

Walking in a Web of Animality: An Animality Informed Ethnography for an Inclusive Coexistence With (Other) Animals

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Abstract : As different groups of wild animals are moving from natural to more anthropic environments, the need to overcome the human-animal gap for ethical coexistence becomes a public concern. Ethnology and ethnography play fundamental roles in the understanding of dynamics, perspective and movement in our interaction with (other) animals. In this effort, the Animality perspective provides an essential ethical lens and quality guidance for ethnography. It deconstructs the human/animal distinction and creates an inclusive approach to society. It further transgresses the rigid lines of normalizing images in human cultures, in which individuals are easily marginalized as 'different'. Just like labeling an animal with species-specific behavior, judging and categorizing humans according to culture-specific expectations is easier than recognizing subjectivity. A fusion of anti-speciesist ethnology and ethnography of natural and social sciences can redress the shortcomings of current practices of multispecies ethnography that largely remain within an exclusively normalized human perspective. Empirically, the paper is based on current research on wild urban animals and human movement in Genua (IT), collecting data from systematic observations in the field regarding wild boars and ethnographic data collection over a period of time (18 months) where the human involved are educated in a changing perspective of coexistence. An "animality-ethnography" starts from observing our animal movement, how much and when we move, how we intersect our movement with that of other animals cohabiting with us, how we can observe and know others by moving, and ways of walking. The research will show how (interspecies) socio-cognition implies motion and movement and animal journeys between nature and the city, but also within the cities themselves, where a web of motion becomes the basic cultural matrix for cohabiting spaces, places, and systems. Here, the term "cognition" does not refer just to the brain or mind or intelligence. Indeed, cognition has a lot to do with movement, space, motion, proprioception, and the body. The ability to be informed, not only through what you see but also through the information you get from being in tune with the motion of a shared dynamic. To be an informative presence instead of an active stimulus or passive expectation, where the latter leaves too much space for projections and interpretations. What is proposed here is an understanding of our own animal movement linked to our own animal cognition. The result of breaking down your own culturally prescribed way in ethnographic research is breaking the barrier of limited options for observation and comprehension of the Other. Walking in the same way results in seeing others in the same way, studying them through only one channel of perception, causing a one-dimensional life instead of a multidimensional web. Returning to an understanding of our Animality, our animal movement, being in tune to improve a socio-cognitive context of cohabitation, both with domestic and wild animals, both in a forest or in a metropolis, represents the challenge of the coming years, and the evolution of the next centuries, to both preserve and share cultures, beyond the boundaries of species.

Keywords : antispeciesist ethology, interspecies coexistence, socio-cognition, intersectionality, animality

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