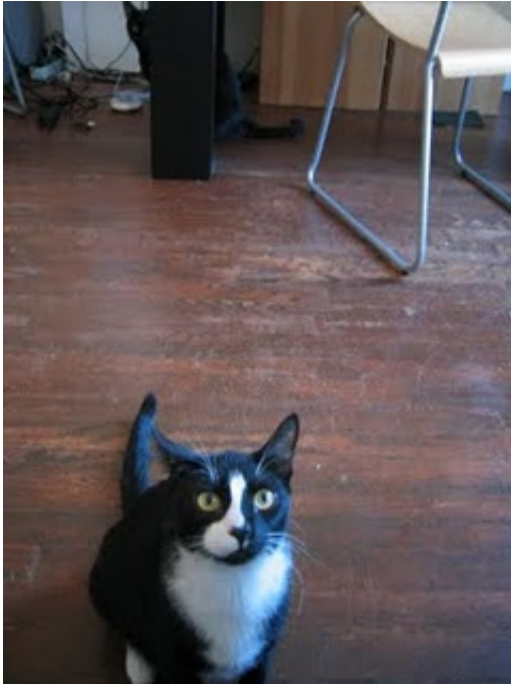


Turning to animals

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By



[The Chronicle Review](#) has a nice series of articles covering the relatively recent turn to “animal studies” among scholars in the humanities and social sciences. [An article by Jennifer Howard](#) examines the emergence of animal studies, discussing related movements in literary and cultural studies, philosophy and ethics, history and the social studies of science.

“Dismantling that model takes animal-studies scholars in different directions depending on their home disciplines and the mix of theory and advocacy that they bring to their work. For historians and sociologists, it might mean investigating the roles assigned to animals in 19th-century Britain, for instance, or the use of canines as forced labor in today’s dogfighting rings. For scholars with literary, cultural-studies, or philosophy pedigrees, animal-studies work clusters around questions of category and subjectivity—how to move beyond the anthropocentric outlook and anthropomorphizing tendencies of humanism in theory and in practice.

Environmentalists and legal scholars have their own ecological or ethical or jurisprudential agendas focused on animals. (For scientists, of course, the phrase “animal studies” usually invokes laboratory experiments involving animals.) If there’s one thread

that ties together practitioners of animal studies, it's that the old ways of thinking about humans and (other) animals must be discarded or transcended," ([Howard 2009](#)).

Howard also emphasizes the tension between scholarly and activist motivations and dispositions which underlies much of the animal studies literature. (In a related vein, a commenter takes her to task for not mentioning Peter Singer's [Animal Liberation](#) as a foundational text).

[Jeffrey Williams discusses](#) the role Donna Haraway's work has played in the animal turn, tracing the development from her "[A Cyborg Manifesto](#)" to the recent [When Species Meet](#).

Haraway's key idea is that animals are "companion species." This phrase seems less provocative than "cyborg," but it has some teeth: It rebuts the traditional Western view that man rightly has "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle" (Genesis 1:26). Haraway sees it the other way around: We are not kings in a great chain of being, but, in her parlance, we are all critters. This idea has a good deal of consequence in how we relate to and what we do with animals.



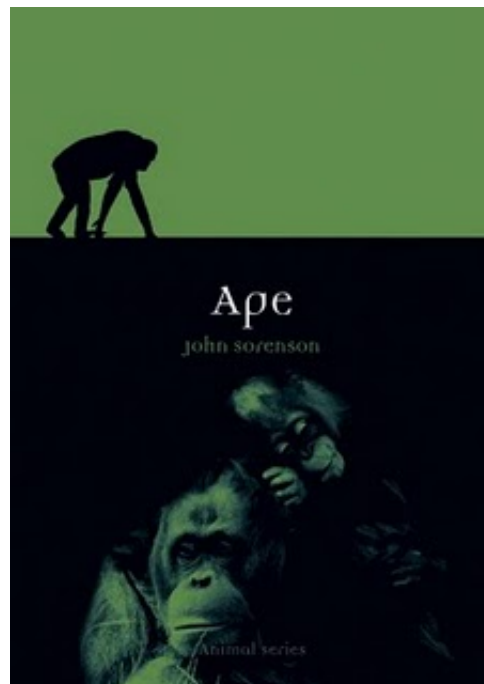
Though animals seem a long way from cyborgs, Haraway sees them as "in the same litter." "I think in ecologies [that] are always at least tri-part: humans, critters other than humans, and technologies," she said. "In the cyborg work, I foregrounded the technological dimensions of that triad, and in the current work I'm foregrounding the other organisms in the triad." Much of her writing examines concepts that we ordinarily think of

as opposed —like organisms and machines or humans and animals—and shows how they interweave.

...

Similar to her argument about the cyborg, that the human does not represent some idyllic state before machines, she holds that we should not consider animals as inhabiting some idyllic state without humans. In her words, rather than seeing “domestic arrangements between human beings and other animals as always the imposition of human domination, ... the history of co-domestication is a multispecies phenomenon. It’s not that we domesticated them and turned them into instruments for our ends, but these are co-evolutions of ourselves and other organisms we live with,” ([Williams 2009](#)).

In “[Moral in Tooth and Claw](#)” Jessica Pierce and Marc Bekoff discuss the argument developed in their [Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals](#) (University of Chicago Press, 2009), that morality “is a suite of interrelated, other-regarding behaviors that cultivate and regulate social interactions,” which have “evolved in many animals, perhaps even in birds.”



[Eric Banks reviews](#) the [Animal series of books](#) published by Reaktion Books. The series is comprised of 34 volumes, “each dedicated to a sort of hybrid natural and cultural biography of a specific creature,” ranging from *Moose*, to *Crow* to *Rhinoceros*, to *Ape*. There is also an [article](#) on the book series and journals focusing on animal studies, although this one—unlike the other articles—requires a subscription.

Generally a nice introduction, although there isn't as much attention paid here to anthropology as there is to other disciplines. It would be good to see a discussion of this animal turn in relation to anthropology per se. If anyone is interesting in writing something along those lines, we'd be happy to run it here!

Some additional sources:

Linda Kalof, Amy Fitzgerald, Jennifer Lerner and Jessica Temeles. [Animal Studies Bibliography](#). A very comprehensive and well-organized list of sources.

Books review forum in *BioSocieties* on "[Animal Evidence](#)." December 2008, 3(4).

Harriet Ritvo, "[on the animal turn](#)," *Daedalus*, Fall 2007, 136(4): 118-122.

Harriet Ritvo, "[Humans & humanists](#)," *Daedalus* Summer 2009, Vol. 138, No. 3: 68–78.

Donna Haraway, [The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness](#). Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

Donna Haraway, [When Species Meet](#). University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Reviewed in [Cultural Anthropology](#), [Feminist Review](#), [History of the Human Sciences](#), [Space and Culture](#), *European Assn for the Study of Science and Technology*, [Savage Minds](#),

Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman eds., [Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism](#). Columbia University Press, 2005.

Eduardo Kohn, "[How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement](#)," *American Ethnologist*, 34(1): 3-24.

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Harvard citation

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MLA citation

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