
Beastly Natures

*Animals, Humans,
and the Study of History*

EDITED BY DOROTHEE BRANTZ



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Does "The Animal" Exist?

*Toward a Theory of Social Life
with Animals*

SUSAN J. PEARSON AND
MARY WEISMANTTEL

Animals still elude us. As numerous conference panels, symposia, books, book series, and academic journals attest, the field of animal studies has become an extraordinarily rich and productive one; yet, despite all our efforts, the animals of our scholarship too often figure only as "objects in human culture," containers of human projections, and as useful tools for drawing social boundaries. When we try to imagine them otherwise, to see them in and of themselves—we fail; ultimately, we find ourselves strangely condemned to replicate, in slightly different terms, the long-standing opposition between nature and culture.¹ Caught between the Scylla of anthropomorphism and the Charybdis of anthropocentrism, can scholars ever regard the animal as more than a symbol?²

We believe it to be possible, but the obstacles to doing so are numerous and formidable. The field of animal studies currently suffers from an inadequate theorization of animals as historical actors, as well as of the social world within which animals and humans live and interact. We seek not the replacement of imagined animals with edible ones, but rather a new theoretical formulation that incorporates symbolic approaches with social and material history. As an anthropologist and a historian, we seek an interdisciplinary approach in which insights from the fields of ethnography and geography can help to refocus attention on the spatiotemporal aspects of human-animal interactions.

A Philosophical Question: Does "The Animal" Exist?

Without a Trace; or, Are Animals Historical Beings?

The challenge of writing animals into history is a multidimensional one. It is *ontological*, a question of imagining animal being. It is *epistemological*, a discursive dilemma constituted by the nonverbal nature of our communication with animals. But it is also *methodological*. Erica Fudge recounts her disappointment when, in the course of her research for a history of animals, she found that "they had no voices and left no textual traces."³ Ultimately, the problem and its solution are *historical*: limitations that appear to be intrinsic to the animal condition are in fact historically and culturally specific. These three dimensions are inextricably linked, for the methodological difficulty of documenting animal lives is taken as evidence of an ontological problem inherent in animals themselves, and hence as epistemological grounds for excluding animals from history.

Language has long been used to distinguish humans as the sole possessors of culture, thereby relegating all other animals to the realm of nature. This point was famously articulated by that exemplar of metaphysical dualism René Descartes. For Descartes, animals' lack of language demonstrated their lack of consciousness and thus of suffering and soul. In this circular logic, animals' inability to express consciousness is offered as conclusive proof that they do not have any.⁴ That scholars studying animals regard their subjects as having "no voices and no traces" is, then, more than a methodological impediment: the inability to signify is a condition of animality itself. This ontological defect writes animals out of history for language—connected by Descartes and others to rationality, consciousness, and subjectivity—has been the established prerequisite for being a subject in and of history. The anthropologists Jack Goody and Ian Watt, for instance, consider history itself the product of linguistic development. "Man's biological evolution shades into prehistory when he becomes a language-using animal; add writing, and history proper begins." The scholarly study of these stages is, they contend, respectively divided among zoology, anthropology, and sociology. In this scheme, animals and the nonliterate cannot participate in history for they are unable to objectify the world and the passage of time. Oral cultures have the absolute time of memory and myth; only the literate have "historical sensibility."⁵ Instead of consciousness, animals have instinct; instead of history, animals have the "time" of genetic inheritance. Johannes Fabian, in his devastating critique of such logocentric schema, identifies their central flaw as the "denial of coevalness" to those who, in fact, coexist with us within the same temporal frame.

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His focus was on anthropology's relationship to the primitive; his point, however, also illuminates history's relationship to animals.⁶

Animals and Humans: Never Quite Themselves

Just as animals have been denied agency in Western history, so has the intellectual category of *animal* been marginalized in Western philosophy, where for centuries it has constituted the suppressed core of what it means to be human. Contemporary theoretical discussions about the animal's central role in the development of humanist philosophy, however, have not led to a new conceptualization of animals as part of human history. Instead, animals once again appear only to disappear as we look through them at ourselves.⁷

At the heart of Western culture, as Giorgio Agamben has written, is an "anthropological machine," a set of philosophical assumptions that produces *man* by delineating *the animal* as that which man surpasses through spirit, evolution, reason, language, will.⁸ The opposite is likewise true: in her study of medieval animals, for example, Joyce Salisbury finds that "people's definition of animals really amounted to a definition of what it meant to be human."⁹ Ironically, then, the more that humans have attempted to draw clear lines around themselves as a separate order of creation, the more dependent on animality they have become. "Humans," as Erica Fudge writes, "need animals in order to be human."¹⁰

In recent decades, these complacent visions of the human and the animal have been partly dislodged by postmodern revisions of Enlightenment categories. Fudge, for example, asserts that putting animals into history is part of a larger posthumanist project of reconsidering the human subject and its special status.¹¹ No longer the speaker of language, man is now spoken by it; no longer the agent of history and power, man is produced by them; no longer the producer of knowledge, "man" is now its product; no longer the master of animals, man is dependent on them to understand himself. In short, as Cary Wolfe writes, "the 'human,' we now know, is not now, and never was, itself."¹² The main task of postmodern and posthumanist philosophy is not, then, to "seek new—more effective or more authentic—articulations" of the human-animal divide but rather, according to Agamben, "to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness."¹³ If *animal* has been a primary category of alterity within Western culture, and if difference has been the main source of inequality and oppression, then Agamben, Fudge, and others glimpse ethical and even utopian possibilities in the abandonment of the anthropological machine, its levers and gears left to rust in posthistorical time.

But although Fudge suggests that scholars who practice "holistic history" (that is, those who use the study of animals as a means to explore the contingency, constructedness, and ultimate emptiness of traditional Western conceptions of the human subject) go beyond the animal-as-symbol paradigm, it is not altogether clear that this is the case. Even in poststructuralist psychoanalytic accounts of human identity, animals are often denied the same degree of subjectivity as humans. Lacan, for example, claims that they are unable to leave traces. Animals leave their tracks (which are used to identify and classify them according to the same schemata that separate instinct and agency, nature and culture, and man and animals), but because they merely generate these signs rather than manipulating them, animals are not their masters but their subjects. Humans, Lacan asserts, though likewise constituted by language, can come to control the process of signification in ways that animals never can.¹⁴

Radical posthumanists, however, question the desirability of these human traits. Deleuze and Guattari, searching for means to undermine the oedipal self, claim that the animal represents the best kind of alterity, what they call "minoritarian."¹⁵ They celebrate the animal as without individual identity, existing only as a "pack," freed from the filial strictures of modernity; and they exhort their readers to enter into "becoming-animal," a state that "lacks a subject distinct from itself." To experience the animal is to experience deterritorialization, in which the self is overwhelmed and dissolved, for the pack "throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel."¹⁶

Their animal is not a flesh-and-blood creature but a symbol of radical Otherness. According to Steve Baker, animals "for Deleuze and Guattari, seem to operate more as a device of writing—albeit a device which initiated its own forms of political practice—than as living beings whose conditions of life were of direct concern to the writers."¹⁷ Even in postmodernist accounts, then, the category *animal* is essentially an empty one, filled only with the shadows of another abstraction—*human*. Defined primarily as a negative, a lack or an absence, the animal of both modern and postmodern Western discourse remains lifeless, a poor substitute for animals themselves.

But as anthropologists have long been aware, the totalizing sensibility of the Mosaic tradition, with its premise that God gave Man dominion over the beasts, is far from universal. Two of the hoariest puzzles of midcentury ethnography, totemism and cannibalism, arose precisely when Western researchers tried to understand moralities and ontologies in which the divide between animals and humans was not so absolute.

The cannibal—a subject of enduring fascination and revulsion in Europe,

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and the very trope of the savage—has long been used to define a state of moral degradation and thus functions as a symbolic foil for Western sensibilities. This image of a subhuman figure who violates the most deeply held and universal of human values is nothing more than a fiction produced by and for Europeans, just as some postcolonial scholars have argued—but not because, as the latter assume, cannibalism never existed. Instead, the problem lies in the misperception of cannibal logic as amoral rather than as an expression of the radically different moral universe that arises when no animal/human divide exists.

In so-called civilized societies, to eat an animal is morally neutral, to eat a human abhorrent; animals are entitled neither to life nor to dignity after death. There is a striking analogy with the crime of rape, which historically could not occur if the victim was nonwhite or enslaved: no criminality attached to the bodily violation of so abject a social figure. Cannibalism is abhorrent because it too involves a bodily violation, one to which no human—but any animal—can be subjected. In contrast, for foraging and hunting peoples, who view animals as the moral equals of humans, the treatment of the dead poses different questions. The bodies of dead animals, like those of humans, are attended by rituals and protocols; the bodies of dead humans, like those of animals, may upon occasion be eaten. The practice of cannibalism emerges from the belief that a death can be recuperated only by the act of incorporating the victim into one's own body—in other words, the act of eating confers meaning on the death. Since a human life is not considered intrinsically more valuable than an animal's in these communities, treating a human corpse as one treats an animal's—for example, by consuming it—becomes sacramental rather than horrifying. Indeed, as with animals, this act may be seen as a reverent gesture that redeems the horror of death.¹⁸

Totemism also illuminates ontological systems in which the categories of *human* and *animal* intermingle. In this belief system, human groups represent and distinguish themselves from other human groups by identifying with an animal species. This identification is not simply symbolic; rather, it is experienced as deeply embodied and inherently social.¹⁹ One's own body and self is substantively identical with that of one's totem animal and therefore unlike that of different clans.²⁰ Some animals and some people—but not all—are kin. The line between species is less important, in other words, than the line between social groups that include both humans and nonhumans.

In these practices, no single animal can be opposed to humanity, leaving us to conclude—as Judith Butler did about *woman*—that the category of *animal* does not exist. Even in American history, as Virginia Anderson's recent

work demonstrates, the abstract division between humans and animals has not always been as salient as the relationship of certain animals to certain people. That both cattle and deer were animals mattered less, for example, to eighteenth-century Native Americans and English colonists than did the fact that one was a form of property, an extension of colonial powers, and the other was not. These juridical, economic, and social distinctions undermined any categorical similarity. In short, the philosophical question, "Does the animal exist?" demands historical and ethnographic investigation.

Historical and Ethnographic Answers: Toward a Theory of Social Life with Animals

Past scholarship on animals has addressed "animals not as literal living organisms—food, prey, possessions, or companions to man—but as symbols, ideas, or images."²¹ Now, however, we propose that some of those disavowed animal topics be allowed back into the fold. Without rejecting the symbolic, we call for a materialist study of animals as tools; as energy sources; and as concentrated, heritable, and reproducible forms of wealth. In addition, we seek a social-geographic account of the shared and segregated spaces occupied by humans and animals within particular social formations. We urge scholars to recover animals' physical presence in social life; to embed that social life within political economy; and, finally, to plot the spatial dimensions of human-animal relations.

The Social

Claude Lévi-Strauss's famous assertion that totem animals are "good to think [with]" (rather than merely "good to eat," as Bronislaw Malinowski had claimed) was not a comment on animals at all but a wry challenge to contemporary Western views on so-called primitive philosophies.²² Its effect among scholars, however, was to remove animals from the realm of the material to that of the symbolic, where they remain today.

Our relationship to animals is, however, neither wholly symbolic nor wholly material; rather, it is profoundly social. The "social," as Durkheim defined it, is a domain of action and interaction that is neither biological nor psychological, neither wholly material nor individual. The social, he wrote, comprises "ways of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him."²³ In his emphasis on the coercive character of the social, Durkheim removes us from the sphere of pure human "agency" or "will," from that

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fictional world in which humans, but not animals, always manipulate their traces. Far from materialist, Durkheim's concept of the collective unconscious underlines the importance he gave to symbolic processes; however, these are deeply imbricated with social activities, and mutually constituted by and constitutive of them. Our ideas about animals—such as the ontological status that philosophers have assigned to animals—are not arbitrary but originate in the historically specific social organization of human-animal relations. Our very concepts, and the processes by which we arrive at them, are therefore susceptible to study through the methodologies of social history and anthropology.

Consider the famous anthropological example of pigs among the Kaulong of New Guinea. According to Jane Goodale, "the Kaulong consider pigs and humans to occupy a single continuum of existence . . . both hav[e] souls in which the essence of social being is to be found."²⁴ Some individuals are able to live within the bounds of the social, eschewing violence and sexual predation, and contributing to the collective life of their communities; others act like wild animals—unpredictable, dangerous, and impossible to integrate within the social. For the latter, death comes early.

The attitude of New Guinean tribes toward pigs derives from the fact that these animals live with, and like, people. Female pigs are brought into the human family while still piglets and are raised in close physical and emotional contact with women. Anthropologists could not help but notice. Even Roy Rappaport's rigorously scientific study of ecology and pig husbandry among the Tsembaga—*Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People*—includes descriptions of pigs following their mistresses to the gardens, tied to them not by a rope but by a bond of affection. These pigs, he tells us, lived inside villagers' homes, "separated from the living quarters only by a rail fence through which the animal . . . thrust its snout for scratching" by dozing owners, who petted, talked to, and fed "choice morsels" to them.²⁵

Material Traces

If we fail to consider animals' material lives, however, our understanding of these emotional relations remains incomplete. The Tsembaga do not confuse pigs with humans; nor do they regard them as pets. Pigs are raised to be butchered and eaten. This combination violates categories of companion animal/barnyard animal that we use in the West: pigs, although beloved members of the household, are valued not because of their similarities to humans but because of their unique economic role in the community. Rappaport notes the important "contribution to Tsembaga subsistence" that pigs make "by

eating garbage and human feces[.] . . . keeping residential areas clean [and] convert[ing] wastes into materials that may be utilized by their masters."²⁶ More crucially, the emotional intensity of the pig/human relationship culminates in rituals in which pigs are first feted and then slaughtered. On these occasions, pigs reward the owners who have lavished attention on them by providing, through their bodies, physiological, social, and spiritual benefits: they sustain the living with meat, demonstrate the wealth and status of ambitious families, and constitute offerings to the ancestors—thus performing multiple necessary functions, the value of which is enhanced because they require the sacrifice of cherished animal companions.

Rappaport documents in great detail the impact that pigs have on life in New Guinea—all forms of life, including the biotic health of the environment and the spiritual well-being of the human community. In reaffirming his point that history is also made through actions other than utterance and writing, we use empirical evidence to challenge one of the longest-held and most fervently argued distinctions between the animal and the human. For, regardless of their cognitive capacities, animals have everywhere left traces of their presence within social spheres conventionally conceptualized as human, here as well as in New Guinea; the onus is not on the animal to prove its capacities but rather on the historian to follow the evidence.²⁷ These traces are often erased, hidden, or disguised, either through ideology or through social geographies that separate humans and animals, consumers and laborers, urban and rural, pleasure and pain. Indeed, as we argue below, such separations characterize certain historical periods—such as our own—and underwrite the very ontologies that deny an animal is a social being.

While archaeologists regard animal bodies—their bones, skin, horns, and hooves—as important sources of information, historians have consigned them to the realm of natural history, to be interpreted as evidence not of actions and experiences but of immutable laws and natural forces acting upon animals as upon the earth from which their remains emerge. We instead claim these material traces as evidence of a social history, one of specific and temporally varied interactions among multiple species. As the geographers Chris Wilbert and Chris Philo put it, "humans are always, and have always been, enmeshed in social relations with animals . . . animals are undoubtedly constitutive of human societies in all sorts of ways."²⁸ This is a history within which humans play a dominant but not an exclusive role; and it is one that, like all histories, can be recuperated only in partial, fragmentary, and sometimes contradictory forms.

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The economic and social history of the world was once written in terms of animals—not symbolic animals but working ones, or animals that served as humans' prey. Largely discredited except in certain obscure corners of the academy, this venerable tradition of historical studies defined animals in terms of their instrumental capacities: as tools, forms of wealth, and sources of energy. "Without the horse," claims one recent contributor to the history of early Western Europe, "human history would have been entirely different."²⁹ A well-known (and, to some minds, dubious) theory offered by Lynn White some years earlier holds that the establishment of feudalism on the European continent can be traced to the invention of the stirrup. In White's analysis, as in the medieval Europe he studied, animals were fundamental forms of technology.³⁰ Historians of later periods have also recognized the horse as critical to the development of industrialism and the transportation networks that made possible the urban expansion so central to capitalism.³¹

Scholars working in the burgeoning field of environmental history often incorporate animals into their stories of ecological change; as a result, they demonstrate how ecology and human society are historically and analytically inseparable.³² Thus while environmental historians incorporate animals as part of a story about the importance of "nature," they simultaneously disrupt the nature/culture binary on which distinctions between animals and humans—and between disciplines—have traditionally rested.

In anthropology, the story of animals as essential components of economic and technological regimes has also had its day: an earlier generation of scholars thought it was important that sub-Saharan Africa could be divided into areas where cattle could be raised and areas that were infested by tsetse fly; that the introduction of the horse into North America stimulated the sudden efflorescence of Great Plains hunting societies, such as the Blackfoot and the Crow; or that camellid pastoralism in the Andes provided not only meat, fiber for textiles, and cargo transport for Inca armies but also dung for cooking fuel at altitudes above the tree line. Many anthropologists now affect disdain for these once-famous accounts of animals in history, but one small branch of animal studies continues to thrive: taphonomy—that is, the study of faunal remains—which is used by archaeologists to reconstruct the economies, ecologies, and social life of prehistoric and historic communities. In the work of these highly specialized scholars, one can find not only ample data about animals in the past but also a sustained focus on political economy that has become increasingly rare elsewhere in the discipline of animal studies as a whole.

Political Economy

An exception is found in Britain, where the materialist tradition is exemplified in works such as the important collection *What Is an Animal?* edited by the anthropologist Tim Ingold. In that volume, Richard Tapper argues that we should think of our relationships with animals as labor relationships. He proposes the integration of animals into classic Marxian categories by substituting the "nature of *human-animal relations of production*" for the more familiar "relations of production." Doing so not only locates human-animal relationships within social organization but also identifies these relations as forces driving historical change.³³ This broad conceptual framework allows us to unite symbolic analyses with political economy under the single rubric of a mode of animal-human organization. One might similarly consider the importance of animals within European categories of social class, where the putatively biological basis of human difference was instantiated in animals, making members of the same species into a blue-ribbon show dog or a mangy, homeless mutt, a pedigreed athlete owned by royalty or a broken-down cart horse. While it has been documented that animals, like humans, have occupied particular class strata throughout most of European history, this has nonetheless been insufficiently theorized in animal studies; so, too, has the spatial mapping of human-animal relations.³⁴

Space

We look to the spatial as an *instantiation of the social* and thus as a methodological solution to the problem of the absent animal voice. As cultural and social geographers long ago observed, spatial arrangements map the social in both concrete and symbolic terms; reciprocal interactions as well as power structures and hierarchies are spatialized.³⁵ Geographers have lately begun to apply this critical insight to the spatial organization of interspecies relationships.³⁶

A recent study of English colonialism in North America demonstrates how attention to space can illuminate the presence of animals, imagined and real. Virginia Anderson's compelling *Creatures of Empire* puts pigs and cows at the center of the unfolding drama of seventeenth-century Indian-English relations. As Anderson shows, English settlers' practice of animal husbandry dictated the course of colonization and became the motive for all westward expansion. These two species appear as willful social actors: never fully under their owners' control, nominally English cows plundered Native Ameri-

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can corn plots and wandered into the no-man's land of the forests, only to be killed, accidentally and intentionally, by indigenous hunters. Often, conflicts over animals brought settlers and Native Americans into court, where radically different visions of the natural world and the nature of property were thrown into sharp relief. To the colonists, their pigs and cows literally transformed the landscape, representing civilized forms of social organization and modes of production; to Indians, English pigs and cows were both a physical nuisance and a symbol of encroachment. In a very real sense, these relationships caused countless daily frictions and the mounting bad faith that form the backdrop for early American history, an insight that becomes available only when the historian places animals and humans in their "New World spaces—the grazing commons, the corn plot, and the forest."³⁷

Anderson's analysis suggests that rather than asking whether animals have agency, we should be asking who the social actors are in any given situation. In questioning the primacy of agency in history, animal studies draws on the insights of historians of the environment and of slavery. Linda Nash, for example, urges fellow environmental historians to drop their efforts to show that nature has agency and instead to "think about agency in altogether different terms."³⁸ Similarly, Walter Johnson points out that "the term 'agency' smuggles a notion of the universality of a liberal notion [sic] of selfhood . . . right into the middle of a conversation about slavery against which that supposedly natural (at least for white men) condition was originally defined."³⁹ The same can be said of animals, who have long been denied this putatively human force, the motor of history—and then held accountable for their lack.

Instead of understanding agency as a transcendent feature of being—one we can see anywhere if only we look hard enough—we would do better to ask how agency has been defined historically, and how agentive powers have been constructed and distributed through social formations. Animals have affected the societies in which they lived by means of their individual presence within social geographies as well as through the collective needs and capacities of particular species. Because of their often degraded and subjugated status, their ability to effect change has often been sharply curtailed; however, the same is self-evidently true of human actors in many circumstances. Rather than a rationale for ignoring nonhuman actors in our paradigms of what a society is and who its constituents are, the uneven distribution of agency should instead be taken as a defining quality that differentiates one society from another.

Our Animals, Our Scholarship

At the beginning of this essay, we proposed that the barriers to fully incorporating animals into history were variously *ontological*, *epistemological*, *methodological*, and *historical*. To overcome the ontological and epistemological limitations that posit animals as speechless creatures outside of time, we have suggested a methodology based on a renewed concept of the social, integrating its symbolic, political-economic, and spatial dimensions. But what of the historical barriers, not least of which are the millennia of dualistic thought that precludes the inclusion of animals in human concepts of social life and historical narrative? It is not merely the weight of tradition, however, that constrains our vision; rather, the peculiarities of our own social life with animals at this historical moment prevent us from seeing animals' tracks, traces, bodies, and actions. By reflexively considering our own historically constituted relationship to animals, in other words, we may finally be able to escape the epistemological trap that binds both animals and our vision of them.

To illustrate, we offer a final contrast between an earlier society famous for its intimate and binding relationships between humans and animals, and the animal-human political economy of our own time: a brave new world in which working animals for the first time nearly vanish from view but remain critical nonetheless to the operation of the global economy. E. E. Evans-Pritchard's ethnography of North African pastoralists in the early twentieth century, *The Nuer*, presents an argument of unsurpassed elegance for the integration of spatial, economic, and symbolic analyses in interpreting the relationship of animals and humans. Among the many tomes produced by British structural-functionalists in the 1930s and 1940s, few are as widely read today as *The Nuer*, and few chapters within that book are as warmly remembered as the first, "Interest in Cattle," with its line drawings illustrating cattle coloration and children's clay cows; lengthy transcriptions of praise songs to cows addressed as "thou pride of Nyawal" and "my black-rumped white ox"; and memorable descriptions of a "habitually morose" young man suddenly becoming animated as he speaks of his "fine ox . . . with a large white splash on its back," and "throwing up his arms to show you how its horns are trained."⁴⁰ The chapter unfolds a series of propositions about the relationship between the Nuer and their cattle, asserting first that "the Nuer is the parasite of the cow" because of the tribe's total economic, technological, and nutritional dependence on the cow, then reversing the terms and proposing instead that "the cow is the parasite of the Nuer, whose lives are spent in ensuring its welfare." Evans-Pritchard goes on to say: "They build byres,

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kindle fires, and clean kraals for its comfort; move from villages to camps, from camp to camp, and from camps back to villages, for its health, defy wild beasts for its protection; and fashion ornaments for its adornment. It lives its gentle, indolent, sluggish life thanks to the Nuer's devotion. In truth the relationship is symbiotic: cattle and men sustain life by their reciprocal relationship to one another. In this intimate symbiotic relationship men and beasts form a single community of the closest kind."⁴¹ Here, one particular species becomes so closely intertwined with a human group as to render the two inseparable not just in daily life and community ritual but in consciousness as well. The intellectual importance of cattle to the Nuer, like that of pigs to the Tsembaga, is demonstrated indirectly by the fact that both Evans-Pritchard and Rappaport were pushed to write about the animals by their informants. As Evans-Pritchard writes, with his customary dry and incisive wit: "They are always talking about their beasts. I used sometimes to despair that I never discussed anything with the young men but livestock and girls, and even the subject of girls led inevitably to that of cattle. Start on whatever subject I would, and approach it from whatever angle, we would soon be speaking of cows and oxen, heifers and steers, rams and sheep, he-goats and she-goats, calves and lambs and kids. . . . Nuer tend to define all social processes and relationships in terms of cattle. Their social idiom is a bovine idiom."⁴²

This all-pervasive presence of the animal in social life and thus in the intellectual life of human actors throws into stark relief the spatial organization of our own late-capitalist society. Largely disconnected from the working animals on whom so many of our products and so much of our food depends, and in regular contact only with pets and zoo animals, the human-animal relationship in the modern West is both brutally mechanistic and highly symbolic. If our survey of earlier societies has revealed a contrast between the fluid and reciprocal relations that governed human-animal interactions among hunters and tribal pastoralists and the rigidly hierarchized structures of urban and rural Europe, where animals and people might be vagrants, laborers, or elites, then the class structure pertaining to animals today—like that of humans—has reached a dichotomization previously unimaginable.⁴³ The contemporary global economy produces social extremes, condemning some animals to the naked coercion and social isolation imposed by modern factory farming, while consigning others to the affective discipline and incapable intimacy of the bourgeois home.⁴⁴

Hidden behind closed doors and segregated from towns and cities, the processes of raising, slaughtering, and rendering animals into products are industrial and impersonal. Our relationship with these animals thus mirrors

society's spatial and economic organization. The industrialization of farming and its attendant economies of scale have removed from sight the evidence of our intense dependence on animals. Recent studies estimate that between 9 and 10 million animals die each year as a part of food production in the United States (of those millions, more than 90 percent are chickens); these constitute 98 percent of all the animals that humans have contact with, making the rest—including companion animals, hunted animals, and laboratory animals—a *statistically insignificant* 2 percent.⁴⁵ The vast size of factory farms and animal-rendering facilities, along with their location on the urban and social peripheries, is part of a process that corresponds not just to industrialization but also to larger mechanisms of modernization, such as the rationalization and compartmentalization of space into specialized domains.⁴⁶

Factory farming reduces animals to a state of abjection that justly outrages animal-rights activists and that represents unprecedented physical abuse. Our attention here, however, is on how this particular spatial arrangement disguises animals' instrumental significance to humans and thus causes us to misunderstand both what animals are and who we ourselves are. The notion that we can recover animals primarily as symbols is an artifact not only of the centuries-old philosophical tradition discussed above but also of the organization of the human-animal nexus in modern postindustrial societies. The animals that *appear* to populate the industrialized world are those in the zoo, the household pets of the affluent, and the ubiquitous anthropomorphized creatures of children's videos, books, and toys—creatures that John Berger calls the "animals of the mind," which "have been co-opted into the *family* and into the *spectacle*."⁴⁷ The animals visible in the contemporary world really *do* serve a function that is almost exclusively symbolic; they neither work nor actively participate in human institutions and communities. Nevertheless, if the "work" performed by modern animals is almost wholly symbolic, this should be seen as a historical phenomenon, the development of which is linked to the same forces that generated the epistemological, ontological, and metaphysical schemas described above.⁴⁸ The irony is that as animals' symbolic importance makes them the focus of growing popular and scholarly interest, it simultaneously imposes severe limitations on how we can perceive the animals of the past. If we conceptualize our society in its spatial entirety, rather than just in terms of what we see in our daily lives, the picture changes dramatically; so, too, does our understanding of the animal. The factory farm becomes a defining feature of our time and place—and we remember that the animals whose flesh we eat, skins we wear, and bones we use as pet food are actors within our economy, albeit as invisible to us as the

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Mexican immigrant workers who slaughter and process their remains.⁴⁹ The shocking journalistic accounts of what happens within these facilities, which document unparalleled cruelty to animals both in print and on film, suggest that these sites ought to be closely investigated and rigorously theorized by animal-studies scholars.⁵⁰

On the other side of the coin, twenty-first-century pets need to be retheorized as economic actors of crucial importance to the global economy. Reports on the pet industry and its excesses—the boutique stores, restaurants, and nail salons—focus on the hapless consumer as a figure of ridicule, an individual with absurdly overdeveloped tastes and desires.⁵¹ Missing from this picture, of course, is the enormous apparatus of advertising and sales that is constantly creating new customers. It is no accident that the pet, like the "tween," has suddenly emerged from centuries of relative obscurity to become a ravenous consumer with ever-expanding appetites and newly defined needs. If the laboring animal has now been perfectly subordinated to the needs of his employer—his capacity for voluntary social engagement destroyed, his physical capabilities reduced to a single substance extracted with nightmarish efficiency—the consuming animal is undergoing a similarly totalizing transformation. If, in our ruminations on the animal, we can successfully theorize transformations such as these in all their symbolic, spatial, and political-economic ramifications, then we will surely understand a great deal more about our animals, about ourselves, and about the multiple social histories of animal-human interaction that have brought us to this point in history.

(In)Conclusions

While philosophers and theorists have used the category of *animal* to alter-nately construct and deconstruct the category of *human*, in writing a history of the human-animal relationship, more empirically minded scholars have tended to adopt one of two sharply dichotomous views. On the one hand, traditional approaches in both history and anthropology are overly economic and technological, treating animals solely as sources of wealth, labor, or commodities; on the other hand, current culturalist approaches often veer toward the other extreme, viewing animals almost exclusively as sources of symbolic meaning and never recognizing their independent existence. What these approaches lack, we feel, is a developed concept of the social: the entire lived experience of quotidian and extraordinary interactions—embodied and imaginary, material and symbolic—that occur within space and in

particular locations, and involve humans and animals in multiple forms of engagement and exchange. By placing humans and animals together within this active social world, we seek to re-situate them within an amplified understanding of social life. By concentrating on the animal as an intellectual symbol, researchers may preclude even an adequate understanding of this symbolic role, since they miss the opportunity to fully conceptualize the dialectical processes by which symbols arise out of lived experience, in all its social, geographic, and material complexity.

We end with an image from Evans-Pritchard: young Nuer men, he tells us, owners of a single ox, would tether it outside their tent at night, and pin open the door so that they might catch glimpses of its shape against the night sky, filling their dreams. Everything in their lives encouraged them to see their ox as the embodiment of beauty and wealth, the source of human power, and also as a comember of "a corporate community with solidarity of interests."⁵² If we can, in theorizing the animal in the social, begin to put the laboring, consuming, living, dying animal back into our own imaginings—if we can find and follow animals' traces—we may begin to realize that the fiction of a traceless past arises from another contemporary fiction: the one that says we live in a postindustrial and postagricultural society.

Notes

1. Christine Kenyon Jones, *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* (Aldershot, U.K., 2001), 1.
2. We are not the first, nor will we be the last, to note (or lament) that much scholarship in animal studies focuses on the symbolic rather than the material; we simply add to the chorus. See, for example, Erica Fudge's introduction to *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures*, ed. Fudge (Urbana, Ill., 2004); and Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert's introduction to *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations*, ed. Philo and Wilbert (London, 2000).
3. Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Basingstoke, U.K., 2000), 2.
4. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, 1993), 32. For more on the importance of language to defining the human-animal divide, see John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" in *About Looking*, by Berger (1980; repr., New York, 1991), 6; Tim Ingold, "The Animal in the Study of Humanity," in *What Is an Animal?* ed. Ingold, 84–99 (London, 1988); Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), 78–85; Duane Rumbaugh, "Primate

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Language and Cognition: Common Ground," in *Humans and Other Animals*, ed. Arien Mack, 310–20 (Columbus, Ohio, 1999); Matthew Senior, "HAIR: When the Beasts Spoke: Animal Speech and Classical Reason in Descartes and La Fontaine," in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, ed. Jennifer Ham and Senior, 61–84 (New York, 1997); R. W. Serjeantson, "The Passions and Animal Language, 1540–1700," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001): 425–44; Brian Cummings, "Pliny's Literate Elephant and the Idea of Animal Language in Renaissance Thought," in *Renaissance Beasts*, ed. Fudge, 164–83; Cary Wolfe, "In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal," in *Zoologies*, ed. Wolfe, 1–57 (Minneapolis, 2003). For the influence of Cartesian dualism on the question of animal rights, see Gary L. Francione, *Animals, Property, and the Law* (Philadelphia, 1995), 8–10.

5. Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," in *Literary in Traditional Societies*, ed. Goody (Cambridge, U.K., 1968), 27, 34. For a recent reassertion of this position on the relationship between alphabetic literacy and historicity, see Jack Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington, D.C., 2000), 63–85. On the idea that humans are distinct from animals by virtue of having both culture and consciousness of the past, see Bernard Williams, "Prologue: Making Sense of Humanity," in *The Boundaries of Humanity: Humans, Animals, Machines*, ed. James J. Sheehan and Morton Sosna, 13–23 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991); and David Premack and Ann James Premack, "Why Animals Have Neither Culture nor History," in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Tim Ingold, 350–65 (London, 1994).

6. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, 1983), 1–35. For an application of Fabian's idea to the discovery of the New World (which also demonstrates the interpenetration of the writing of history and the writing of anthropology), see Walker D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, 2003), 125–69. We take the denial of coevalness to be the problem to which Erica Fudge refers when she says that animals do not fit the usual periodizations based on human experience (e.g., dogs had no Renaissance) (see Fudge, "A Left-Handed Blow," in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels, 3–18 [Indianapolis, 2002]). For a discussion of thought about the immanence of animals in Western philosophy, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, 2004), particularly his discussion of Heidegger's claim that animals are in the world but do not have a world. For more on Heidegger and animal immanence/human transcendence, see William McNeill, "Life beyond the Organism," in *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, ed. H. Peter Steeves, 197–248 (Albany, 1999). Like Agamben, McNeill tries to find some small opening in Heidegger for a nonessentialist description of humans and animals, though given Heidegger's insistence that the animal is "poor in the world" while the human is "world-forming," this is a difficult proposition.

7. This dynamic brings to mind Marjorie Garber's comment in her book on cross-dressing that, despite the growing scholarly interest in transvestites "as a sign of the constructedness of gender categories," the overwhelming "tendency on the part of many critics has been to look through rather than at the cross-dresser, to turn away from a close encounter with the transvestite, and to want to subsume that figure within one of the two traditional genders. To elide and erase—or to appropriate the transvestite for particular political and critical aims" (*Visible Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* [New York, 1992], 9).
8. Agamben, *The Open*, 92. See also Bruno Latour's notion of the "modern constitution" in his *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).
9. Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1994), 168. Similarly, Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior argue that "the artistic and historic reinvention of humanness has often involved a return to animality" (introduction to *Animal Acts*, ed. Ham and Senior, 1–8, esp. 5).
10. Fudge, *Perceiving Animals*, 2, 4.
11. For more on this, see Wölfe, introduction to *Zoontologies*, ed. Wölfe, ix–xxiii.
12. *Ibid.*, xiii.
13. Agamben, *The Open*, 92.
14. This description of Lacan is taken from Jacques Derrida, "And Say the Animal Responded," in *Zoontologies*, ed. Wölfe, 121–38. Derrida objects to this distinction, claiming that "traces erase (themselves), like everything else, but the structure of the trace is such that it cannot be in anyone's power to erase it" (138).
15. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1987), 232–309.
16. Deleuze and Guattari are not the only theorists to appropriate the "animal" in order to critique contemporary society. The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art recently mounted an exhibition inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's work. (see Nato Thompson, ed., *Becoming Animal: Contemporary Art in the Animal Kingdom* [North Adams, Mass., 2005]). For an examination of how eco-anarchists appropriate animality without critiquing its constitution as radically Other, see Chris Wilbert, "Anti-This—Against-That: Resistances along a Human—Non-Human Axis," in *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance*, ed. Joanne Sharp et al., 238–55 (London, 2000). For a feminist use of Deleuze and Guattari, see Lynda Birke and Luciana Parisi, "Animals, Becoming," in *Animal Others*, ed. Steeves, 55–73; and for feminist uses of animal "otherness," see Marjorie Scholmeier, "The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women's Fiction," in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, 231–62 (Durham, N.C., 1995). For a less postmodern, but no less utopian, appropriation of animal otherness, see Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, D.C., 1996).
17. Steve Baker, "What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like?" in *Representing Animals*, ed. Rothfels, 95.
18. Beth Conklin, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (Austin, 2001).
19. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston, 1963); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (1912; repr., London, 1964). For a particularly rich discussion of these issues, see Tim Ingold, "From Trust to Domination: An Alternative History of Human-Animal Relations," in *Animals and Human Societies: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Aubrey Manning and James Serpell, 1–22 (London, 1994).
20. These societies and their descendants have not, of course, vanished from the earth; far from it. Indeed, in many places non-Western religious, cultural, and aesthetic traditions are flourishing; however, their forms are today hybrid, modern/postmodern, localized/globalized, and so plural as to defy easy categorization; our intent is not to dismiss these important phenomena of the twenty-first century, but we cannot fully discuss them, or their relationship to earlier cultural forms, in this context.
21. Nona C. Flores, introduction to *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Flores (New York, 1996), ix.
22. Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 89. John Berger draws on Lévi-Strauss in his famous essay "Why Look at Animals?" For subsequent invocations of Lévi-Strauss, see Richard Tapper, "Animality, Humanity, Morality, Society," in *What Is an Animal?* ed. Ingold, 47–62; Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester, 1993), 6; and Kenyon-Jones, *Kindred Brutes*, 2. Among the specifically historical works that focus primarily (though not always exclusively) on animals as symbols, as "good to think [with]" are: Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Severine," in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1985), 75–104; Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987); Fudge, *Perceiving Animals*; Fudge, ed., *Renaissance Beasts*; Salisbury, *The Beast Within*; and Kathleen Kete, *Beast in the Boudoir: Pet-keeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994). This list is by no means exhaustive.
23. Emile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, 8th ed., ed. George E. G. Catlin, trans. Sarah A. Solway and John H. Mueller (1895; repr., Chicago, 1962), 3.
24. Jane Goodale, *To Sing with Pigs Is Human: The Concept of a Person in Papua New Guinea* (Seattle, 1995), 247–50.
25. Roy Rappaport, *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People* (1968; repr., New Haven, 1984), 58.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Some material historians have used animal artifacts to reconstruct pet-keep-

ing relations. In general, these scholars document but do not theorize the human-animal relationship (see, for example, Nancy Carlisle, "The Chewed Chair Leg and the Empty Collar: Mementos of Pet Ownership in New England," *Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife: Annual Proceedings* 18 [1993]: 130-46; and Neil Dana Gluckin, "Pet Birds and Cages of the Eighteenth Century," *Early American Life* 8 [1977]: 38-41, 59).

28. Philo and Wilbert, *Animals Spaces*, 2.

29. Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Horse Power: A History of the Horse and the Donkey in Human Societies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 9.

30. Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford, 1962).

31. See, for example, Nicholas Pappayannis, *Horse-Drawn Cabs and Omnibuses in Paris: The Idea of Circulation and the Business of Public Transit* (Baton Rouge, 1996); and Anne Grimshaw, *The Horse: A Bibliography of British Books, 1851-1976* (London, 1982), xi-xvi. See also the essay by Clay McShane and Joel Tarr in this volume.

32. Animals, for example, play a large role in the "Columbian Exchange," the episode that environmental history has contributed to the rethinking of the larger narrative of North and South American history (see Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* [Westport, Ct., 1972]; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* [New York, 1983]); and Elmor G. K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* [Cambridge, U.K., 1994]). For a recent overview of animals in environmental history, see Harriet Ritvo, "Animal Planet," *Environmental History* 9.2 (2004): 204-20, also available online at www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/9.2/ritvo.html.

33. Tappet, "Animality, Humanity, Morality, Society," 52-54.

34. Some scholars, for example, have discussed how animals have been used to articulate human class position (see Darnton, "Workers Revolt?"; Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*; and Kete, *Beast in the Boudoir*).

35. Joanne P. Sharp et al., "Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance," in *Entanglements of Power*, ed. Sharp et al. (London, 2000), 24-30; David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford, 1996).

36. See essays in the following collections: Jennifer Wolch and Jacque Emel, eds., "Bringing the Animals Back In," special issue, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995): 631-760; Philo and Wolch, eds., "Animals and Geography," special issue, *Animals and Society* 6 (1998); Philo and Wilbert, eds., *Animal Spaces*.

37. Virginia Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed America* (New York, 2004), 177.

38. Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" *Environmental History* 10.1 (2005), www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/10.1/nash.html.

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39. Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003): 113-24, esp. 115.

40. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (1940; repr., New York, 1969), 38.

41. *Ibid.*, 36.

42. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

43. Richard Bullitt calls this schism—"on the one hand, highly industrialized animal labor and death, and on the other, highly sentimentalized attention to pets—characteristic of "postdomesticity" (see his *Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships* [New York, 2005]).

44. Katherine Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill, 2006).

45. David Wolfon and Mariann Sullivan, "Foxes in the Hen House: Animals, Agritourism and the Law: A Modern American Fable," in *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, ed. Cass R. Sunstein and Martha C. Nussbaum (Oxford, 2004), 205-33.

46. For the removal of animal industry from the city core over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Dorothee Brantz, "Slaughter in the City: The Establishment of Public Abattoirs in Paris and Berlin, 1780-1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2003); Chris Philo, "Animals, Geography, and the City: Notes on Inclusions and Exclusions," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995): 655-81; and Noelle Vialles, *Animal to Edible* (New York, 1994).

47. Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" 15-16.

48. For the notion of emotional labor, see Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003); for a popular account of the emotional labor of modern pets, see Jon Katz, *The New Work of Dogs: Tending to Life, Love, and Family* (New York, 2003).

49. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York, 2006); Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York, 2001).

50. Sue Coe, for instance, both paints the insides of factory farms and slaughterhouses, and discusses how difficult it is to get access to such spaces (Coe, *Dead Meat* [New York and London, 1995]).

51. Daphne Merkin, "Let the Fur Fly," *New York Times Magazine*, 1 May 2005, 21-24. For a full discussion of anti-pet sentiment, see James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Cambridge, U.K., 1996).

52. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 40.