to speciesist values’.<sup>[8]</sup> Recently, multispecies ethnography has itself been taken to task for failing to address ‘multispecies injustice, suffering, and unidirectional violence’ (Kopnina 2017: 351). In this section we thus also touch on the ways anthropologists have thought about the political and ethical stakes of multispecies ethnography.

### **Taking animism seriously**

In the 1990s, several anthropologists (e.g. Descola 1992; Bird-David 1999) returned to the concept of ‘[animism](#)’ which had preoccupied an earlier generation. However, rather than interpreting this phenomenon as a form of primitive religion or a metaphorical projection of human society, they argued that in order to be faithful to the conceptions of the people they studied, they had to abandon the nature-society (or nature-culture) dualism which had oriented earlier work. This sense that anthropologists have to allow the worlds of their informants to challenge existing categories of analysis nourished what has become known as the ‘[Ontological Turn](#)’.



Perhaps the most celebrated exposition of the precepts of this turn has come from the anthropologist of Amazonia, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998), who has coined the notion of ‘Amerindian Perspectivism’ to describe the way in which ‘humans’ and ‘animals’ alike are thought by many Amazonian peoples to be ‘subjects’ (to have a perspective), and to share a singular ‘human culture’ made up of villages, longhouses, beer, manioc, etc. What beer *is*, however, will depend on the perspective of the entity in question, determined by its particular bodily form. What a human sees as its own blood, for example, a jaguar is thought to see as beer. This perspectivism has important implications for [hunting](#) and warfare in Amazonia. Hunting is a perilous activity for humans, because from the animals’ perspective, it can appear as warfare, prompting revenge (warfare conducted by animals appears as disease in humans). Hunters take care, through the use of particular language and weapons, to make a distinction between hunting and warfare, in order to prevent the animals from taking revenge (Fausto 2007). Human-animal relations in Amazonia, then, are seen to be characterised by *predation* as well as perspectivism.

Outside of Amazonia, the peoples of the circumpolar regions have also prompted anthropologists to think again about animism. Here, however, it is *reciprocity* rather than predation which is thought to be the hallmark of the interactions between humans and their prey. A number of [ethnographers](#) have suggested that for hunting peoples in circumpolar regions, the prey animal intentionally presents itself to the hunter to be killed (Hallowell 1960; Nadasdy 2007). According to this conception, hunting is not a violent act but rather part of a trusting social relationship between human and nonhuman persons (including a spirit master who often owns the animals), which is characterised by reciprocity. By performing certain ritual activities, and by ensuring that animals are killed and consumed in the proper manner so that their souls will then be re clothed in flesh, hunters can trust that animals will in turn continue to present themselves to be killed.

Paul Nadasdy (2007) notes the historical tendency of anthropologists to treat such notions of animal reciprocity as purely metaphorical, rather than considering that they might be literally true. Nadasdy conducted ethnographic fieldwork with hunters from the Kluane First Nation in the Yukon. He describes how his own personal experience of hunting what appeared to be animals able to engage actively in reciprocal relations with humans forced him to question this metaphorical reading, and along with it the accounts of animal behaviour provided by wildlife biologists. Other multispecies ethnographers agree that ‘[t]he natural sciences are far from being the only way to know and understand the lives of other species’ (Van Dooren *et al.* 2016: 9). As we shall see, however, it is not only by way of contrast that anthropologists have related indigenous knowledge to scientific thought.

Some anthropologists have looked to indigenous ontologies to question the primacy afforded to animals over other nonhumans as the subjects of academic attention, ethical deliberation, and political activism. Kim TallBear (2011) writes that ‘Aboriginal thinkers [help to] extend the range of nonhuman beings with which we can be in relation’: trees, stones, and thunder are here held to be sentient beings too. As such,



might these beings not also require incorporation into political communities (Nadasdy 2016)? Indeed, some scholars (e.g. Avelar 2013; Danowski & Viveiros de Castro 2016) would suggest that it is the continued elevation of indigenous thought beyond the analytical level to that of the political which offers the best hope of salvation in a time of environmental crisis and multispecies extinction.

### **From trust to domination?**

Drawing on [ethnographies](#) of circumpolar hunters, Tim Ingold (2000) contrasts the ‘trust’ which these hunters feel towards their prey to the ‘domination’ which he argues characterises pastoralists’ mastery over their animals. Hunters respect the autonomy of these nonhuman persons, who have the capacity to refuse to give themselves up if the hunter mistreats the animals (by wasting their meat or by killing them with unnecessary cruelty, for instance). Ingold juxtaposes this with the status of livestock in pastoralist societies. Here the autonomy of animals is curbed by means of force (whips, bits, hobbles), and the relationship is characterised by the exercise of human will over the animal, rather than by reciprocity. Are reciprocal, trusting, interpersonal relations between humans and animals then the sole preserve of hunter-gatherer societies? On this point there has been significant debate. Some anthropologists have suggested that Ingold’s hunters appear to cultivate relationships with animals *in general* rather than as individual persons; we cannot then speak of ‘interpersonal’ relationships (Knight 2005; 2012). What is more, the flight response of wild animals, and the one-off nature of the hunter-prey encounter, appears on the face of it to militate against the establishment of enduring interpersonal relationships between particular humans and animals. It is for this reason that several writers have proposed that we look instead to herders and their livestock for instances of what they call ‘human-animal co-sociality’ (Knight 2005, 2012; Willerslev *et al.* 2014).

Studies of such societies have in turn suggested that ‘domination’ might not in fact be the best way to characterise the relationship between herders and their animals. They have highlighted the fact that herders often live in close proximity to their livestock, resulting in everyday interactions defined not only by human control but also by [care](#), conviviality, and intimacy (Knight 2005: 5; Theodossopoulos 2005; Fijn 2011; Govindrajana 2015).<sup>[9]</sup> The contemporary relationship between Mongolian pastoralists and their herds, for example, can be thought of as ‘co-domestic’, based on interspecies reciprocity rather than human domination (Fijn 2011). In a similar vein, studies of reindeer husbandry in Siberia (Beach & Stammler 2006; Vitebsky & Alekseyev 2014) have recently stressed the ‘symbiosis’ that characterises the relationship between humans and domesticated reindeer. Reindeer actively seek the care and protection from predators offered by herders, while the herders in turn benefit from animal products and [labour](#). There exists a ‘circularity of wills’, as reindeer internalise the patterns of movements dictated by herders, who then follow the reindeer across the landscape (Beach & Stammler 2006). The attachments that are fostered between humans and free-ranging reindeer have an intimate, bodily quality, since reindeer are attracted by the

presence of salt in human urine (Stépanoff 2012). Interspecies association here is at least in part a product of mundane micturition and not merely human mastery.

Anthropologists and archaeologists have argued that domestication should not be seen as a one-off event for which humans alone are responsible, but as an ongoing process of mutual adaptation in which other species also exercise agency (see also Cassidy & Mullin 2007; Franklin 2007; Francis 2015). For insight into the two-way nature of the relationship between domestic animals and humans, and the imbrication of care and control involved, many multispecies ethnographers have turned to Donna Haraway's notion of 'companion species', which she has developed in relation to her own experience of dog training in the U.S. (Haraway 2008). In contrast to those who would condemn those who herd animals by reducing all human relationships with domestic animals to the violence which characterises factoring farming (e.g. Nibert 2013), some anthropologists have suggested that we can look to ethnographic accounts of pastoralist interspecies communities, which show how 'in the interstices of power and violence, spaces for love, care, and mutuality flourish' (Govindrajana 2015: 507). It is here that we might find resources for thinking about [sustainable](#) and responsible animal agriculture (Haraway, in Franklin 2017).

### **Taking animals (and scientists) seriously**

As we saw above, some anthropologists have contrasted indigenous explanations of animal behaviour with those of scientists, regarding the articulation of the former as the proper subject of anthropology. Ingold argues that 'explaining the behaviour of caribou is none of [anthropologists'] business'; their concern is rather with the hunters' 'direct experience of encounters with animals' (2000: 14). However, the close engagement with the lives of domestic animals that fieldwork in pastoralist communities often requires has led some writers to criticise this exclusive focus on the experiences of human informants, and on their conceptualizations of animals, rather than on the animals themselves (Stépanoff 2017).

Like Viveiros de Castro and Nadasdy, Stépanoff also wants to take [animism](#) seriously and reject the nature-culture divide. However, he suggests that this might be best achieved by changing the way that anthropology is practiced, by 'challenging our supreme divide between the natural and social sciences' (2017: 378), and incorporating insights from the natural sciences into our accounts of human-animal relations. Rather than contrasting indigenous accounts to those of natural scientists, Stépanoff shows how that they can in fact be complementary. In according an active role to animals in the process of domestication, he suggests, scientists are finally catching up with descriptions of animal behaviour in the myths of Siberian peoples. Indeed, [ethnographic](#) studies of scientists themselves can reveal unexpected similarities between, say, Amerindian perspectivism and behavioural ecology (Candea 2012). And both biologists and Amazonian peoples, for example, at times take steps to avoid treating animals as subjects: the scientists in the interests of objectivity, the Amazonians in order to avoid being transformed into those animals (Kohn 2007; Fausto 2007; Candea 2010). Such comparisons work against the tendency to posit a

radical contrast between western and Amerindian ontologies.

Other scholars have questioned the human exceptionalism that they find to be embedded within the ethnographic method, in which (human) language plays a dominant role. This has led to methodological innovation; some, for example, have sought to combine ethnography with the close observation of animal behaviour characteristic of ethology (Fuentes 2006; Lestel *et al.* 2006; Fijn 2011). Piers Locke writes of the transformative experience of doing ethnography in an elephant stable in Nepal, which led to him regarding the elephants not only as ‘subjective actors but also as participating research informants’ (2017: 356). Crucially, while Locke notes the complementarity with developments in animal behavioural sciences, this realization came not from a knowledge of this literature, but from everyday immersion in an ‘interspecies apprenticeship’ as he learned to work together with a sentient nonhuman being. Locke suggests that ethnography must be attuned to the embodied, affective quality of this interspecies relationship (see also Parreñas 2012; Dave 2014). This attunement might involve cultivating new modes of sensing across species boundaries, as in the case of the synaesthetic blending of vision and touch, which Eva Hayward (2010) terms ‘fingeryeyes’ in her ethnography of cup corals.

While the turn to [affect](#) suggests a move away from anthropology’s longstanding focus on linguistic semiosis (which involved thinking of animals as symbolic resources), Eduardo Kohn (2013) has recently argued that semiosis should remain at the heart of a new ‘anthropology of life’, which still succeeds in moving beyond human exceptionalism, since the living world is in fact engaged in constant *non-linguistic* meaning making.<sup>[10]</sup> Here he is influenced by, among others, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, who also produced innovative work on animal communication (e.g. 1972), in a way that sets him outside the ‘good to eat/good to think’ approaches which were contemporary with his work. Some, however, have argued that Kohn’s account remains ‘all too human’, since his analysis still appears to be guided by the conceptualizations of his human informants, in the manner of the proponents of the [Ontological Turn](#) (Descola 2014). This is indicative of some of the tensions within what we have been referring to as ‘multispecies ethnography’.

### **Conclusion: multispecies multiethnography**

We can now delineate, for the sake of clarity, three ways in which anthropologists have suggested that [ethnography](#) can be ‘multispecies’. These are sometimes in tension, while at other times they overlap in the project of a single anthropologist. For the sake of argument, we will refer to these as the *elevating*, *complementing*, and *expanding* of ethnography. (1) Ethnography can be ‘elevated’ by raising the conceptualizations of informants to the level of analysis, in order to destabilise the ‘Euroamerican’ naturalist ontology. This is what is proposed by the anthropologists associated with the [Ontological Turn](#). (2) Ethnography can be ‘complemented’ with accounts of animal behaviour by colleagues working in the

traditions of natural science. (3) Ethnographic methodology can be expanded to include nonhuman research participants.

In sum, if ‘multispecies ethnography’ has multiplied the entities that ‘count’ in anthropology, it also involves a multiplying of ethnography itself. What we might now think of as ‘multispecies multiethnography’ contains within it a host of organisms and a variety of approaches, some of which thrive together, while others exist in a more antagonistic relationship. Whatever their differences, and the unresolved tensions between them, these various approaches have helped to shine new light on the diversity of relationships between humans and animals. The participation of animals in human social lives has been thought of variously in terms of predation, reciprocity, trust, domination, [care](#), and intimacy (to take but a few salient examples). At the same time, these recent approaches have also problematised the very categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal’, and concomitant notions of human exceptionalism, which sociocultural anthropology had long taken for granted. Such problematization appears to strike at the root of the discipline. Perhaps it will lead to the wholesale reconceptualization of what it means to do anthropology; or, perhaps, the challenges it poses will be quarantined within a specific subfield and within a single encyclopedia entry.

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[1] For good overviews of the twentieth century literature, see Shanklin 1985; Mullin 1999.

[2] “I was led to formulate the following law: Any object or event which has important effects upon the well-being (material or spiritual) of a society, or anything which stands for or represents any such object or event, tends to become an object of the ritual attitude. I have given reasons for rejecting Durkheim's theory that in totemism natural species become sacred because they are selected as representatives of social groups, and I hold, on the contrary, that natural species are selected as representatives of social groups, such as clans, because they are already objects of the ritual attitude on quite another basis, by virtue of the general law of the ritual expression of social values stated above” (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 129).

[3] See Shanklin 1985: 386-88 for a discussion of the ensuing ‘sacred cow controversy’.

[4] Gellner scathingly but not entirely unfairly noted that ‘the structuralist method consists of a somewhat arbitrary extraction of polar patterns at the whim of the individual structuralist virtuosos’ (Gellner 1987: 157).

[5] For other analyses in this vein, see Leach 2000.

[6] Indeed, they are sometimes actively critical of it (e.g. Ingold 2013). However, we have found it productive to use ‘multispecies ethnography’ in a capacious way to capture a loosely shared orientation among these anthropologists, and an explicit sense of rupture from earlier approaches to animals.

[7] Though, note the critique by Ingold (2013).

[8] Speciesism denotes a form of prejudice, comparable to racism or sexism.

[9] Such intimacy can also be present in encounters with 'wild' animals, such as in orangutan rehabilitation centres, where it is commodified as part of the transnational 'voluntourism' industry (Parreñas 2016).

[10] One example of what Kohn means here is the way in which the form of an anteater's snout can be said to 'represent' something about an ant colony (its long tunnels) (2013: 74).