Centering Animals: Moments of Unlearning, the Pitfalls of Consent and Narrating the Nonhuman Lives in Multispecies Ethnographic Research

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Abstract

This article explores the ethical and methodological challenges of de-centring the human gaze to produce more nuanced and richer accounts of nonhuman animals' lives. Such a shift requires grappling with human-centered research methods and residual anthropocentrism within multispecies scholarship. Drawing on fieldwork conducted at farmed animal sanctuaries in Denmark – spaces dedicated to the care and rehabilitation of animals previously subjected to farming – this article critically examines issues of narration, representation, and 'consent' in human-animal and multispecies research. These sanctuaries serve as multispecies sites that foster sensibilities to and critical reflections on the individuality and social lives of other animals. By integrating first-hand experiences from the research sites with sanctuary aspirations and interspecies practices of care, the article highlights the methodological and theoretical challenges encountered when striving to include the lived experiences of other-than-human beings in research. Despite the availability of critical tools for analysing power dynamics, social representations, and the influence of language, these frameworks often prove insufficient when applied to the complexities of multispecies interactions in the field. Studying interspecies relationships entails an intricate and ongoing process of attentiveness and unlearning preconceived notions about the animal 'other'. Consequently, the article recognizes the methodological limitations and risks of inadvertently reinforcing species hierarchies, even in research driven

by well-meaning intentions. Acknowledging these challenges, the article adopts a cautious approach that emphasizes positionality and reflexivity as critical components of human-animal research. Rather than offering definitive solutions to the problem of human-centrism, it weaves together critical tools and methodologies that contribute to addressing it. Ultimately, this approach is grounded in a dual commitment: to de-centring the human and to re-negotiating nonhuman animals' positions as research participants. In doing so, the article calls for more nuanced and critical engagement with the ethical and representational dilemmas inherent in multispecies research, encouraging scholars to develop methodologies that operate responsibly across species boundaries.

Keywords

Multispecies ethnography, nonhuman research subjects, unlearning, ethical vetting, farmed animal sanctuaries

Introduction

Amid widespread ecological devastation and staggering harm to both human and nonhuman life, scholars are increasingly scrutinizing the role and responsibility of humanistic and social scientific research practices and the knowledge they produce (Chakrabarty). In the realm of human-animal and multispecies studies, this introspection has turned towards examining the dominance of human-centredness and challenging various conceptions of an 'autonomous' human subject detached from ecological networks and interspecies relationships. Specifically, there is a growing body of literature that addresses the methodological limitations of an excessive focus on and overstatement of the human subject in the social sciences. This body of literature critiques previous scholarship for its failure to sufficiently account for the interconnected and larger-than-human webs of lives that comprise our world.

Within these discussions, ethnographic methods have been recognized for their potential to foster attunement with the lifeworlds of other beings (Ogden et al.). This attunement is largely enabled by ethnography's emphasis on nonverbal forms of communication and social interaction, in contrast to the heavy reliance on language and discourse characteristic of conventional qualitative social science methodologies. Notably, the embodied nature of knowledge production in ethnography is seen as particularly effective in cultivating attentiveness to alternative ways of being and engaging with the world through multisensory approaches (Charles et al.; Gillespie, 'For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography'; Hamilton and Taylor). For example, recent scholarship is inspired by non-invasive and attentive methods developed by critically-minded ethologists (for example Piers Locke's ethnoelephantology or Barbara Smuts' primatology), reflecting the view of other animals as 'subjects, agents, creators, and co-creators of their lives and of cultures, differently able to express their agency depending on the structure and contexts in which they live and work' (Coulter 62).

Still, it is essential to engage critically with ethnographic methods and acknowledge the risk of research failing its responsibility to the groups or communities directly involved or affected by the research and its conclusions. Within human-animal scholarship, similar concerns arise about tendencies to neglect the structures of domination and human-centric biases that perpetuate the marginalization and oppression of nonhuman animals (Giraud). Studies also demonstrate that exposure to negative or derogatory portrayals of animals – common in popular media – can shape and reinforce personal attitudes and perceptions of their abilities (Leach et al.). Researchers are evidently not immune to the pervasive cultural normalization of animal exploitation (Linné and Pedersen; Canavan) nor to entrenched tendencies – particularly prevalent in the Global North – to underestimate and devalue cognition and subjectivity in nonhuman animals (Smuts; Gruen and Weil).

These concerns reflect the potential pitfalls and paradoxes inherent in attempts to challenge human-centered biases in multispecies scholarship (Watson; Giraud). For example, research within the field of Critical Animal Studies highlights the human-animal binary as a historical and ongoing site of racial, gender- and species-based struggle, positioning 'the animal' as a central categorical figure of negotiation (Belcourt). Consequently, scholars have proposed that *human* attitudes and behaviour – along with the social structures they reflect – should remain an essential object of study. They caution against treating nonhuman animals as merely objects of study or as an 'unknown' from which knowledge is extracted (Dinker and Pedersen).

In their introductory reader on ethnographic methods in human-animal research, Hamilton and Taylor discuss the challenges researchers face in overcoming humancentric notions and frameworks for analysing multispecies relations and ecological networks, often leaving them humbled and perplexed. Building on this research agenda, my focus is on creating a productive space for multispecies inquiry that prioritizes generating knowledge *with* other animals rather than merely *about* them. Accordingly, the methodological reflections in this article centre on addressing the challenge of establishing ethical and non-harmful conditions for interspecies encounters within qualitative research designs and the

broader domains of human-animal studies and multispecies research (Gillespie, 'For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography'; 'For Multispecies Autoethnography'; Patter and Blattner; Hamilton and Taylor; Mc Loughlin et al.).

In this article, I reflect on my experiences designing and conducting research at farmed animal sanctuaries in Denmark. These sanctuaries serve as places dedicated to caring for and rehabilitating nonhuman animals previously subjected to farming, neglect, or abuse, providing them with permanent homes. I approach these sanctuaries as multispecies sites that foster sensibilities and critical reflections regarding the individuality and social lives of other animals. This approach acknowledges animal subjectivity and the power dynamics involved in representing and narrating their lives. Still, as my research progressed, I encountered significant methodological and theoretical challenges. Despite the availability of critical tools for analysing power dynamics, social representations, and the influence of language, I found myself unprepared to navigate the complex methodological issues that arose when I entered these multispecies sites with the intention of including the lived experiences of other-than-human beings.

Consequently, I recognize the methodological limitations and risks of inadvertently perpetuating species hierarchies, even in research driven by well-meaning intentions. This acknowledgment shapes my cautious approach, emphasizing positionality and reflexivity as critical components of human-animal research (Coulter; Gillespie 'For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography'). Rather than offering definitive solutions to the problem of human-centrism, I aim to weave together critical tools and methodologies that might contribute to addressing it. This approach is grounded in the dual commitment: to de-centring the human and re-negotiating nonhuman animals' position as research participants.

The article is organized into four main sections, each addressing critical issues related to research ethics, positionality and methodology. The first section introduces the research site and material, reflecting upon how theoretical frameworks can either support or hinder the goal of cultivating multispecies perspectives in ethnographic research. Here, I focus specifically on the *interspecies* conceptions of care that emerged from my study of

sanctuaries. The second section delves deeper into questions of the power of narrating, exploring practices of unlearning and generating knowledge *with* animals based on the twofold commitment of decentring the human while recentring other animals (Arluke and Sanders). The third section examines my efforts to attune to the lived experiences of other animals in my research. It reflects on challenges related to expert knowledge, collaboration with human gatekeepers and the limitations of conventional research ethics and codes of conduct. Finally, the conclusion affirms the value of advancing our understanding of human-animal relationships. I emphasize the unique sensitivity cultivated through the care work of sanctuaries. This sensitivity also calls for the development of innovative methods and pathways for researching, writing and collaborating in multispecies worlds.

Introducing sanctuary: Replacing human-centric conceptions of care with interspecies modes of caring

In recent decades, a growing movement of Farmed Animal Sanctuaries (hereafter referred to as *sanctuaries*) has emerged globally (Abrell). Focusing on rescuing and rehabilitating animals previously subjected to farming and abuse, these sanctuaries operate on a foundation of compassion and empathy in their caregiving efforts. In Denmark, the animal sanctuary movement is relatively small, with only a few sanctuaries, each housing between 40 to 60 individuals. Given the vast number of nonhuman animals requiring rescue and care, only a small fraction of the pigs, chickens, ducks, cows, sheep and rabbits in distress are accommodated at these sanctuaries (Abrell). These individuals may have escaped from the facilities where they were held captive, or they may have been brought to the sanctuary by humans who witnessed their abuse or abandonment and chose to intervene, securing them a place at the sanctuary.

The data collection for this study is based on qualitative interviews (online and in-person) with sanctuary personnel and participant observations at two Danish sanctuaries during the fall of 2021. In total, six qualitative interviews and six observations were

conducted during volunteer days, where I participated in repair work and open house events. The interviews focused on the human caregivers' aspirations and reflections on the day-to-day of building a community centred around animal care. The participant observations served as a crucial complement to the interviews, expanding the human accounts and perceptions of interspecies life at the sanctuary. During my visits, I made a conscious effort to attune myself to other sensorial ways of engaging with the sanctuary community's way of life, drawing on recent approaches in multispecies research. This included actively seeking 'to know' through touch, smell and listening, as well as dedicating field notes to exploring how specific situations and interactions might have been perceived by the nonhuman residents of the sanctuaries (Gillespie, 'For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography').

To capture the multiple dimensions and meanings of care at the sanctuaries, I had to challenge my initial conception of care, which was grounded in a human-centric perspective and starting point of what care is and might be. Care at sanctuaries – much like care work more broadly – is complex due to the relational dynamics between giving and receiving (Gruen). The human caregivers I spoke with described themselves as deeply committed to saving and caring for animals on a personal level. At the same time, they also reflected on the care they receive from the nonhuman residents of the sanctuary, noting its healing effects.

In a society that often is a cause of much distress and harm, the sanctuary caregivers described the benefits of spending time with other animals. For example, Kimmi, a primary caregiver at a newly established sanctuary, recalls the moment when the idea of creating a sanctuary was first conceived. She explains that she has always had a 'profound protective instinct' towards other animals since her childhood, but she also acknowledges that spending time with them also brings her comfort and enjoyment:

> I don't have any problems socializing with other humans, but GOSH, I really relax with animals. Of course, they have some expectation of getting food – but humans, oh, can they be demanding! [chuckles briefly]. And even despite the demanding and

> time-consuming work of caring for them, I'm completely at ease when I'm around them and the horses in a completely different way. Because then I don't have to perform or accomplish anything. But with other people, you really have to perform a lot. And it's my experience with interacting with animals here because none of them have to perform either.

In an account like this, the caregiver challenges conventional narratives of *human* caregivers and *animal* recipients of care, offering a more relational and reciprocal perspective where humans, too, are receiving care (Gruen). Yet, standard definitions of animal sanctuaries, like the one provided earlier, often 'emphasize the aspirations of the human beings involved, defining sanctuaries according to the *human* intentions of caring for, rescuing and rehabilitating animals' (Leth-Espensen, 'Unveiling Shared Histories'). In contrast, sanctuaries that actively promote and support animals opportunities for decision-making, roaming and creating social bonds might be more accurately described as *interspecies intentional communities* (Donaldson and Kymlicka). This latter definition may better capture the diverse, multispecies experiences of living and cohabiting within the defined space of the sanctuary.

The sanctuaries not only work to end the abuse and exploitation of nonhuman animals but also envision alternative visions for multispecies futures grounded in justice, solidarity and care – what anthropologist Elan Abrell refers to as the symbolic power of sanctuaries (439). The transformative potential of sanctuaries as sites of change has been previously recognized (Jones; Gillespie, *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389*; Pachirat). Sanctuaries are seen as contributing to reshaping and reimagining the meaning of care by demonstrating what life for domesticated animals such as cows, pigs, and chickens could be, with the ultimate goal of ending animal exploitation.

According to the sanctuaries' advocacy models, the required transformation relies on a fundamental shift in human attitudes toward other animals. Hence, to achieve what is perceived as real and meaningful change for individual nonhuman animals, they wish to

promote responsiveness and attentiveness. As Molly explains in defining the sanctuary's mission beyond simply saving lives:

> I believe the activist aspect [of running a sanctuary] lies in planting some seeds with the people who visit us. Visitors often say, 'Gosh, can a pig really grow so big?' Because they've never seen [a pig of a commercial breed] before. Everything is hidden so far away. Consumers are so disconnected from the products they consume that they don't really have any sense of what's happening. That's where our very positive approach comes in. We don't look down on anyone, but we don't hide our beliefs either.

Respecting the needs and desires of other animals and fostering attentiveness are essential aspects of the work of care at the sanctuaries. Care, as modelled on the daily practices as the sanctuaries, is framed as offering alternative, non-anthropocentric ways of relating to farmed animals (Abrell; Leth-Espensen, 'Care in a Time of Anthropogenic Problems'). However, despite their best efforts, sanctuary personnel recognize that they cannot entirely eliminate the inherent asymmetry in the interspecies relationships, particularly when they make decisions on behalf of the nonhuman residents – decisions about how they live, share spaces, or in dire circumstances, choosing to end an animal's life due to untreatable and painful injuries or illnesses (Donaldson and Kymlicka; Abrell). Yet, to effectively advocate for and promote the mission of sanctuaries, it remains crucial for the sanctuary personnel to highlight their efforts to ensure a safe and caring environment. This includes emphasizing the residents' potential for flourishing, even if the actual circumstances and prospects of recovery are often more complicated (Leth-Espensen, 'Care in a Time of Anthropogenic Problems').

Observing these various expressions of care as affect, ethos and practice, shaped by material constraints and compromise (Puig de la Bellacasa), reminds me of the power embedded in knowledge production and the need to reflect critically on how research and theorizing can have tangible effects on the lives of other animals. It required me to go

beyond discourse, and care as defined by humans, to study affective and sensory aspects of care based on how the *interspecies relationships of care* manifest at the sanctuary space and between various sanctuary residents. For instance, I observed how care was expressed through eating and sharing, playing, nesting, and preserving the soil and shared spaces. These practices were not limited to humans but extended across species boundaries: rabbits had repurposed a section of the adjacent hen house into a nesting area, demonstrating spatial negotiation and adaptation; pigs engaged in soil-turning, contributing to the ecological upkeep of the environment; and dogs took on protective roles, safeguarding the humans in their vicinity. These expressions of care, shaped by interspecies relationships and material conditions, illustrate how animals actively participate in care work and practices.

Knowing and unlearning

Ethnography is widely regarded as an essential method for accessing the lived experiences of individuals, people and communities. As ethnographic research expands to explore the lifeworlds of other species, new collaborative and methodological approaches are emerging, extending beyond the social and humanistic disciplines. Notably, ethology, which focuses on studying the behaviour of individual nonhuman animals in their natural environment, has recently attracted the interest of researchers in environmental humanities and related fields (van Dooren and Rose; Hartigan). Additionally, other animal sciences and veterinary medicine have come to inform the work of social anthropologists and subject are as keen on opening up entangled multispecies life (Vogel). However, despite the many benefits of cross-disciplinary work, it is crucial to remain mindful of how each discipline carries its own conventions and methodologies, which may limit or foreclose other perspectives on the life and existence of other animals. Animal and multispecies scholars must be aware of the power dynamics involved in acquiring knowledge about animals, who are often viewed as 'other' (Dinker and Pedersen, 2016).

As experienced at the sanctuaries, scientistic framings of animal behaviour can negatively impact the effort to create conditions for interspecies life that goes against the norms. During my visits to the sanctuaries, I learned about multiple instances where veterinarians specializing in farmed land animals like pigs, cows and chickens, were dismissive of the sanctuaries' efforts to rehabilitate animals bred for the purpose of food production. Drawing on their expertise and authority in animal health and pathology, they questioned whether these individuals, suffering from chronic conditions or injury, could ever experience a decent quality of life (Leth-Espensen, 'Care in a Time of Anthropogenic Problems'). Additionally, the sanctuary caregivers felt that their day-to-day experiences with the individual residents were not given sufficient attention in the veterinary assessments. Instead, they experienced the limits to expert knowledge shaped by disciplinary boundaries and knowledge paradigms and how knowledge is instrumentalized to align with specific production schemes (Rosenfeld; Leth-Espensen, 'Monitoring Care, Curating Suffering').

At the sanctuary, human caregivers engage in complex negotiations around practices of 'knowing animals.' Its personnel aim to expand the public's understanding and awareness about conditions for animals in industrialised farm contexts and what the life of an individual pig or a cow might look like if it had not been severely impacted by confinement and acts of human control and dominance. Visitors are introduced to animals familiar in predominantly rural or agricultural social imaginaries: pigs, cows, goats, sheep, chickens, rabbits and geese. These are animals likely recognizable due to their central role in Danish history, culture and identity (Karrebæk), even if the visitors have never encountered them close up beforehand. The caregivers spend considerable time sharing the personal stories of the nonhuman residents, recounting their individual histories of trauma, including detailed accounts of their conditions at production sites, which are not known to the visitors. They highlight the negative effects of practices such as the separation of calves from their mothers, forced insemination, breeding chickens for rapid growth, as well as the staggering numbers of piglets lost due to the way sows are bred to produce ever-increasing litters. The caregivers

combine this knowledge with examples drawn from the daily experiences at the sanctuary: the ongoing practices of care and interspecies communal living. They reflect on the potential for individual animals to recover and thrive but also acknowledge that illness and death are inevitable aspects of sanctuary life.

From a sociological perspective, the sanctuaries engage in processes of de-objectifying or subjectifying nonhuman animals (Cole and Stewart). Sociologists have previously emphasized the material effects of social constructions and how representations of nonhuman animals can impact their lives (Arluke and Sanders; Cole and Stewart). The processes of unlearning integral to the sanctuaries encompass a wide range of inquiries. They encourage asking questions like: What stereotypes and prejudices affect how we relate to specific nonhuman others? How have my views and perceptions of other animals been influenced by powerful narratives of an inferior animal mind and by value hierarchies privileging the human experience (and, I should add, a specific *privileged* human)?

These questions illustrate the ongoing effort to decouple the sanctuary from the farming space, which primarily concerns confronting and problematizing how animal farming impacts the lives of nonhuman animals. Simultaneously, the sanctuaries confront specific forms of human identity politics embedded in notions of humaneness, rooted in Enlightenment philosophy and the humanist tradition (K. Oliver). In 'writing beyond the human,' as Catherine Oliver (C. Oliver) encourages, dismantling species hierarchies aligns with disrupting the dominant ideas of the autonomous, self-contained human subject found in Western-centric knowledge paradigms.

As I conduct my fieldwork and write, I am guided by the challenge of knowing and unlearning how I perceive nonhuman animals. I am tasked with narrating life at sanctuaries, yet I find myself uneasy doing so, reflecting on the power of language and the risk of misrepresenting animals' lifeworlds through the words I choose. I am negotiating ontology and language conventions when considering the appropriateness of terminology, such as the human-nonhuman binary, the concept of 'the animal' and using pronouns such as she, he,

them, but never 'it.' I hesitate, as I am aware that these issues are not easily resolved, uncertain about their impact on the reader and, most importantly, about the implications for the animals I aim to represent.

Hamilton and Taylor note how human-animal ethnographers should pose questions that are not immediately answerable. They observe that 'removing assumptions of human superiority from our work is no easy task for us as authors. It requires us to *un*-learn much that we take for granted and to ask questions that often seem ludicrous to others' (Hamilton and Taylor 8). They provide examples such as asking about the impact of human colonizing on kangaroo spaces or interpreting movements inside the slaughterhouse truck as attempts of resistance (see also Hribal, for a powerful example). Examples from my research include asking about the preferences of nonhuman sanctuary residents suffering from chronic conditions – if they were able to decide, would they receive continuous medical treatment?

On the flip side of unlearning, there is much to learn and discover: How do the lives and circumstances of commercially bred and domesticated animals differ from those of their ancestors, who were not subjected to selective breeding and ongoing domestication processes? How might the phenotypical and socio-psychological changes of selective breeding impact the lives of individual animals? What more subtle changes in behaviour and reproduction have been induced by controlled breeding? And, if enabled to roam freely, how would these animals choose to live, with whom, and in what environments? (Gillespie, 'For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography').

Feminist animal and multispecies geographer Kathryn Gillespie ('For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography') emphasizes how engaging with farmed animal sanctuaries in research and education can foster empathy and ethical responsibility. However, these efforts must be guided by a serious commitment to understanding and considering the lived experiences of the other animals involved, demanding a reflective and empathetic approach from the researcher. Furthermore, Gillespie poses crucial questions: 'How can the spaces and bodies in research be imagined in more caring and beneficial ways for the pigs? In what ways could the methodology itself be further politicized, more collaborative across species

lines, more caring, less anthropocentric?' ('For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography' 30). These questions poignantly capture the core concerns of multispecies and human-animal studies.

In this context, it is crucial to learn from the caregiving efforts at sanctuaries, which go beyond merely responding to urgent needs; they also foster the sensitivity required to attend to the specific preferences of each individual resident. As Eva Meijer writes, 'To get to know other animals, we need to move beyond our own motivations and actually pay attention to them. We can then meet the other animal, begin to see them, and follow their lead' (Meijer). Learning *from* animals by way of moving, verbalizing and responding in appropriate ways for the nonhuman participants, whether through 'whines, growls, nuzzling, or ear-sniffing' and more, are methods previously proposed for ethnographers in this realm of studies (Arluke and Sanders 28).

Foregrounding and foreclosing: Research site, access, gatekeepers and the limitations of conventional research ethics

I am guided by the vision of sanctuaries that imagine a future where other animals are not merely treated as property or commodities but instead as sentient, world-making beings. This idea is grounded in an interspecies ethics of care, acknowledging and respecting diverse ways of life and nonhuman social worlds. Crucially, it also extends to the ethical considerations of conducting research. If I regard other animals as potential participants in my research, I am required to consider the implications of their involvement. How should I approach the recruitment of non-human participants? What does informed consent mean and entail in this context? Am I fostering a truly collaborative relationship with my nonhuman research participants, and if so, how is that collaboration defined and enacted?

Furthermore, I reflect on the critical question: what do the nonhuman animals participating in this research stand to gain? Ensuring that participants are not harmed by the research is a necessary baseline, but it is insufficient on its own. To justify empirical research

– which inherently carries some level of risk for participants, whether for the individual or group – I must continually ask what positive outcomes could emerge from this project. Without addressing this, it becomes impossible to access the potential benefits for the individual participants in relation to the risks involved.

An issue that remains insufficiently addressed in multispecies research concerns the ethical aspects and consequences of selecting the empirical site of inquiry, including the choice of research participants, informants, gatekeepers or expert witnesses. Particularly in cases where access to the research site requires permission due to prevailing ownership structures, researchers may find themselves reliant on human gatekeepers to mediate contact. These gatekeepers often play a pivotal role in providing insights into the individuals or groups being studied – as primary caregivers and 'owners', they may be treated as experts. Researchers must critically reflect on these sources of information and how the specific nature of the space and context might shape their understanding. Ethical concerns may also arise when negotiating the terms of the investigation, including the level of access and the researcher's potential involvement in practices that may be causing harm (for example, by participating in medical procedures or containment by force) (Mc Loughlin et al.).

It is crucial to reflect on the broader implications of collaborating with human gatekeepers in such research. For example, empathy plays a pivotal role in observing and narrating the lives of other animals. This is exemplified in the story of Willi, an elderly boar and one of the most senior residents at the sanctuary, as recounted by Martha, a caregiver at the sanctuary:

> [Willi's limp] is a direct consequence of mistreatment by humans. He was given inappropriate food and, on top of that, he's a mishmash of different things. [He] has terrible legs because humans wanted to breed a smaller pot-belly pig that might be considered cuter than a wild Vietnamese pot-bellied pig. Just like we've interfered with the genetics of all other small pot-bellied pigs, I can tell by looking at Nelly's back [another small pot-bellied pig living at the sanctuary] that it's not too good

> either. I can see that her back could potentially give her problems because she has been bred to grow too big. Although it's primarily males who experience back problems as they grow larger than females, Nelly is facing these issues as well.

During our conversation, Martha provides crucial context to help me understand the circumstances and challenges faced by individual residents like Willi and Nelly, as well as the care and treatment they require. Martha's accounts highlight the importance of storytelling about individual residents to shed light on their past and present situations. These narratives significantly contribute to the ethnography by offering a pathway to move closer to the lived experiences of Willi and Nelly. Without reflecting on the consequences of breeding practices aimed at achieving specific desirable traits – such as those seen in pot-bellied pigs – it is impossible to fully address the broader context shaping these individuals' lives and well-being. Conversely, hearing these accounts highlights the profound ethical concerns tied to breeding practices and the resulting health challenges that nonhuman animals endure. It underscores the necessity of considering the long-term consequences of human intervention in the lives of other species.

This awareness ties into the complexities of speaking on behalf of others (Spivak). For instance, a strong focus on animal suffering often overshadows the broader ethical problems of animal consumption and the authority involved in narrating what suffering means for others (Spelman). I find myself questioning the consequences of a politics that centres on animal suffering, even when driven by the best intentions. Such approaches risk tethering animals' subjectivity and agency to human-centric concepts of suffering and innocence (Ticktin), potentially imposing passivity onto them. As others have suggested, acts of witnessing grounded in an ethics of care might offer a more ethical and empathetic approach to research subjects, both human and nonhuman (Gillespie, 'For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography'). In this context, bearing witness involves more than providing eyewitness testimony or evidence based on what is directly observable (K. Oliver). Instead, it entails facilitating a response and fostering response-ability, encouraging an active and reciprocal engagement with the beings whose lives are being studied.

In the realm of ethnography, research participants are recognized as active co-creators of knowledge. They play an integral role in the research process, contributing to the understanding of cultural practices and social interactions by sharing their lived experiences and perspectives. This collaborative approach holds promise even when extending the scope of research to include other animals and their lifeworlds. Reflecting on the potential for achieving a more mutually beneficial approach to generating knowledge and fostering a shared purpose, it is crucial to acknowledge that individual animals are the true experts in their own lives. Rather than relying solely on external expert knowledge, this perspective calls for a deeper respect for the lived realities of the animals themselves. Despite the inherent challenges in comprehending other animals' perspectives – such as accessing their lifeworlds, lived experiences, and preferences – it is vital to recognize the limitations and ethical complexities of human knowledge about other animals. Human expertise is necessarily constrained and fraught with anthropocentric biases, underscoring the need for humility and reflexivity in research practices.

The principles of reciprocity and respect are equally paramount in this context. These principles emphasize the importance of establishing a sense of mutual benefit in the research relationship between the researcher and the participants. This consideration becomes particularly significant given that the conventional standards of informed consent, which guide human research interactions, are not directly applicable to nonhuman participants. At a minimum, researchers have suggested ensuring that animals involved in research have the option to exit or discontinue their participation. Providing such an exit option reflects an ethical commitment to meeting other beings on their own terms, respecting their choices and agency (Gillespie, 'For a Politicized Multispecies Ethnography'; Van Patter and Blattner).

Adhering to established ethical guidelines – which can be referred to as 'ethics on paper' – is a required aspect of conducting responsible research. These guidelines provide researchers with a structured framework to navigate the ethical considerations inherent in their studies, ensuring they are well-prepared for foreseeable challenges. However, even the

most comprehensive ethical frameworks cannot fully anticipate every potential ethical dilemma that may arise in the course of a study. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) highlight, researchers must remain vigilant and prepared to address unexpected ethical issues that may surface during their work. Unforeseen circumstances can occur in any research project, and rigid adherence to predefined guidelines may not always suffice. This underscores the importance of maintaining a flexible and adaptive approach, allowing researchers to respond ethically and thoughtfully to novel situations as they emerge.

An essential limitation of existing standards and practices of ethical vetting lies in how the potential harm to nonhuman animals is weighed against potential human benefits. If no readily available (and affordable) alternative exists, it is often deemed justifiable to proceed with the research as planned. Historically, such guidelines have been predominantly shaped by concerns related to medical and psychological experiments involving animals, often neglecting broader ethical considerations (Gillespie, 'For a Multispecies Autoethnography'). However, in the social sciences and humanities, ethical guidelines also prove to be of limited utility with regards to non-invasive research involving animals (Van Patter and Blattner). As Van Patter and Blattner observe, existing ethical frameworks typically do not extend to non-invasive studies, leaving researchers without guidance on ethical considerations outside the realm of animal testing and experimental interventions. This gap became apparent in my own experience when applying for a mandatory ethical review of my study. The review focused exclusively on the collection and processing of sensitive personal data regarding the human participants, as stipulated in the Swedish Ethical Review Act.[1] No ethical scrutiny was applied to the aspects of my study involving nonhuman participants, despite their centrality to the research.

[1] Although the research was conducted in Denmark, it was subjected to ethical review in Sweden, where I was employed at the time.

Given these limitations, it is clear that future initiatives are needed to develop comprehensive ethical guidelines for human-animal and multispecies research. Such initiatives may include the establishment of review boards capable of addressing the unique ethical challenges posed in human-animal research and related fields of research (Van Patter and Blattner; Tumilty et al.). These measures would provide critical support for researchers striving to navigate the complex ethical terrain of multispecies studies. Yet, while ethical guidelines provide a vital foundation for fostering good research practices, the capacity to navigate and address unforeseen ethical dilemmas is equally essential. Researchers must balance adherence to formal protocols with the ability to make ethical decisions in real time, ensuring the integrity of their work even in the face of unexpected challenges.

Conclusion

This research was shaped by an immersive, situated methodology grounded in feminist approaches and a critique of the 'view from nowhere'. Such an approach highlights the importance of positionality and ethical reflexivity in navigating the complexities of interspecies relationships. In the context of multispecies ethnographic research, key considerations – such as representation, narration, attunement and knowledge generation – are of crucial importance. These elements, closely tied to a critical awareness of how place and site shape the 'encounter', have emerged as central through this methodological reflection.

Looking back on my experiences with conducting research into the world of farmed animal sanctuaries, I have underscored how sanctuary work provides a critical lens for examining the complex interplay between representation, ethics and care in multispecies research. Fieldwork experiences often prompt researchers to reorient their conceptual frameworks, as was the case here. Engaging with sanctuaries required attention to divergent forms and expressions of care across species boundaries, moving beyond discourse to

consider the affective, non-verbal and materially constrained dimensions of care. This reorientation revealed how care and ethical commitments can potentially be reconceived on interspecies terms, transcending exclusionary human and speciesist politics.

Sanctuaries, as distinctive spaces, emphasize the importance of place in cultivating more-than-human sensibilities within ethnographic research. They create opportunities for human-animal encounters rooted in attentiveness, responsiveness, and interspecies care and respect. Moreover, interspecies sanctuary care and daily life foster sensitivity to the conditions and circumstances shaping the lives of their nonhuman residents. This sensitivity became a vital methodological tool, specifically as it enabled a deeper engagement with other-than-human subjectivities. However, sanctuaries also raise profound questions about the participation of nonhuman animals in research, particularly concerning the possibility for consent, exit and being involved as experts of their own lives. Addressing these issues requires researchers to critically evaluate the limitations and possibilities of developing ethical, inclusive and reciprocal research practices. Given the persistent asymmetries in multispecies relationships, researchers must critically interrogate their own positions and biases. Such reflexive efforts are not only ethical imperatives but also imaginative acts, enabling researchers to humbly and respectfully 'get to know' other animals.

Future research might explore how sanctuary-based methodologies can be adapted across different multispecies contexts. Comparative studies could examine how place-specific ethics and care practices shape interspecies relationships and knowledge production. Additionally, further inquiry into nonhuman consent and agency in research participation could help advance ethical frameworks for multispecies ethnography. In considering these challenges and constraints, I argue that conducting fieldwork in multispecies sites may offer a unique opportunity to examine and push the possibilities and limitations of moving beyond human-centric research methodologies. Particularly, sanctuaries – when configured as multispecies communities centred on nonhuman agentive beings – offer a productive, comparative site for non-invasive research contexts because they may help to advance critical questions for multispecies ethnographic research.

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