# CRITICAL TERMS *for* ANIMAL STUDIES

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# INTRODUCTION

Lori Gruen

Animal Studies is almost always described as a new, emerging, and growing field. A short while ago some Animal Studies scholars suggested that it "has a way to go before it can clearly see itself as an academic field" (Gorman 2012). Other scholars suggest that the "discipline" is a couple of decades old (DeMello 2012). Within cultural studies as well as the social sciences, there have been multiple attempts to locate the beginning of Animal Studies in the 1990s, and each proposed origin story is accompanied by specific aspirations for the field. The various hopes evoked by Animal Studies are part of what makes the field so exciting and at times contentious.

## Histories

In one of the first journals dedicated to Animal Studies, *Society and Animals*, editor Ken Shapiro wrote in 1993 that "the main purpose" of the journal "is to foster within the social sciences, a substantive subfield, animal studies." And he described this subfield as primarily concerned with providing a "better understanding of ourselves"; "through animal studies we wish to understand our varied relations to them, and to assess the costs—economic, ethical, and most broadly, cultural—of these relations" (Shapiro 1993, 1). Social scientists also assessed the benefits of these relations, insofar as they existed, for both humans and other animals.

Around the same time that *Society and Animals* was launched, in literary studies, according to Robert McKay (2014), "very few scholars were concerned with the near omnipresence of nonhuman animals in literary texts or how they formed part of a much longer story about creatural life that the humanities, in dialogue with other disciplines, could document

and interpret"(637). This paucity of attention may have been the result of a discomfort that emerges when, as Susan McHugh (2006) describes it, "a systematic approach to reading animals in literature necessarily involves coming to terms with a discipline that in many ways appears organized by the studied avoidance of just such questioning." But that avoidance was beginning to dissipate by the late 1990s, when we find "the peculiar correlation that gave birth to Animal Studies at that time: the commitment to developing both scholarly knowledge of an as yet unthought subject of inquiry (always a serious business) and also the responsibility needed to show the proper respect for, to take seriously as subjects of experience, the animals whose lives are represented in cultural texts" (McKay 2014, 637). Cary Wolfe (2009) reflects further:

> One would think animal studies would be more invested than any other kind of "studies" in fundamentally rethinking the question of what knowledge is, how it is limited by the over determinations and partialities of our "species-being" (to use Marx's famous phrase); in excavating and examining our assumptions about who the knowing subject can be; and in embodying that confrontation in its own disciplinary practices and protocols (so that, for example, the place of literature is radically reframed in a larger universe of communication, response, and exchange, which now includes manifold other species). (Wolfe 2009, 571)

Within the broad rubric of cultural studies, there was a different focus than that of the social scientists, and different types of questions were being asked. And even within cultural studies we can see tensions. Is the project of Animal Studies to take animal representations seriously within literature or to take animals seriously as subjects or to come to new understandings by recognizing the difficulties and possibilities of moving beyond the human as the only subjects of cultural knowledge?

Though these questions were being asked by a growing number of literary scholars, animals were not quite "unthought subjects of inquiry" in other disciplines. Important books had already been published: Donna Haraway's *Primate Visions* (1989), Harriet Ritvo's *The Animal Estate* (1987), Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), and Donald Griffin's *Animal Minds* (1992) are just a few, representing quite different perspectives on "the question of the animal." The 1990s marks an important moment in the growth of work in Animal Studies to be sure, but I hesitate to call it the origin. Thinking about and with animals has been a central concern across a number of academic disciplines going back a very long time.

Within philosophy, for example, two of the most well-known scholars thinking about ethical and political obligations to other animals, Peter Singer and Tom Regan, published before the 1990s (Singer's *Animal Liberation* first appeared in 1975 and Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* appeared in 1983), but animals as subjects of philosophical inquiry can be found all the way back to antiquity. Henry Salt, in his 1892 book *Animal Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*, draws readers to his "immediate question"—"if men have rights, have animals their rights also?"—and notes,

> From the earliest times there have been thinkers who, directly or indirectly, answered this question with an affirmative. The Buddhist and Pythagorean canons, dominated perhaps by the creed of reincarnation, included the maxim "not to kill or injure any innocent animal." The humanitarian philosophers of the Roman empire, among whom Seneca and Plutarch and Porphyry were the most conspicuous, took still higher ground in preaching humanity on the broadest principle of universal benevolence. (Salt 1892, 2–3)

While philosophers were interested in what sort of ethical claims animals made on us, work in the sciences provided some reasons as to why we might owe other animals our attention and concern, why they are worthy subjects of study, and how they may be subjects in their own right.

In the mid-late 1800s, Charles Darwin's work radically altered the view of other animals and our relationships to them. Humans and other animals were not separable by kind, he suggested, only by degree. He argued that like us, animals express emotion, can experience their worlds in vivid ways, and he suggested that they can even reason:

> Only a few persons now dispute that animals possess some power of reasoning. Animals may constantly be seen to pause, deliberate, and resolve. It is a significant fact, that the more the habits of any particular animal are studied by a naturalist, the more he attributes to reason and the less to unlearnt instincts. (Darwin [1874] 1998, 77)

Though questions of animal emotion and reason were and are topics for debate (see chaps. 8, 20), Darwin's observations led to rich interdisciplinary explorations of animal intelligence (George Romanes 1882) and their *Umwelts* (Jakob von Uexküll 1934), and new fields of inquiry, including comparative psychobiology (Robert Mearns Yerkes 1925), gestalt

psychology (Wolfgang Köhler 1947), ethology (Konrad Lorenz 1961 and Niko Tinbergen 1963), and eventually cognitive ethology (Donald Griffin 1976; Dale Jamieson and Marc Bekoff 1992). Like all scholarly investigations, these various areas of inquiry were shaped by the accepted theories of the times as well as particular social and cultural anxieties. The insights that emerged from these investigations led to important developments that couldn't help but inform what we now call Animal Studies. Central to these earlier explorations was a commitment to understanding other animals as subjects and often, although not always explicitly, understanding ourselves in relation to them.

Given this long history of inquiry, and I have only mentioned here a very small fraction of it, I find it odd that the novelty of Animal Studies is so often remarked on. Animal Studies seems to have had an extended developmental period akin to what is referred to in evolutionary biology as *neoteny*. *Neoteny*, coming from the Greek words *neos*, as in juvenile, and *teinein*, meaning extended, is thought to be especially advantageous for our species, *Homo sapiens*. By having an extended childhood, we come to develop our individual wit and charm, and perhaps more importantly, better abilities to cope with the complexities of our environments. Neoteny is one of the explanations for why we humans are still around when the estimated twenty-seven or so other hominid species perished (Walter 2014). Perhaps the lengthy time Animal Studies has been thought to be "developing" will similarly insure its success as a mature, interdisciplinary field.

If the intensity of scholarly attention to Animal Studies is any indication, the signs of successful maturity are good. There are conferences and workshops across a wide range of topics in Animal Studies around the globe occurring almost weekly. There are at least ten book series, a dozen or more dedicated journals, and a growing number of academic programs, some offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in response to demand from students seeking to pursue focused work in Animal Studies. And there are a large number of highly respected senior scholars working in the area, many of whom have written the chapters that follow.

While it is not necessarily a bad thing to remain in perpetual development, there is a time when focus on whether Animal Studies is yet a field can be redirected toward more interesting topics. My hope is that the publication of this volume and the quality of the discussions contained in it are indications of the field's maturity. Of course, maturity as a field doesn't mean that the state of inquiry is static or that there is consensus about what counts as the proper objects of study or best methods of inquiry.

Most "mature" disciplines have rich, often transformative debates about these issues, and this is particularly true in interdisciplinary fields.

## Contestations

### *Activism and the "Real World"*

Interdisciplinary fields such as Women's Studies, African American Studies, and more recently Environmental Studies, Queer Studies, and Disability Studies emerged as scholarly tentacles of political movements. Though the connections to activism can vary considerably depending on the experiences of scholars and teachers doing the academic work, there is a general sense that a scholar working in any one of these areas is committed to some of the goals of the political movements to which they are, or should be, accountable.

The scholarly connection to activism in these cases is not just to opinions or arguments or texts, nor is it only to the study of the social movement in question (although there is important scholarship along these lines), but to a shared normative commitment, as I call it, that motivates social movement. Normative commitments in all of these interdisciplinary fields and the movements they are connected to are ethical/political aspirations about eliminating the conditions that subjugate, erase, deny, violate, or destroy the subjects of study. And when a scholar in these fields appears indifferent to these goals or seems not to share the aspirations, it is especially noticeable. Consider an environmental scientist who discovers dangerous levels of pesticides in a particular river who, rather than reporting it to the local environmental protection department or letting the parents of the children swimming in the river know, keeps the data quiet to compare with more data that will be collected two years or five years hence. This scientist should not be surprised when challenged by environmental studies colleagues or environmental activists if and when they learn of this.

Of course, the normative commitments that scholars have, even within the same area of study, will vary as they often do within the movements with which such study is connected. Debates in women's studies about who is a "woman" were going on as women's studies programs were starting and continue to this day. Different, sometimes contradictory, conceptions and waves of feminism animate much activism and scholarship. The meaning and politics of intersections between gender, race, sexuality, class, physical

ability, gender expression, and other dimensions of power and privilege generate complex disagreements and move theory and practice in new directions. To a large extent, work in women's studies and ethnic studies in the 1970s and 1980s provided important space for discussions about the ways that academic inquiry is always imbued with normative commitments, and that in turn empowered students politically. Connections to political movements have taken a variety of forms within both teaching and scholarship, and these connections can often be a source of contention, but scholars within these interdisciplinary areas are rarely completely detached from the political goals of the movements.

For example, as the recent Black Lives Matter protests occurred on the streets, African American studies programs as well as ethnic studies and gender studies programs sponsored events and offered courses addressing the issues raised by the movement. Political syllabi were made available online for those teaching courses as well as people, both within and outside of the academy, interested in more study. There have, of course, been protests on campuses, too, and this has often led to changes within universities as well as stronger university-community partnerships. Links between academics and activists have generated important scholarly collaborations that promise to reshape curriculum and research.

Although there is contention about the texture, depth, and content of the various normative commitments within these interdisciplinary areas, that there are ethical and political aspirations that accompany scholarship is not particularly controversial. But within Animal Studies, embracing normative commitments and being accountable, in some way, to the animal protection movement, also known as the animal rights movement, seems more vexed.

I think part of the reluctance to acknowledge one's ethical or political views stems from a fear of criticism from various corners. In one corner, there is that part of the animal rights movement that is loud and unforgiving. When one is attempting to explore new topics that colleagues question as being connected to inquiry in their particular field, there may also be a worry about being targeted by activists. In a different corner, there are activists, in the animal protection movement as well as other social movements, who find "theory" too far removed from "the real world" and can be critical or, more often than not, dismissive. This sort of detachment was what made "academic feminism" bad words. There are certainly animal activists who ignore Animal Studies scholarship, finding it too far removed from the lives and deaths of real animals. This, too, may serve as a

disincentive to make one's work accountable to a movement that isn't particularly receptive. In yet another corner are scholars within Animal Studies who are disciplined in more historical or textual or scientific methodologies and don't see a clear connection to contemporary advocacy. Some of them think that scholars shouldn't dirty their hands with "activism." I'll say more about the anxiety about advocacy below.

Another source of reluctance to make one's political commitments known undoubtedly has to do with the depth and breadth of anthropocentrism (see chap. 3). Animal Studies provides insights into the ideologies and frameworks according to which some forms of life are enabled to thrive while others are oppressed and destroyed. Using animals in various ways is not just part of the structures that shape our lives and to which much work in Animal Studies is directed; it is also part of our daily practices. Questions about our own use of other animals certainly heighten discomfort. In human-centered scholarship, animals are relegated to the background. Animal Studies, in bringing other animals to the fore as sentient subjects who can have meaningful lives and relationships, presents challenges to our own ways of living. These challenges can be difficult to acknowledge in the classroom and at faculty meetings as well as in our personal lives. The discomfort that these challenges elicit can lead to a desire to disconnect theory from practice, scholarship from advocacy.

## *Institutionalization*

Another contested issue has to do with the institutionalization of Animal Studies. A look at the history of women's studies programs is again instructive here. When faculty and students came together on college campuses in consciousness-raising sessions in the 1970s to protest ubiquitous sexism on campus and off, discussions began about building common curriculum to combat the silencing of and violence against women. Scholars working in many different disciplines convened and debates emerged about whether to build centralized, interdisciplinary programs, or to push for integrating feminist scholarship into more courses within disciplines. It quickly became clear that one could do both, create new women's history courses or feminist ethnography courses, for example, that could be cross-listed courses in women's studies. Feminist faculty, together with their students, began developing interdisciplinary methods for teaching and scholarship, and hundreds of women's studies programs emerged.

While there are now a great many courses offered on topics in Animal

Studies around the globe, there is one distinct difference between the creation of institutional homes for women's studies and other interdisciplinary fields and more centralized programs for Animal Studies, and that is that the subjects of study are not organizing curriculum, mobilizing faculty, or agitating for inclusion. More precisely, one of the central areas of scholarly concern in Animal Studies involves representing animals (see chap. 21) not only as symbols or metaphors for human interests and projects but as subjects themselves. Animal Studies has been at the forefront of efforts to foster new epistemological paradigms for recognizing and articulating the agency of other animals, but "speaking for" others is always tricky, especially so when the subjects don't speak human languages. Within women's studies classrooms—where important interventions about the exclusion of the experiences of black women, women of color, queer women, transwomen, and gender nonconforming people continue to occur—the excluded subjects' perspective can be articulated, usually by the subjects themselves. Feminist scholarship on just how to respectfully attend to the perspective of the other has deeply informed feminist practice over the years. This is not so easy with other animals, where not only language but entire ways of living are vastly different (see, e.g., chaps. 4, 7). The very category "animal" is so vast and includes such diverse beings as orangutans and coral, butterflies and cows, parrots and sharks, it is hard to identify a commonality other than that they are "not human."

Their status as not human has institutional ramifications as well. While sexism, racism, and other forms of prejudice exist in institutions of higher learning, whether overt or implicit, animals are there as objects of use. At large research institutions there may be laboratories containing dogs, cats, cows, pigs, and monkeys. Even at smaller institutions, rats, mice, fish, birds, and frogs are being used in the sciences. Those who use animals may complain about the idea that there is a field of study at their very institution that questions the legitimacy of their work. And this has generated tensions about institutionalizing Animal Studies. Of course, scholarly disagreements are at the heart of intellectual exploration, and questions about legitimacy themselves are centrally important for opening new avenues of inquiry. Any field, whether biology, psychology, sociology, or history, becomes static when it resists challenges.

And such challenges often come from within a discipline. I mentioned earlier that even when women's studies programs were getting started, there were questions about who it is that women's studies studies along

with questions about whether women's studies is good for women. At the turn of this century, many programs began reflecting on whether their success at institutionalization had become a liability and whether the intellectual and political excitement of the field was becoming dulled as programs worked to "secure their boundaries, define an exclusive terrain of inquiry, and fix their object of study" (Brown 2005, 122). Institutionalization comes with costs. In response to these and other challenges, women's studies programs began changing their names to better reflect not just the diversity of women and women's issues differentially experienced racially, sexually, ethnically, religiously, in terms of class, ability, and gender expression but also questions about the different ways of understanding how these complex, often intersectional social positions influenced affective orientations and social institutions. Many women's studies programs became gender studies programs, others became feminist and gender studies programs, others became gender and sexuality studies programs, and there are other naming combinations as well.

### *What's in a Name?*

These efforts to rename women's studies programs were, to a large extent, designed to more accurately represent the objects of study, but there is also a normative (in the sense I described earlier) dimension of naming. Politics and perception play a role in the naming contestations that have occurred in some interdisciplinary fields, and this is certainly true in Animal Studies.

When scholars first began describing their work as Animal Studies, there was occasionally confusion—some people, including many scientists, thought that meant scholars were working directly with animals, for example, in laboratories or in the wild. This led some scholars to adopt the name Human-Animal Studies (HAS) and emphasize the relationships that the field was devoted to examining, understanding, and critically evaluating. But this, too, led to further confusion, particularly about the meaning of *human*.

Posthumanism, for example, works toward developing new frameworks that don't center the human, often urging recognition of claims for other animals to flourish on their own terms and not in reference to categories and characteristics that are tied to human flourishing. Posthumanism challenges the assumptions, desires, and imperatives of humanism, the very

theoretical framework that is often used to extend rights to other animals (see chap. 22), and takes the distinction between human and animal as a site for theorizing.

The posthumanist branch of Animal Studies is not alone in challenging the human-animal binary—those working in feminist Animal Studies have long challenged it, and theorists and activists in the developing area of scholarship on race and animals pointedly remind us that the "human" in human-animal studies is a social construction steeped in racist history (see chap. 1). Independent scholar and activist Syl Ko writes,

> In her 1994 open letter to her colleagues, cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter noted, "You may have heard a radio news report which aired briefly during the days after the jury's acquittal of the policemen in the Rodney King beating case. The report stated that public officials of the judicial system of Los Angeles routinely used the acronym N.H.I. to refer to any case involving a breach of the rights of young Black males who belong to the jobless category of the inner city ghettos. N.H.I. means 'no humans involved.'" . . .
>
> It's no wonder that one way we have historically sought and continue to seek social visibility is by asserting our "humanity."
>
> I used to be that kind of black activist. You know: *"We're human, too!"* But now, I question this strategy. . . .
>
> The domain of the "human" or "humanity" is not just about whether or not one belongs to the species homo sapiens. Rather, "human" means a certain way of being, especially exemplified by how one looks or behaves, what practices are associated with one's community, and so on. So, the "human" or what "humanity" is just is a *conceptual way to mark the province of European whiteness as the ideal way of being homo sapiens*. . . . This means that the conceptions of "humanity/human" and "animality/animal" have been constructed along *racial* lines. (Ko 2017, 20–23)

The racial and gendered social history of both the human and the animal are important areas of theoretical work. And the relationships among the various beings that are seen to fall into one or the other category, both as groups and as individuals, as well as the conceptual roles these relationships play in social, cultural, practical, and theoretical knowledge, are the objects of Animal Studies.

There is another group of scholars who take up the name Critical Animal Studies, in part as a reaction to the Human-Animal Studies nomenclature

and its claims. HAS scholar Margot DeMello (2012), for example, notes in her text *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* that "there is nothing in the field of HAS that demands that researchers, instructors, or students take an advocacy or political position of any kind" (17). Of course, not taking an advocacy position is itself political. "What defines critical animal studies," notes Claire Jean Kim (2013), "is that it is fiercely, unapologetically political. Critical animal studies scholars aim to end animal exploitation and suffering and have little patience for work that just happens to be about animals" (464). So Critical Animal Studies scholars reject the name and the claims of Human-Animal Studies.

But there are other scholars who argue that Human-Animal Studies does include a commitment to respecting and acting on the behalf of other animals. For example, Samantha Hurn (2010) writes about her fieldwork in Ceredigion, in which she observed Hindu monks campaigning for an individual animal's right to life in the face of opposition from the farming community, that "lent itself more to the approach of what is referred to as 'human-animal studies' (HAS). HAS differs, in my opinion, from anthrozoological research through the process of 'bringing in' the animal. In other words, the hyphen in 'human-animal studies' places all of the research subjects on a level playing field, recognizing the interconnectedness between humans and our fellow living beings" (27).

And then there is *Anthrozoology*, a term that prioritizes the human in scholarship and tends to be more focused on the scientific aspects of human-animal relations. One anthrozoology program suggests, "At its core, the field of anthrozoology is about helping people live better lives. . . . Anthrozoology is about embracing the bond between humans and animals, and touching lives" (Carroll College, n.d.). There is a clear normative commitment noted here, a type of advocacy, but it is not the same sort of advocacy that one sees in Critical Animal Studies, for example.

Importantly, there are individual scholars who may identify their work with any one of these names but have a different set of political and practical commitments. I view Animal Studies as an expansive field of study that encompasses aspects of all of these positions. Animal Studies uses a variety of methodologies to explore relationships of various kinds to help us understand the ways in which animals figure in each other's lives, in our lives, and we in theirs. Some of this variety is represented in the chapters that follow. Like other interdisciplinary fields, Animal Studies will continue to be shaped by lively debates about normative commitments and disciplinary frameworks as well as changes in our understanding of our

various relationships and, inevitably, by the prerogatives of institutions, both social and academic.

## Critical Terms

One of those prerogatives shapes this book, and that is the constraint on the number of pages that limited the critical terms that are included in the volume. There are many terms that don't appear here, and my choices require some explanation. Given that the two most prominent objects of Animal Studies are the animals themselves and our relationships to them, one might expect to see chapters on chimpanzees or chihuahuas or cheetahs and chapters that specifically address our most common relationships with animals—as companions, as scientific models, as entertainment, or as food. They don't appear because these aren't really "critical terms." Critical terms might be thought of as tools to help solve the conceptual problems that are raised within Animals Studies, they provide a framework for helping us think more methodically about animals as subjects, and they are resources for analyzing our relationships with other animals. Fortunately, given the growth of Animal Studies, there are many places to find books on other animals. For example, the Reaktion series Animal, edited by Jonathan Burt, starts with albatross, ant, and ape and ends with whale, wild boar, and wolf, with seventy-six books to date, each devoted to a particular animal in between. And there are a growing number of collections in Animal Studies, some organized by discipline and others that are more interdisciplinary, focused on particular kinds of relationships with animals (e.g., as research subjects or as food).

The critical terms in this volume are centrally important for Animal Studies, and each term demands, and often elicits, varying interpretations. The authors were encouraged to bring their own distinctive voices and perspectives to "their terms." In some cases this means that the normative commitments that I mentioned above are front and center; some discussions are more descriptive, some more analytical, some significantly political. Since the authors are well-respected experts, they were not asked to provide standard descriptions of their terms or simply review various ways the term is employed within particular disciplines. Rather, they were invited to explore what they thought was most exciting about the term, and each of the chapters identifies the term's conceptual developments and theorizes in ways that help readers rethink the term's role for Animal Studies. In some chapters, the traditional or expected understanding of

the term is being stretched and challenged, and this will undoubtedly raise debates and perhaps raise blood pressure, all with the hope of eliciting future engagement.

Of course, not every conceptual issue is addressed. There were practical decisions that I made about what critical terms, of the many that could have been included in a two- or three-volume work, would ultimately appear here. Fortunately, many of the terms that could have been their own chapter are discussed in other chapters. For example, *agency* is explored in the chapters on behavior, mind, personhood, rationality, and sociality; *analogy* is explored in the chapters on difference, law, and sentience; *domestication* is explored in the chapters on captivity and sanctuary; *consciousness* comes up in chapters on pain and sentience; *race* is analyzed in chapters on abolition, biopolitics, empathy, and postcolonial. But there are nonetheless gaps; no book of this sort can be comprehensive.

My hope is that *Critical Terms for Animal Studies* provides readers who are already engaged in Animal Studies as well as those who are curious about it with opportunities for thinking deeply and differently about our relationships with other animals, our conceptions of what it means to be a human animal, how we might engage practically and intellectually with other animals, and how our attitudes and actions might more positively affect the more than human world.

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