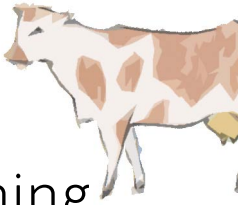
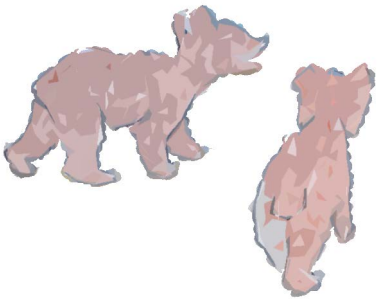



MULTISPECIES FUTURES

New Approaches to Teaching Human-Animal Studies


edited by / hrsg. von
Andreas Hübner
Micha Gerrit Philipp Edlich
Maria Moss

Neofelis

Andreas Hübner / Micha Gerrit Philipp Edlich / Maria Moss (eds)

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Mieke Roscher

Current Objectives of Human-Animal Studies

Why the Story of Harriet the Tortoise Should Be Retold

1. Introduction: Tortoise beginnings

"On Tortoise shells the world began."[1] Thus begins the poem by R. W. Stallman on the relationship between tortoises and the concept of evolution. Stallman seems not to have been an outspoken admirer of this particular species, calling them "freaks," and "monsters." At the same time, however, he suggests that the tortoise has had a foundational impact on how the world was shaped. Pitting the creation of the world as described in the Book of Genesis against the one proposed by scientific discoveries and the emerging theory of the (biological) evolution of all life forms, the poem casts the species as the decisive factor in this debate. If we take the poem literally, Charles Darwin's encounter with turtle cosmology, as suggested in the poem, thus provided for a new telling of creation and providence, which led to a new world. This new world was, of course, mainly one characterized by nineteenth-century ideas of scientific progress, bourgeois and Victorian values, and imperialist endeavors.[2] However, such narratives of an empire characterized by its ability to classify and control nature also leave room for a different interpretation, namely one that sees the tortoise, indeed, as more than an accidental bystander in what

1 R. W. Stallman: Darwin and His Tortoise. In: *The Southern Review* 18:3 (1982), pp. 560–562, here p. 560.

2 Janet Owen: Collecting Artefacts, Acquiring Empire: Exploring the Relationship between Enlightenment and Darwinist Collecting and Late-Nineteenth-Century British Imperialism. In: *Journal of the History of Collections* 18:1 (2006), pp. 9–25; K. Thalia Grant / Gregory B. Estes: *Darwin in Galápagos: Footsteps to a New World*. Princeton: Princeton UP 2009.

was to become a revolution in the history of ideas, as I would like to argue here. The tortoise could just as well be framed as a decisive historical figure, albeit one that does not fit into a propertied hero kind of historiography. For the sake of simplicity, let me individualize the encounter.

In 2006, the tortoise of my story died. Although she did not receive a ceremonial funeral or any other honors, her death was widely reported in the media. Her name was Harriet, she was a Galápagos tortoise, and she died at the age of approximately 175.[3] She rose to fame due to the fact that she was reportedly collected by Darwin during his 1835 visit to the Galápagos Islands as part of his survey expedition on board the *Beagle*. She was then transported to England and, in 1841, the former captain of the *Beagle,* John Clement Wickham, took her to Australia, where she lived in several botanical and zoological gardens.[4] Although there is some doubt as to the truthfulness of this story – Darwin never visited the island that Harriet originally came from – she has left her footprint on the historical narratives of evolutionary history and the history of nineteenth-century scientific and social reformism. In view of the argument presented here – namely that it was through contact with these animals and through the forming of interspecific relations, in which tortoises served not just as some sort of passive interface for new ideas about how the world developed but as both semiotic and material agents of change, that these evolutionary transformations in thinking came to fruition – I will assume that Darwin and Harriet actually did meet. Harriet thus serves as a model to show what a more inclusive narrative that considers the impact of animals on historical events might look like and what methodological steps the political history of animals that I am proposing here would entail.

In the aftermath of Harriet's death, other tortoise specimens that had been buried in the vaults of the London Natural History Museum were "rediscovered," leading to a new appreciation of the animal life that had influenced the

3 Thair Shaikh: Harriet, Who Probably Knew Darwin, Dies at 175. In: *The Independent*, June 24, 2006. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/harriet-who-probably-knew-darwin-dies-at-175-6097292.html (accessed: August 24, 2020).

4 Scott Thomson / Steve Irwin / Terri Irwin: Harriet, The Galápagos Tortoise: Disclosing One and a Half Centuries of History. In: *Intermontanus* 4:5 (1995), pp. 33–35; Henry Nicholls: Celebrity Pet: The Rediscovery of Charles Darwin's Long-Lost Galápagos Tortoise. In: *The Guardian*, February 12, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/science/animal-magic/2014/feb/12/celebrity-pet-discovery-darwin-tortoise (accessed: August 31, 2020).

revolutionary discoveries of the famous naturalist.[5] When the shell of James, another one of Darwin's "pets," was located in 2014, Riley Black wrote in *National Geographic*:

> The same sense of human history and fascination surrounds innumerable other specimens – from dinosaur bones to pressed flowers – saved in museums around the world. The hands that touch them and the minds that wonder about them might not leave any permanent marks like the inscription of "James" on Darwin's tortoise, yet by studying and arguing over these curious representations of the wild we intertwine human history with nature's mysteries.[6]

Historical investigations that aim to make visible the past lives of animals such as Harriet or James and to uncover, to use Black's somewhat paternalistic words, the "intertwining" of "human history" with "nature's mysteries," might be based on several concepts well established in the discipline. Approaches used in the fields of environmental history, the history of science, as well as social history have all been fruitfully employed to examine the monumental shifts ignited by evolutionary theory. All of these approaches have been employed by another Harriet, namely historian Harriet Ritvo, an acclaimed scholar of Darwinian science, and author of *The Animal Estate*, which has been recognized as one of the first works of animal history, whose work has both paved the way for and inspired this chapter.[7] The objective of achieving more visibility for animal actors like the ones considered in this article could

5 Aaron M. Bauer / Colin J. McCarthy: Darwin's Pet Galápagos Tortoise, Chelonoidis Darwini, Rediscovered. In: *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 9:2 (2010), pp. 270–276.

6 Riley Black: A Tale of Two Turtles. In: *National Geographic*, February 25, 2014. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/phenomena/2014/02/25/a-tale-of-two-turtles/ (accessed: August 26, 2020); see also Henry Nicholls: Celebrity Pet: The Rediscovery of Charles Darwin's Long-Lost Galapagos Tortoise. In: *The Guardian*, February 12, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/science/animal-magic/2014/feb/12/celebrity-pet-discovery-darwin-tortoise (accessed: June 11, 2021).

7 Harriet Ritvo: *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1987. For her work on evolutionary history, see Harriet Ritvo: *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1998, and idem: *Noble Cows and Hybrid Zebras: Essays on Animals and History*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P 2010. For an appreciation of Ritvo's work in human-animal history, see André Krebber: History of Ideas. In: Idem / Brett Mizelle / Mieke Roscher (eds): *Handbook of Historical Animal Studies*. Berlin / Boston: de Gruyter 2021, pp. 275–291. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110536553 (accessed: January 24, 2022).

also benefit from more recent debates developed in light of changing social conditions and the growing recognition of animals as historical agents in a society now often understood as a multispecies society.
In 2015, geographer Henry Buller summarized the methodical approaches taken in human-animal studies as follows:

> The key methodological endeavour of human-animal relational studies has been to come to some emergent knowing of non-humans: their meaning (both materially and semiotically); their "impact" on, or even co-production of, our own practices and spaces; and our practical and ethical interaction with and/or relationship to them – or at least to find creative ways to work around unknowing.[8]

For Buller, looking at what is common to both humans and animals and what has been the result of a common shaping of their environment is at the center of interest. As this quotation shows, human-animal studies has moved away from a perspective that treats animals as mere symbols, developing toward one that focuses on the agency of "real" animals and their impact on society and in history. As Donna Haraway suggests in her groundbreaking volume *When Species Meet,* human-animal studies should juxtapose the imprints of our cultural ideas of animals with the life we share with them.[9] Responding to Haraway's call to action, this chapter engages with previous historiographical approaches and with concepts that have been developed in other disciplines such as geography or sociology, and that aim to consider other-than-human actors in their narratives in order to propose a political history of animals.
To develop this new historiographical approach, I will first turn to the concept of agency as the most widely discussed path to making visible the involvement of animals in "our" shared history. I will then take up recently introduced concepts that concentrate on relations rather than individual actors as a point of departure for historical analyses of human-animal interactions. I want to show how both praxiography and material culture studies have been used to tell stories different from the ones provided by traditional historiography, aiming to acknowledge and consider animals' interspecific experiences. Moreover, spatial approaches have been particularly fruitful in animal history for getting

8 Henry Buller: Animal Geographies II: Methods. In: *Progress in Human Geography* 39:3 (2015), pp. 374–384, here p. 379.
9 Donna J. Haraway: *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 2008.

to the "real" animal instead of the one represented as a historical cipher, if only through their bodily presence, and I will show how human-animal studies has revisited concepts provided by animal geography.[10]

I will return to Harriet and her extraordinary life because, in spite of all the media attention she has received in her lifetime and since her death, historians could and should do more to analyze and reevaluate her role and influence. Tortoises and turtles have, of course, already influenced historical thinking, not least because they have come to symbolize the extinction discourse and debates on climatic change and the *Anthropocene*.[11] However, the case of Lonesome George in particular shows that focusing on an iconic individual animal and its status as the last of its kind fails to recognize either its whole life story or the stories of different lives and the potential of his (former) conspecifics.[12] I would argue that more is indeed possible, and that historians need to grapple with, among other things, the issues of scale and species. This chapter argues for the need to individualize interspecies relations while at the same time recognizing the cultural semiotics and political symbolism that shape these relations. The kind of political history of animals proposed here takes into account agency and relations (and agency as relation), practices and materialities, spaces and places, and suggests tentative answers to these pressing methodological questions. Finally, this article will also shine a light on how Harriet's life story could be retold.

10 On the writing of animal history as a subdiscipline, see, for example, Hilda Kean / Philip Howell (eds): *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*. Abingdon / New York: Routledge 2018; André Krebber / Brett Mizelle / Mieke Roscher: Writing History after the Animal Turn? An Introduction to Historical Animal Studies. In: Idem (eds): *Handbook of Historical Animal Studies*, pp. 1–19. For its theoretical framing, see Gesine Krüger / Aline Steinbrecher / Clemens Wischermann: Animate History. Zugänge und Konzepte einer Geschichte zwischen Menschen und Tieren. In: Idem (eds): *Tiere und Geschichte: Konturen einer Animate History*. Stuttgart: Steiner 2014, pp. 9–34.

11 Ursula K. Heise: *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*. Chicago: U of Chicago P 2016.

12 Henry Nicholls: *Lonesome George: The Life and Loves of a Conservation Icon*. Basingstoke / New York: Macmillan 2006.

2. Tortoise agency: Animal actors

In his diary of his voyage on the *Beagle*, published after his return to England, Darwin describes his encounter with tortoises as follows:

> As I was walking along I met two large tortoises, each of which must have weighed at least two hundred pounds: one was eating a piece of cactus, and as I approached, it stared at me and slowly stalked away; the other gave a deep hiss, and drew in its head. These huge reptiles, surrounded by the black lava, the leafless shrubs, and large cacti, seemed to my fancy like some antediluvian animals. The few dull-coloured birds cared no more for me, than they did for the great tortoises.[13]

While the birds apparently were not impressed by the tortoises, Darwin clearly was. The diary is full of such accounts and those of other crew members and of locals, bearing testament to not only the physical presence of these animals, and the character and actions of individual specimens, but also to the impact of the encounters themselves. (Fig. 1) Acknowledging this impact, geographer and environmental historian Elisabeth Hennessy argues in a recent publication the importance of the tortoise for species survival and, more generally, for narrating turtle life on the Galápagos archipelago as an "all-the-way-down history."[14] In such a history, tortoises do not take center stage as an arbitrary effort to inscribe other-than-human beings into our history books, but because the story of these islands simply cannot be written without recognizing the deep history of the tortoise's rootedness. Animal historians have set out to trace these roots, of a presence that goes beyond mere being, mainly through the impact of animals on their human counterparts – in short, through the agency that those animals have exhibited.

Of course, the agency approach is not reserved to the field of history, nor does it focus on the impact of large reptiles. On the contrary, it still is one of the central motifs with which human-animal studies scholars across all disciplines

13 Charles Darwin*: Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H. M. S. Beagle Round the World, under the Command of Capt. Fitz Roy, R. N.* 2nd ed. London: John Murray 1845, pp. 374–375.

14 Elizabeth Hennessy: *On the Backs of Tortoises: Darwin, the Galápagos, and the Fate of an Evolutionary Eden*. New Haven: Yale UP 2019. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvqc6h1b (accessed: January 24, 2022). Hennessy adopted the phrase "turtles-all-the-way-down" from a philosophical debate held at the beginning of the twentieth century in which a member of the audience claimed that the world really rests on turtles, one stacked on top of the other (see ibid., p. 2).

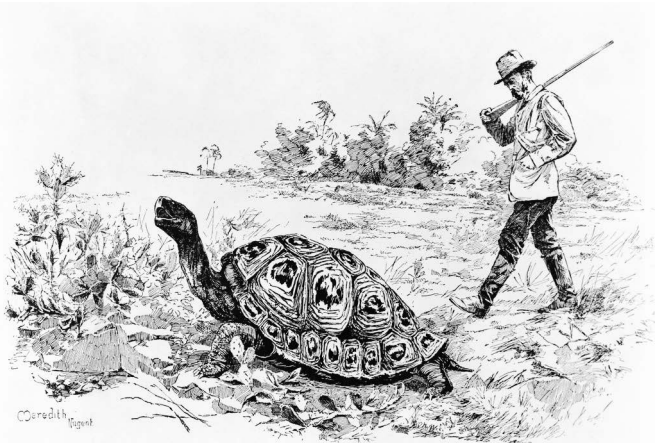

Fig. 1: Meredith Nugent: *Darwin Testing the Speed of an Elephant Tortoise (Galapagos Islands)*, drawing, 1891.

are engaging.[15] However, the concept has mainly been adopted from Bruno Latour, actor-network theory (ANT), and the broader subfield of science and technology studies (STS), rather than from long-standing discussions in the fields of labor or social history. In these fields, the concept of agency has also been used to consider those who have not left any written traces of their existence, although it has come under scrutiny in recent years because it does not (fully) consider sociohistorical contexts. In particular, tendencies within ANT to treat hierarchies conceptually rather than contextually have increasingly been met with criticism. An ANT perspective has been shown to ignore the radical asymmetrical power relations between and among individual species.[16] Because of this inevitable contradiction, human-animal studies has turned in recent years toward a more nuanced social theory that accepts – theoretically, though not morally – the power relations between humans and animals as

15 For example: Sarah E. McFarland / Ryan Hediger (eds): *Animals and Agency: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*. Leiden: Brill 2009; Chris Pearson: History and Animal Agencies. In: Linda Kalof (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2017, pp. 240–257; Susan McHugh: Literary Animal Agents. In: *PMLA* 124:2 (2009), pp. 487–495; Mieke Roscher: Actors or Agents? Defining the Concept of Relational Agency in (Historical) Wildlife Encounters. In: Jessica Ullrich / Alexandra Böhm (eds): *Animal Encounters*. Stuttgart: Metzler 2019, pp. 149–170.

16 Bob Carter / Nickie Charles: Animals, Agency and Resistance. In: *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 43:3 (2013), pp. 322–340.

fundamentally asymmetrical. Still, most scholars in the field maintain that these imbalances are worth looking at if only to show how they are in flux and historically contingent. Especially by making the social structures defined by multi-relations the focal point of their inquiry, they hope to illustrate the different social positionings of animals at particular points in time, which are, in turn, the result of species *and* cultural affiliation and which determine the scope of any activity.

What would it now mean to consider the hierarchical multi-relations for the history of one tortoise born in the Galápagos Islands sometime around the 1830s? It would mean that, yes, Harriet was forcefully taken from her home island in the wake of the explorative voyages of European scientists,[17] and that, yes, she had little control over her own life. This was, however, also true for many humans in a world shaken up by the new stratifications of class society as well as the waning of the indentured labor system and slavery, all of which produced unfree labor.[18]

If we consider these power asymmetries (determining the extent and degree of agency), we can adopt an understanding of agency that is implicitly relational as it reveals itself in relationships, and view social settings as something that includes both human and nonhuman animals. After all, it is through social figuration that animals are integrated into meaningful relations.[19] Understood in this manner, agency becomes visible in interactions between humans and other animals, and in a wide range of different practices. These practices include riding, hunting, breeding, trading, loving, attending, presenting, drawing, cooking, killing, and eating animals. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, many, if not all, of these practices were also carried out with and on tortoises.

17 Owen: Collecting Artefacts; see also Dane Kennedy: British Exploration in the Nineteenth Century: A Historiographical Survey. In: *History Compass* 5:6 (2007), pp. 1879–1900; Tony Ballantyne (ed.): *Science, Empire and the European Exploration of the Pacific*. London: Routledge 2018.

18 The classic texts on this issue are Edward P. Thompson: *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Gollancz 1963; and Kay Saunders (ed.): *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834–1920*. London: Routledge 2018; on the context of slavery, see the recent PhD project by Christopher Michael Blakely: *Inhuman Empire: Slavery and Nonhuman Animals in the British Atlantic World*. Doctoral thesis, 2019. https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/61693/ (accessed: June 10, 2021).

19 Nadir Weber: Das Bestiarium des Duc de Saint-Simon: Zur „humanimalen Sozialität" am französischen Königshof um 1700. In: *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 43:1 (2016), pp. 27–59. https://doi.org/10.3790/zhf.43.1.27 (accessed: January 24, 2022).

For all these relations, whether they were formed through practices of animal keeping or of collecting animals like Harriet in order to study them, we should not ignore the importance of affect and intercorporeal exchange that have resulted in the forging of agency within the participating subjects. This means that relations are not fully asymmetrical but, in fact, much more complex. Furthermore, by singling out individual animals and by relating their lives to those of the humans who have accompanied, studied, killed, cooked, dissected, and adored them, it is possible to map the specific social and historical contexts that have produced the ideas of certain species at certain times but are also constantly influenced by their real physical presences and action.[20] Such meaning-making practices appear, however, as only one part of a multispecies sociality that needs to be considered in full. To put it bluntly: without the animals that Darwin encountered, no meaning could have been attributed to his writing; they are literally the flesh and bone of the narration. Framed in this manner, relational agency destabilizes classical dichotomies between action and reaction, and considers animals as active partners in the making of specific cultural, scientific, and social meanings, thereby offering opportunities for telling stories from a different perspective.[21] In line with Haraway's notion that relation is "the smallest possible unit of analysis,"[22] relational agency can be observed between all beings and species, but especially between individual specimens of a species, and between one animal and one human. If we consider the relations between human and nonhuman animals, it is also possible to examine the ways in which animals have established and influenced relationships with humans.

The question is, however, how relational agency can be identified and traced. How does one read the source material in a way that runs counter to traditional narratives about the relationship between, for example, Darwin and Harriet as one-directional? To be sure, one could consider how human-tortoise relations developed over time. Hunted as food by pirates, whalers, and

20 For the biographical method, see André Krebber / Mieke Roscher (eds): *Animal Biographies: Reframing Animal Lives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2018.

21 Relational agency is my term. Others have used similar concepts, also suggesting that animal agency is best considered not as a fixed set of capacities but as revealing itself in processes and in relationships with humans. See Vinciane Despret: From Secret Agents to Interagency. In: *History and Theory* 52:4 (2013), pp. 29–44; Philip Howell: Animals, Agency and History. In: Hilda Kean / Philip Howell (eds): *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*. Abingdon / New York: Routledge 2019, pp. 197–221.

22 Donna J. Haraway: *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm 2004, p. 24.

merchants during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, more than 200,000 tortoises were killed or extracted for scientific research between 1830 and 1870 alone, the period in which Darwin visited the Galápagos Islands.[23] Human-tortoise relations were thus primarily defined by killing and eating. But Darwin's account also includes clues that indicate that he perceived tortoises as distinct individuals with distinct personalities and individuality. He noted that "the inhabitants [...] state that they can distinguish the tortoises from the different islands; and that they differ not only in size, but in other characters."[24] He discovered that these tortoises had evolved over the course of time and had adapted to their environment. It was through different responses to his presence that he came to recognize their distinct personalities and to see them as individuals: his observations of tortoises pursuing various activities such as feeding, moving, or hissing at or ignoring him, were foundational for his subsequent work. Other things to consider when looking for evidence of relational agency are the working environments of those involved with Harriet or other tortoises, whether they were the members of the ship's crew, museum staff, or the zookeepers who took care of her and other tortoises in Australia.[25] Indeed, Harriet's story is quite well documented, as curators at the zoo in Australia learned when they were looking for evidence that Harriet had indeed met Darwin.[26] As Wiebke Reinert has shown in her analysis of California sea lions, zookeepers were engaged in multilayered (working) relationships with animals that not only revealed the general character to which Darwin was referring but also what that character meant for day-to-day interactions.[27] It is thus through the relationships that were formed and that – in Darwin's case – were chronicled through (his) writing that historians are able to make inferences regarding the agency of individual animals.

23 Paul Chambers: *A Sheltered Life: The Unexpected History of the Giant Tortoise*. London: Murray 2004.

24 Darwin: *Journal of Researches*, p. 384.

25 Nicola Foote / Charles W. Gunnels: Exploring Early Human-Animal Encounters in the Galápagos Islands Using a Historical Zoology Approach. In: Susan Nance (ed.): *The Historical Animal*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP 2015, pp. 203–220, here p. 212.

26 Thomson / Irwin / Irwin: Harriet, The Galápagos Tortoise, p. 33.

27 Wiebke Reinert: *Applaus der Robbe: Arbeit und Vergnügen im Zoo, 1850–1970*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2020; see also idem: Betwixt and Between: Making Makeshift Animals in Nineteenth-Century Zoological Gardens. In: Philip Howell / Aline Steinbrecher / Clemens Wischermann (eds)*: Animal History in the Modern City: Exploring Liminality*. London: Bloomsbury 2018, pp. 181–200.

3. Tortoise practices: Animals and praxeology

Darwin spent quite some time with the tortoises on the Galápagos Islands, observing them and also engaging in other kinds of activities. He notes in his diary that

> the inhabitants believe that these animals are absolutely deaf; certainly they do not overhear a person walking close behind them. I was always amused when overtaking one of these great monsters, as it was quietly pacing along, to see how suddenly, the instant I passed, it would draw in its head and legs, and uttering a deep hiss fall to the ground with a heavy sound, as if struck dead. I frequently got on their backs, and then giving a few raps on the hinder part of their shells, they would rise up and walk away.[28]

Multispecies ethnographers look in particular at how these relations are performed in concrete practices, and this has become another method employed by human-animal studies scholars seeking to recount interactions between human and nonhuman animals.[29] Historians can adapt these perspectives by looking at how performances shaped the thinking *and* doings of the actors. When Elizabeth Hennessy writes that "animals [...] change because of the ways that they become entangled in social life" and that through this entanglement "they change history too," she is referring to the fundamental prerequisites for the potential historiographical framing of practices.[30] First explicitly articulated by historian Susan Pearson and anthropologist Mary Weismantel in 2010, human-animal practices are defined as elemental to the social environment that constitutes human societies.[31] Hennessy describes this social context as follows:

> Giant tortoises are both objects and agents of a socionatural history in which people and animals – and plants and all nature – together make history, though not on equal terms or in conditions of any of our own choosing.[32]

28 Darwin: *Journal of Researches*, p. 384.

29 On multispecies ethnography, see Eben Kirksey / Stefan Helmreich: The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography. In: *Cultural Anthropology* 25:4 (2010), pp. 545–576.

30 Hennessy: *Backs of Tortoises*, p. 12.

31 Susan J. Pearson / Mary J. Weismantel: Does "The Animal" Exist? Toward a Theory of Social Life with Animals. In: Dorothee Brantz (ed.): *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P 2010, pp. 17–37.

32 Hennessy: *Backs of Tortoises*, p. 16.

It was, after all, the practice of collecting animal specimens that characterized the age of exploration and then continued in the age of empire. Animals appear to be part of the setting in the *narratives* that recounted these discoveries, yet they were also at the core of its *practice*. Animal history that examines such practices seeks to capture the history in the making that produces and is *made* by animals. Evolutionary history would not have been written in the same manner were it not for the animals crawling, flying, or swimming through it. As historian Nicola Foote and animal behaviorist Charles W. Gunnels argue in an article that aims to adapt zoological theory to historical analysis,

> [t]his effort begins by embedding any interpretation of animals through their *umwelt*, which describes the unique sensory and experiential world of each animal. In zoology, this approach allows rich descriptions of animal perspectives without falling into the paired traps of anthropomorphism and human exceptionalism.[33]

Animal practices conceptualized in this manner rely, on the one hand, on the embeddedness of interactions within the (human) social realm and, on the other, on the acceptance that the animals involved in this social space experience it in a unique way. Applying approaches in historical human-animal studies that draw on theories of practice means considering what we do with animals, what they do, and the material consequences of those actions. After all, it was the distinct performance of a specific nonhuman species, tortoises, in relation to human hunters, caretakers, killers, and collectors that have defined how these animals have behaved and been perceived in their environments. Performativity relies on bodily interaction, it relies on some sort of relation, be it intentional or accidental. It is only in interspecies interactions that the relational agency I have argued for above emerges.

Applying a praxeological perspective, which is most commonly understood as research into practices, then, means to accept the concept of species as a social relation and the product of a praxiographic endeavor.[34] Following Annemarie Mol, praxiography can be described as a method that "take[s] notice of the techniques that make things visible, audible, tangible, knowable."[35]

33 Foote / Gunnels: Human-Animal Encounters in the Galápagos, pp. 204–205 (emphasis in original).

34 Eben Kirksey: Species: A Praxiographic Study. In: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21:4 (2015), pp. 758–780.

35 Annemarie Mol: *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice.* Durham, NC: Duke UP 2002, p. 33.

This approach allows animal historians to depict animals as historically constructed. Furthermore, it helps them to show that the concept of species is also performed, especially through differentiations between human and nonhuman animals. In line with Gabrielle Spiegel's take on praxiography, animal practices are increasingly being depicted in human-animal studies as culturally co-constitutive, and the field has followed her, moving away from "culture as discourse to[ward] culture as practice and performance."[36] Harriet, seen in this light, is not part of the historical narrative because of her natural desire to eat, hiss, or stroll, but because her performances took place in a culture of observation and exploration. It is thus through the practices described in the source material that historians are able to uncover past relations and therefore also the agency of animals.

4. Tortoise bodies: Animal materiality

The material value of tortoises, their utilization as food, drink, fuel, and scientific specimens, has been highlighted in all accounts of Darwin's visit to the Galápagos written by his contemporaries: "In the days before refrigeration, the tortoises embodied an ideal, low-maintenance way to transport fresh meat and fat."[37] However, their build and weight – male tortoises can weigh more than half a ton – at times prevented crews from capturing live animals as provisions. Some of the large male specimens on the islands eventually became venerated icons in their own right. According to Foote and Gunnels, those "celebrity animals" were used as a sort of premodern graffiti wall, with sailors carving their names in the shells of the living animals, who would then bear material testimony not only to a history of the encounter itself, but also to the different value systems attributed to them.[38] This is also because the bodily contours of tortoises varied significantly: on one island, they had saddle-shaped shells, while those on another island had dome-shaped shells. People who lived on the islands could even tell the island a turtle came from by its shell.

Scrutinizing the material dimension of the interspecific encounter is another approach utilized by human-animal studies scholars to examine how animals

36 Gabrielle M. Spiegel: Introduction. In: Idem (ed.): *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*. New York: Psychology Press 2005, pp. 1–31, here p. 3.

37 Hennessy: *Backs of Tortoises*, p. 37.

38 Foote / Gunnels: Human-Animal Encounters in the Galápagos, pp. 215–216.

make meaning. Following new trends in material culture studies and new philosophical materialism, they have focused on the social meaning of objects, including dead animals, such as the taxidermies of exotic animals that natural history museums mounted in the second half of the nineteenth century.[39] In these spaces, social meaning and hierarchies were constructed through the arrangement and presentation of artefacts.[40] Again, this may be particularly true of animals such as Harriet, which were at the heart of the exploration craze. One could argue that putting animals on display was a way to demonstrate one's dominance as a species, as a colonial power, and so on. All of these practices, to be sure, generated particular material objects that are now stowed away in archives and cabinets of curiosities, presented in museums, analyzed in laboratories. The ambiguous, liminal status of these animal objects is often related to the changing cultural assumptions that underlie them. By focusing on these transformations of animal objects in specific cultures or over time, human-animal studies has followed the approach proposed by Erica Fudge, who argues that "a living animal and animal matter are not separate categories. Like subject and object, they are utterly intertwined."[41] Of course, this is also true for other animals and animal-made objects involved in other instances of social contact in that same period. These ritualistic bodily entanglements with animals are thus disentangled by scholars in the field in much the same way as animal-related practices are in view of the implicit or explicit expression of power relations. The hope here is to better tease out the biopolitical meaning of animals when framing them as material objects first and as sociocultural beings second. The bodily companionship is then described by paying attention not just to the symbolism and representationalism but to the material, biopolitical consequences for both humans and animals. Consider the case of Harriet: she might have been a representative of both evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century and of species extinction in the late twentieth century, but it was only through her material existence that these discourses

39 Helen Cowie*: Exhibiting Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Empathy, Education, Entertainment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014.

40 Julia Courtney: The Secret Lives of Dead Animals: Exploring Victorian Taxidermy. In: Helen Kingstone / Kate Lister (eds): *Paraphernalia! Victorian Objects.* New York / London: Routledge 2018, pp. 122–140.

41 Erica Fudge: Renaissance Animal Things. In: Joan B. Landes / Paul Youngquist / Paula Young Lee (eds): *Gorgeous Beasts: Animal Bodies in Historical Perspective*. University Park, PA: U of Pennsylvania P 2012, pp. 41–56, here p. 42.

made it into a historical narrative. Considering the material bodily existence of animals thus grounds performance theories in such a way that the significance of human-animal relations and their spatial surroundings are always taken into account.

5. Tortoise places: Animal spaces

Admittedly, Harriet and Darwin met in a specific spatial environment. It was not until the sixteenth century that humans encountered the animals living on the Galápagos Islands in their natural habitat. The idea of *first contact* between the species and what it meant for them is therefore much easier to trace back and to recount. Furthermore, the isolation of the islands, now a "living museum of evolution"[42] and often perceived as a mythical Eden, has allowed researchers to examine interspecific relations without any major disruptions. Focusing on the places of cohabitation and on different mappings of life with animals has become a central feature of the human-animal studies perspective, not only in the field of animal geography.[43] However, spatial interspecies encounters here are seen not only as microscopic displays of general human-animal relations but also as something that more precisely reveals the particularities of, for example, the age of discovery, in which animals played, as noted earlier, an important role. As Hennessy writes:

> The idea that the Galápagos archipelago is an evolutionary Eden is a "geographical imagination" – a powerful way of understanding and engaging with particular places that reflects social, class, and political positions and has profound material effects. The evolutionary Eden trope draws from a long history of romantic ideas about desert island Edens in Western culture.[44]

Hence, taking a spatial approach means considering the imaginative and ideological positioning of animals as stand-ins for cultural geopolitical ideas and *contact zones*, or as separation tropes of alleged inferiorities. It is also a means of reflecting on the diverse ways in which nonhuman animals have been quite literally "penned in" by human beings and examining how animals shape

42 Hennessy: *Backs of Tortoises*, p. 6.

43 Alice J. Hovorka: Animal Geographies II: Hybridizing. In: *Progress in Human Geography* 42:3 (2018), pp. 453–462.

44 Hennessy: *Backs of Tortoises*, p. 10.

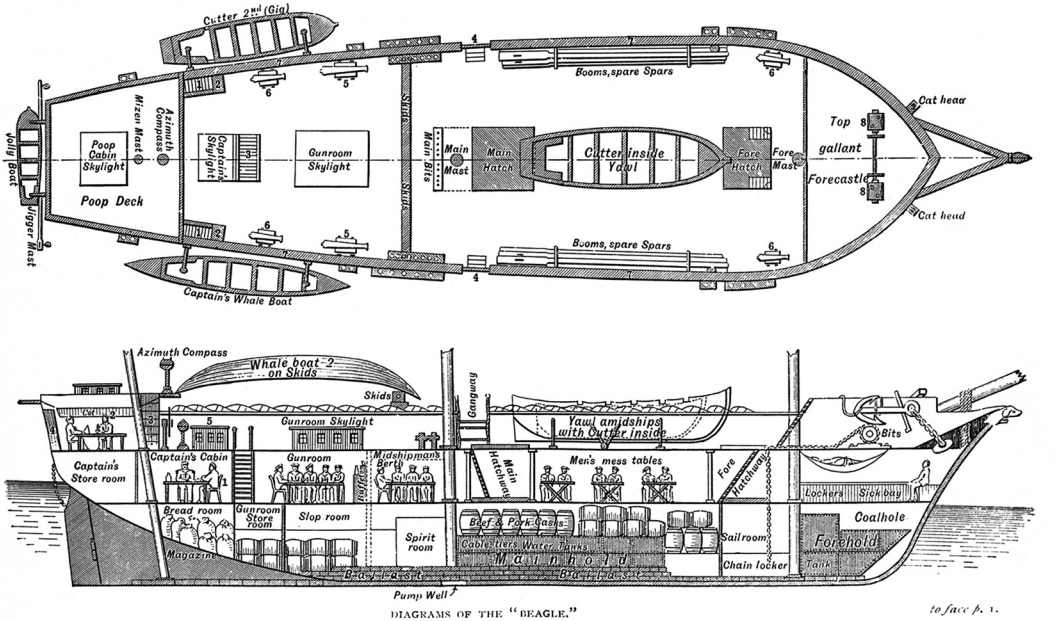

Fig. 2: HMS Beagle. Galápagos tortoises were stacked in the lower hold. Philip Gidley King*: H. M. S Beagle, incorporating Middle Section, Fore and Aft 1832*, line drawing, 1897.

places themselves or in relation to humans. Animals seen from this perspective not only endure but also influence the shared landscapes that are produced. In the case of the tortoises on the Galápagos Islands, one could, for example, consider Harriet's passage on the *Beagle*. It is assumed that as many as forty tortoises were stowed under the ship's deck. (Fig. 2) Most were used as food, others were kept as keepsakes, and a few, including Harriet, as scientific specimens. The space they occupied aboard the ship did not necessarily foretell where they would end up. One would thus need to consider their respective ideological position – either as food, as scientific objects, or as pets – to follow up on questions about the representation of tortoises. In Darwin's text, for example, the scientific interest clearly alleviates the status of the animals ideologically, yet the specimen he took did not necessarily benefit from his interest in them.

One could also choose to take a more integrative path by looking at shared and produced spaces. Harriet was taken from England to Australia to be displayed in a zoo that functioned, as most zoos did at that time, as a microcosm for imperialism. The colonial dimension of zoo politics and its zoogeographic consequences, the cultural imperialism accompanying exhibitions

of the exotic, and the ideology of empire building were clearly mirrored in the animals on display, but the idea of empire was also produced through them.[45] Monitoring the systemic consequences of human-animal relations that are a result of where animals are placed helps animal historians but also scholars in the wider field of human-animal studies to analyze the biopolitical fallout of these encounters. This is relevant to the practice of collecting and observing animals, especially in places such as the Galápagos Islands, where the microcosm of the extinction debate has been narrowed down to some *flagship species*, species chosen to raise support for biodiversity conservation. This is why human-animal studies, by looking at shared mappings and usages of space and place, can chart the relations between humans and animals more precisely than by looking at the practices of, say, collecting alone. Places structure relationships in a fundamental way, and the spatial ordering of animals significantly affects the social order of both human and nonhuman animals.[46]

6. Toward a political history of tortoises

Taking all these perspectives on animal agency, practice, materiality, and spatiality into account, I propose an approach that I refer to as a political history of animals and that builds on the considerations above.[47] This approach combines material interactions between humans and animals (and the impact of these interactions on animal lives, bodies, and so on) with their discursively charged representations. Through this lens, it is possible to identify (both materially and discursively) a distinct mode of *producing* animals. Underlying this argument is the assumption that this process of production relies on constant exchange with the animal. This exchange can also be regarded as a process of political negotiation via or with the animal. In other words: Darwin was first and foremost negotiating through animals the impact of the environment on their appearance. He was able to show that there could be distinct specimens of the same species only one island away, specimens that,

45 See for example Robert W. Jones: The Sight of Creatures Strange to Our Clime: London Zoo and the Consumption of the Exotic. In: *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2:1 (1997), pp. 1–26.

46 Jacob Bull / Tora Holmberg / Cecilia Åsberg (eds): *Animal Places: Lively Cartographies of Human-Animal Relations*. London: Routledge 2017.

47 I outline this approach more substantially in: Mieke Roscher: New Political History and the Writing of Animal Lives. In: Hilda Kean / Philip Howell (eds): *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*. London: Routledge 2018, pp. 53–75.

however, looked radically different from the ones on the island he first visited. Added to this rather straightforward description is an underlying subtext, one that was, of course, at least not directly intended by the author. As is well known, the idea of social development was also negotiated via animal evolutionary systems, and there were very few issues in the nineteenth century that were more controversial than evolution.[48] This debate, however, centered not only on the idea of the animal, but also on the animals that were displayed in the museums and zoos of London, Amsterdam, Berlin, and other colonial metropolises and that were actively used as a constant reminder of the special place of "mankind," or, alternatively, the white, male European of a certain social standing. This story therefore built on a certain interpretation of Darwin's material findings. Apes in particular, but to a certain extent other (exotic) animals such as tortoises as well, came to represent certain political discourses that shaped the nineteenth century.

The political history of animals proposed here is a response to critics of human-animal studies who argue that animals leave no intentional traces, are without a sense of history, can only ever be encountered through human representation, and thus must be reduced to their symbolic construction. This approach aims to cut the "material-semiotic knots"[49] that create this symbolism, this "representationalism" in the first place. In a first step, a political history of animals would trace the spatial and physical presence of animals and their actions, all of which can be found in the diverse sources available. These could include geographical sketches of the Galápagos Islands as scenes of first contact, of the ships that transported the tortoises, or of the zoos and museums where they were often displayed. A second step would include looking at the specific process of producing animals as the result of human-animal relations, both physically through breeding or selection, and symbolically by assigning properties and characteristics to animals. The beginnings of tortoise conservation programs in 1985 and the repatriation of animals to the Galápagos from zoos across the globe come to mind here. Lastly, a political history of animals would reflect upon the extent to which these tortoises were discursively charged. What did it mean, for example, that some of the animals on display were seen as "lesser," some as "higher" animals? What was the implication of the fact that some were displayed as being closer to humans than

48 It is also well established that Darwin did not have some sort of epiphany when he visited the Galápagos Islands and instead only came to his theory once he was back in England studying his specimens. See Frank J. Sulloway: Tantalizing Tortoises and the Darwin-Galápagos Legend. In: *Journal of the History of Biology* 42:1 (2009), pp. 3–31.

49 Haraway: *When Species Meet*, p. 4.

others? How did their exoticism and uncommonness make them more palatable for interspecific analogies, and to what extent did the association between *race* and breed play into these animal related discourses? To understand the impact and impressions of the "real" animals, it is necessary to consider their entangled meaning at a specific time.

7. Conclusion: Harriet's story retold

In a short essay called "On the Animal Turn" (2007), the other Harriet, Harriet Ritvo the historian, remarks that human-animal studies is far from becoming mainstream in cultural and social studies. However, this "very marginality," she notes, "allows the study of animals to challenge settled assumptions and relationships to re-raise the largest issues both within the community of scholars and in the larger society to which they and their subjects belong."[50] Complicating a dualistic perspective of the human vs. the other animals thus allows us to ask the question: where does Harriet the tortoise belong? Even if the world did not begin with her shell or was not built on her back, she was, over the course of her lifetime, part of very different social systems and stood for very different cultural discourses.

This makes her a perfect specimen for also considering how thinking about human-animal relations can help students to develop the ability to consider an issue from different perspectives (multiperspectivity), an educational goal pursued by many proponents of the didactics of history. Looking at the practice of classifying animals, students can learn much about human society and (the development of) its structures. Imperialism, colonialism, and the emergence of science in the bourgeois world are all topics fundamental to an understanding of nineteenth-century history. Debates on the place and the rights of animals are closely linked to these developments. Changes in social structures equally reflect lived relationships with animals. In the classroom, this means regarding Harriet not just as a representative of her species but also as a victim and a product of the colonial history of European exploration, which could be taught from multiple perspectives. By analyzing how zoos, for example, simultaneously functioned as colonial brokers, cultural agents, and scientific institutions, students can begin to interrogate many narratives of imperial advancement and to question the role that humans – as well as nonhuman animals – have played in them.

50 Harriet Ritvo: On the Animal Turn. In: *Daedelus* 136:4 (2007), pp. 118–122, here p. 122.

By adopting a political history of animals in the classroom, i. e., by asking students to engage with the symbolism of animals and their agency, practices, and materialities, it is possible to get a better sense of how past societies understood themselves. Furthermore, such didactics help to illustrate the complexities of the historical processes of transformation accompanying, say, the age of discovery while at the same time highlighting, by way of the critical reading of sources, how entanglements between humans and animals have shaped, for example, the ideas of the metropolis and the colonial periphery.

With this in mind, we can get a glimpse of animals such as Harriet and their impact on humans like Darwin, and we can teach and write about relationships, be they rational or emotional, close or more distanced. We must then, however, align these relationships with the relationships that were possible at a specific point in time. In other words, we must ask what kinds of relations were permissible and could be written about. With such detailed analyses, it should become apparent that there is no such thing as *the* animal or *the* human-animal-relationship, but that there is a whole spectrum of possible relationships, and that the one between Darwin and Harriet was framed by a specific historical context and by the respective ways in which they existed in the world. Such an analysis will reveal that the "settled assumption" about the passive role of animals in history, society, and culture needs to be challenged. If done correctly, Harriet will get the narrative she deserves: a narrative that takes into account the hardships that she and her species faced, her prominent role in the extinction debate, and also the various relationships that she had with handlers, with those who studied her, and with those with whom she shared spaces in pens, cages, or in the natural habitat of her youth on the Galápagos Islands. This would also illustrate that Harriet can be conceived of as a historical figure whose story is worth redeeming. To be sure, she was part of various interspecific relationships, even if Darwin may not have been a member of any of them.

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