

Close animals, distant animals : a story between collectives and individuals (from Prehistory to the 21st century)

International colloquium

Wednesday June 1, Thursday June 2, and Friday June 3, 2022

Université Toulouse – Jean Jaurès (31000 Toulouse)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the zoohistory and cultural history of animals, resulting from the pioneering contributions of medieval historians¹, have been considerably enriched by two methodological approaches which still need to be in dialogue: on the one hand, an approach centred on identification and the definition of communities integrating humans and other animals, designated by the term “collectives²”. On the other hand, research aimed at bringing out individual animal experiences or inter-individual exchanges between humans and non-humans, in particular through animal “biographies³”. These two approaches are not opposed and, on the contrary, observing the collective dimensions of relationships between humans and / or other animals allows us to better consider the individual scale.

Thus, the notion of hybrid community, as defined by Dominique Lestel, refers to “an association of men and animals, in a given culture, which constitutes a living space for both sides, in which are shared interests, affects and meaning⁴”. These collectives are formed between individuals belonging to different species, and the individuality of these agents therefore matters more than the species involved. The use of the notion of hybrid community has shown its heuristic potential for the study of domestication, in ethnology and archaeology⁵.

From this perspective, the community is not only created and maintained by cohabitation within a given space but also by the development of a particular relationship between humans and other animals who recognize each other as individuals. The relationship between the collective and the individual scales is further marked by the conceptualization of

¹ Robert DELORT, *Les animaux ont une histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 1993 [1984] ; Jacques VOISENET, *Bêtes et hommes dans le monde médiéval. Le bestiaire des clercs du Ve au XIIe siècle*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2000 ; Michel PASTOUREAU, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*, Paris, Points, 2014 [2004].

² Bruno LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, Paris, La Découverte & Syros, 1997 [1991] ; Philippe DESCOLA, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005.

³ Éric BARATAY, *Le point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 2012 ; *Biographies animales. Des vies retrouvées*, Paris, Seuil, « L'univers historique », 2017.

⁴ Dominique LESTEL, *L'animal singulier*, Paris, Seuil, 2004.

⁵ Charles STEPANOFF et Jean-Denis VIGNE (dir.), *Hybrid Communities: Biosocial Approaches to Domestication and Other Trans-species Relationships*, London, Routledge, 2018.

different degrees of proximity and distance, whether between individuals, between collectives, or between individuals and collectives, from a perspective that is not limited to the only human actor, since it allows to approach animal sociability. Finally, the gradation and articulation between these various levels of interaction stem from historically situated power struggles, in constant reconfiguration.

Proximity and distance can be understood as the set of discursive or relational strategies which make it possible to define a group by what brings together its parts and differentiates the other, by adopting a more graduated perspective than the reductive articulation between inclusion and exclusion. These degrees of proximity and distance between a plurality of individuals, groups of human or non-human animals, of species, still await to be considered as a dynamic phenomenon, more than as a fixed descriptive category, thanks to the contribution of historical and archaeological evidence. To test the relevance of such an approach, we invite historians, historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, literary scholars, and specialists in life sciences to compare, through various case studies, complex situations extending from prehistoric times to 'nowadays, within the geographic spaces they deem appropriate. To do so, we propose to understand the notions of proximity and distance at three levels, complementary and interdependent, of interest to all disciplines, although some issues have been more readily addressed by one or the other.

Axis 1: spatial proximity and distance

The sharing of a territory raises many issues which can revolve around the concept of "proxemics" created by the anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall⁶: the notions of proximity and distance are in fact linked to the protection of an invisible bubble, more or less extensive depending on the times, places and social ties that unite humans and / or other animals. The idea of territory, home, area where what is ours is constantly defined, exists simultaneously on several scales, from that of the "country" to that of the individual. Therefore, human and non-human cohabitation questions the legitimacy of each of these scales and causes permanent adjustments. It can rely on economic, security, moral or even symbolic issues and underlines the importance of mobility, which is constantly reshaping it. Finally, questioning the different living spaces represents a major and topical issue on a global scale, both because of the potential development of epidemics resulting from globalization and because of ecological concerns.

Axis 2: proximity and distance of bodies ("physical" proximity and distance)

The distinctions made between the various types of beings that inhabit the world differ according to classification systems linked to the concept of "ontology". Thus, according to Philippe Descola, humans may or may not be distinguished from other animals based on traits of a physical nature or conversely referring to internal criteria⁷. The presuppositions of the naturalistic ontology of the modern West, involving a sharp discontinuity between human and

⁶ Edward Twitchell HALL, *La dimension cachée*, Paris, Seuil, 1971.

⁷ Philippe DESCOLA, *Par-delà nature et culture... op. cit.*

animal subjectivities, are currently being challenged, both by ethology, neuroscience, philosophy, and law. However, all ontological categorization systems (naturalism, animism, totemism, analogism) have in common that they consider the body to be in some cases a border, in others an interface with non-humans. Far from being abstract, this link is embodied through food (incorporation of each other and vice versa) but also medicine (anthropomorphized physical descriptions, principle of similarities and theory of signatures, shamanic therapy, animal experimentation), today at the centre of social debates but whose genesis remains to be written.

Axis 3: temporal proximity and distance

Finally, because their definition is relative and linked to a fluctuating point of reference, proximity and distance to animals are necessarily articulated in diachronic terms, whether through the scientific study of the traces of extinct species, evolutionary theory or myths such as Christian genesis. This perception of animals from the past by human actors should be questioned, as it influences the relationships they establish with contemporary fauna, while new practices are able to reform these representations. This issue therefore does not only relate to the animals of the past but also to those of the “future”, as evidenced by the protagonism of animal funeral rites, the selection of breeds or the long history of animal rights movements. Anticipating a future free from abuse, these can serve as a human political utopia, as Pierre Serna has pointed out⁸. Finally, back to the present, a given animal species can help define a historical period, or even a human culture, which poses a decisive methodological and reflexive issue for research.

Communication proposals must include a **title** (ideally short), **five key words**, an **argument (between 1,200 and 2,000 characters**, spaces included, in PDF format). Finally, the author must indicate the axis in which he or she wishes to insert his or her communication proposal (spatial proximity and distance, proximity and distance of bodies, temporal proximity and distance).

Communication proposals should be sent no later than **December 20, 2021**, to the following address: AnimHist31@gmail.com

Do not forget to indicate your institutional affiliation as well as your contact details when sending your proposals (email, telephone, and postal address).

Organized at the University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès with the support of the Research Commission and the FRAMESPA and TRACES laboratories, the conference will take place in hybrid modalities. Participants' travel and accommodation costs will be covered.

⁸ Pierre SERNA, *Comme des bêtes. Histoire politique de l'animal en révolution (1750-1840)*, Paris, Fayard, 2017.

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