



# MULTISPECIES FUTURES

New Approaches to Teaching  
Human-Animal Studies

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# **Multispecies Futures**

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Greta Gaard

## Epilogue

The presence of human-animal studies (HAS) in Germany is a particular delight to those outside the country: we can learn from the ways each national culture investigates how human-animal relations mirror diverse cultural narratives about equity and hierarchy, empathy and alienation, belonging and marginalization, selfhood and extended-family, self or not-self. As both Jobst Paul (in this volume) and Jeannie Shinozuka (2013) have observed, “dehumanizing modes of human, economic, and natural exploitation” (Jobst Paul) have been variously used in national contexts to vilify (for example) wolves returning to their former habitat as “immigrants” (Germany), or to portray Japanese and Japanese-Americans as foreign invaders, “a contagious and poisonous ‘yellow peril’” that shaped anti-Asianism in the years leading up to World War II in the US.<sup>1</sup> Each scholar draws on their national cultural contexts to analyze the “discursive strands involved in *them and us rhetoric*” (Jobst) that involve not only the philosophical animal but also their associations of “plants as animals” (Jobst), as in the case of carnivorous plants, or *animalized* associations of Japanese immigrants with “vile, disease-breeding vermin” (Shinozuka). Such insights affirm the significance of human-animal studies as a field that goes beyond the definition of discipline.

In the first volume to define the field, *Teaching the Animal: Human-Animal Studies across the Disciplines*, editor Margo DeMello speaks of human-animal

1 Jeannie Shinozuka: Deadly Perils: Japanese Beetles and the Pestilential Immigrant, 1920s–1930s. In: *American Quarterly: Journal of the American Studies Association* 65:4 (2013), pp. 831–852. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2013.0056> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

studies variously as “an academic discipline”<sup>2</sup> and an “interdisciplinary field,”<sup>3</sup> while the volume’s first essay describes human-animal studies as “committed to the critique of discipline-specific methodologies, and the ‘interbreeding’ of methods of knowledge production.”<sup>4</sup> That these definitions are quite different and yet simultaneously descriptive says a lot about the exuberant evolution of the field. As a discipline, human-animal studies initially drew intellectual tools from both the humanities and the social sciences, quickly expanding to include tools from natural sciences such as ethology, zoology, and ecology. Expressed through a journal article, a monograph, or a university class, human-animal studies might be multidisciplinary, drawing on knowledge from diverse disciplines but staying within their boundaries; or, the course might be interdisciplinary, exploring questions and scholarship between and among disciplines. But the greatest potential for human-animal studies manifests in its capacity for *transdisciplinary* inquiry, centering the problems themselves (i. e., oppression), and generating knowledge beyond academic disciplines, addressing academic institutions, governments, social movements, and civil society – with the potential for transforming the assumptions and structures of knowledge by challenging academic and cultural-economic norms.<sup>5</sup> The discovery of West Nile virus is a case in point.

When the chief pathologist at the Bronx Zoo in New York City, Tracey McNamara, noted many crows dying near and around the zoo in summer 1999, she became concerned – particularly when three flamingoes, a pheasant, and a bald eagle died a month later. That same summer, doctors in another borough of New York City were treating a rising number of encephalitis cases. Suspecting that both humans and birds were suffering attacks from the same pathogen, McNamara sent virus samples from her dead birds to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Iowa, and then convinced the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to analyze the genetic materials from the samples. West Nile virus, a zoonotic disease, was discovered in the US because a zoo pathologist worked – like Michaela Keck (in this volume) – from the

2 Margo DeMello: Introduction. In: Idem (ed.): *Teaching the Animal: Human-Animal Studies Across the Disciplines*. New York: Lantern 2010, pp. xi–xix, here p. xv.

3 Ibid., p. xi.

4 Annie Potts / Philip Armstrong: Hybrid Vigor: Interbreeding Cultural Studies and Human-Animal Studies. In: DeMello (ed.): *Teaching the Animal*, pp. 3–17, here p. 3.

5 Sue L. T. McGregor / Russ Volckmann: *Transversity: Transdisciplinary Approaches in Higher Education*. Tucson: Integral 2011.

understanding that, whether human or bird, *we are all animals*.<sup>6</sup> In describing her intellectual approach, McNamara uses the metaphor of the birdcage, observing that the bars are our *a priori* assumptions and expectations, and that only when we strip away the bars of rigid thinking are we able to see clearly.

Perhaps McNamara had read feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye, whose essay defining “Oppression” uses a birdcage metaphor to explain the double bind, one of the most ubiquitous features of oppression, wherein the oppressed are constrained into situations where options are severely reduced, and every option also carries a penalty. The bars on the cage seem thin enough, and it is not immediately evident why the bird does not fly away until the observer steps back to notice it is not the single wire bar, but rather the network of bars and their interrelationship that is “as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.”<sup>7</sup> Frye’s feminist metaphor was developed to describe the conditions of women under patriarchy; McNamara was using the birdcage to describe zoonosis; ecofeminists have bridged the gap and restored the *absent referent* to Frye’s birdcage metaphor, observing that species oppression as a feminist metaphor still omits the birds themselves – and have used this example to develop an ecofeminist multispecies intersectional analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Posthumanism, human-animal studies, critical animal studies: these terminological distinctions have been important in naming different ways of viewing the problem of animal suffering and oppression, the modes of inquiry, and the desired goals. Initially a critique of human-centrism, posthumanism was developed by theorists such as Donna Haraway, Cary Wolfe, N. Katherine Hayles, and others.<sup>9</sup> The discourse itself was largely theoretical, with few or

6 Tracey McNamara: How Monitoring Animal Health Can Predict Human Disease Outbreaks (TED x UCLA). In: *TED*, April 2018. [https://www.ted.com/talks/tracey\\_mcnamara\\_how\\_monitoring\\_animal\\_health\\_can\\_predict\\_human\\_disease\\_outbreaks](https://www.ted.com/talks/tracey_mcnamara_how_monitoring_animal_health_can_predict_human_disease_outbreaks) (accessed: January 24, 2022).

7 Marilyn Frye: Oppression. In: Idem: *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg: Crossing 1983, pp. 1–16, here p. 5.

8 On animal bodies as the “absent referent,” see Carol J. Adams: *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. New York: Continuum 1990; on the birdcage as a multispecies ecofeminist metaphor of oppression, see Greta Gaard: Women, Animals, and Ecofeminist Critique. In: *Environmental Ethics* 18:4 (1996), pp. 439–441. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199618411> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Lori Gruen: On the Oppression of Women and Animals. In: *Environmental Ethics* 18:4 (1996), pp. 441–444. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199618412> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

9 See Donna Haraway: *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P 2007; Cary Wolfe: *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 2009; N. Katherine Hayles: *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P 1999.

no applied activism; animal advocates charged that posthumanists tended to engage in wordplay, yet failed to interrogate the exploitation of other species or to discuss activism on their behalf.<sup>10</sup> Locating the genesis of human-animal studies around 2004, simultaneous with the heightened popularity of posthumanism, Margo DeMello describes human-animal studies as promoting “the study of the interactions and relationships between human and nonhuman animals,” whereas critical animal studies is “an academic field of study dedicated to the abolition of animal exploitation, oppression, and domination.”<sup>11</sup> Shortly thereafter, critical animal studies scholars distinguished their approach as “a radical, interdisciplinary field dedicated to establishing a holistic total liberation movement for humans, nonhuman animals, and the Earth.”<sup>12</sup>

By 2012, at least two feminist animal studies scholars<sup>13</sup> had noted that the preceding tripartite taxonomy of scholar-activist human-animal inquiry tends to background or omit at least two centuries of activism and theory articulated through women’s advocacy for animals, from the intersections between the suffrage and anti-vivisection movements,<sup>14</sup> to the feminist intersectional analyses of speciesism as it interfaces with critical race studies<sup>15</sup> and the emergence

10 Zipporah Weisberg: The Broken Promises of Monsters. In: *Journal of Critical Animal Studies* 7:2 (2009), pp. 22–62.

11 Margo DeMello: *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies*. New York: Columbia UP 2012, p. 5.

12 Anthony J. Nocella II / John Sorenson / Kim Socha / Atsuko Matsuoko: Introduction. In: Idem (eds): *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*. New York: Lang 2014, pp. ix–xxxvi, here p. xxvi.

13 Susan Fraiman: Pussy Panic Versus Liking Animals: Tracking Gender in Animal Studies. In: *Critical Inquiry* 29:1 (2012), pp. 89–115. <https://doi.org/10.1086/668051> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Greta Gaard: Feminist Animal Studies in the U.S.: Bodies Matter. In: *DEP: Deportate, esuli, profughe* 20 (2012), pp. 14–21.

14 Josephine Donovan: Animal Rights and Feminist Theory. In: *Signs* 15:2 (1990), pp. 350–375. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494588> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

15 Claire Jean Kim: Multiculturalism Goes Imperial: Immigrants, Animals, and the Suppression of Moral Dialogue. In: *DuBois Review* 4:1 (2007), pp. 233–249. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X07070129> (accessed: January 24, 2022); A. Breeze Harper: Race as a “Feeble Matter” in Veganism: Interrogating Whiteness, Geopolitical Privilege, and Consumption Philosophy of “Cruelty-Free” Products. In: *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 8:3 (2010), pp. 5–27; Maneesha Deckha: Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals. In: *Hypatia* 27:3 (2012), pp. 527–545. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2012.01290.x> (accessed: January 24, 2022).



of both vegan studies and veganism of color.<sup>16</sup> Observing the humanist limitations of intersectional theories, feminist animal studies scholars use a multispecies intersectional approach. As Nik Taylor and Richard Twine explain,

This move toward intersectionality, originally pursued by ecofeminists (e.g. Adams 1994; Plumwood 1993; Merchant 2003) makes clear how the material and symbolic exploitation of animals intersects with and helps maintain dominant categories of gender, “race” and class. In turn, this troubles the humanist premise of many extant feminist, anti-capitalist and anti-racist politics by pointing out that dominant identities and practices of gender, “race” and class help maintain the human exploitation of animals.<sup>17</sup>

As climate change compels greater awareness of the ecological and economic foundations of our multispecies flourishing and survival – as well as the global inequities of wealth, habitat, self-determination and safety – the diverse emphases in multispecies studies have inspired collaborations.<sup>18</sup> From an otherwise humanist discipline, environmental justice, David Naguib Pellow has explored radical environmental and animal rights movements whose conceptual grounding aligns them with what he calls “critical environmental justice,” creating a new framework for “total liberation.”<sup>19</sup> These developments suggest further directions for multispecies studies: for example, bringing Lori Gruen’s ecofeminist study of entangled empathy<sup>20</sup> into conversation with fields such as ecopsychology and ecotherapy due to the ways

16 Laura Wright: *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*. Athens: U of Georgia P 2015; and idem (ed.): *The Routledge Handbook of Vegan Studies*. New York: Routledge 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003020875> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Julia Feliz Brueck (ed.): *Veganism of Color: Decentering Whiteness in Human and Nonhuman Liberation*. Sanctuary 2019.

17 Nik Taylor / Richard Twine: Introduction: Locating the “Critical” in Critical Animal Studies. In: Idem (eds): *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*. New York: Routledge 2014, pp. 1–15, here p. 4. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203797631> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

18 See, for instance: Human Animal Research Network Editorial Collective: *Animals in the Anthropocene: Critical Perspectives on Non-Human Futures*. Sydney: Sydney UP 2015; and Deborah Bird Rose / Thom van Dooren / Matthew Chrulew (eds): *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations*. New York: Columbia UP 2017.

19 David Naguib Pellow: *Total Liberation: The Power and Promise of Animal Rights and the Radical Earth Movement*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 2014; and idem: *What is Critical Environmental Justice?* Cambridge: Polity 2018.

20 Lori Gruen: *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*. New York: Lantern 2015.

these fields utilize affect studies, exploring questions such as how might analyses of eco-grief and eco-anxiety illuminate the emotions of humanimals – diverse in species, race, class, and citizenship status – variously exploited and commodified through the practices of industrial animal agriculture? And what might scholars do with the information gathered through such interdisciplinary explorations?

Texts such as Jason Hribal's *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* narrates animal agency, as does Mieke Roscher (in this volume), while Gay Bradshaw's *Elephants on the Edge* might be helpful in developing theories of multispecies grief and anxiety (see Roman Bartosch, in this volume), especially in conjunction with patrice jones's *Aftershock*, exploring the *animal-bodied affects* of human-bodied animal advocates working as allies in rescue operations, whether with Humane Societies or with the Animal Liberation Front.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, as Andreas Hübner (in this volume) argues, our teaching of multispecies studies must interrogate the educational and learning processes of the very institutions where we teach and learn. As Australian animal studies scholars have shown in their report, "A Sustainable Campus: The Sydney Declaration on Interspecies Sustainability," multispecies ethical practices can be productively linked with campus sustainability initiatives, challenging and transforming practices such as student cafeteria food options, industrialized animal agriculture, materials use, and waste disposal, redefining food justice "not only as justice for human consumers and producers of food and the land used by them, but also [as] justice for the nonhuman animals considered as potential sources of food themselves."<sup>22</sup> Intersectional approaches linking multispecies justice with other movements for human and environmental justice function as a teaching tool, exposing the structure of oppression – what ecofeminist Karen Warren called "the logic of domination"<sup>23</sup> – and thereby inviting interrogation, discussion, and transformation.

21 Jason Hribal: *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*. Stirling: AK Press 2010; G. A. Bradshaw: *Elephants on the Edge: What Animals Teach Us about Humanity*. New Haven: Yale UP 2009. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300154917> (accessed: January 24, 2022); patrice jones: *Aftershock: Confronting Trauma in a Violent World: A Guide for Activists and Their Allies*. New York: Lantern 2007.

22 Fiona Probyn-Rapsey / Sue Donaldson / George Ioannides / Tess Lea et al.: A Sustainable Campus: The Sydney Declaration on Interspecies Sustainability. In: *Animal Studies Journal* 5:1 (2016), pp. 110–151.

23 Karen Warren: The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism. In: *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990), pp. 125–146. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199012221> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

In sum, we need more narratives that re-place human-animal relations within the larger context of human-human and humanimal-ecological relations, cultural narratives of self and success, gender and environment. To that end, Freya Mathews' *Ardea* has much to offer: with a narrative that includes multi-species relations, environment and economics, gender and power, *Ardea* provides more details about the forces that combine to create species hierarchy and oppression than does J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, while Coetzee's protagonist is variously described as pitiful or ineffective, as Alexandra Böhm notes (in this volume), *Ardea* describes the ecological selfhood of a woman philosopher whose psyche is rooted in and nourished by the larger multispecies inter-identity of living beings and ecosystems. German human-animal studies scholars will appreciate Mathew's multispecies reframing of Goethe's Faustian challenge, here contextualized amid climate-changing forces of economic "development" predicated on ecosystem destruction, species loss, homophobia, and the loneliness of human-centrism. Perhaps the most critical insight offered by multispecies scholars is our recognition of how the collapse of individualism – and the separate, superior human self – is requisite to our rediscovery of ecological multispecies kinship, powering and re-storying our collective humanimal resistance and recovery in the Anthropocene.

24 Freya Mathews: *Ardea: A Philosophical Novella*. Punctum 2016. <https://doi.org/10.21983/P3.0147.1.00> (accessed: January 24, 2022); J. M. Coetzee: *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton: Princeton UP 1999.