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[Review] Natalie Porter and Ilana Gershon, editors. *Living with Animals: Bonds across Species*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018. 266 pp.

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Abstract

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Living with Animals, as the dust jacket avers, ‘is a collection of imagined animal guides – a playful look at different human-animal relationships’. The collection has an international range from dogs in Australia, to sacrificial cattle in Madagascar, chimpanzees in West Africa, tamed hyenas in Harar, and returning birds in Buenos Aires. At the same time the reader learns more about animals in processes and places we might take for granted – training service dogs, marketing rescue dogs, introducing a gorilla into a zoo troop – or prefer to deny – dealing with pigs in a factory farm, artificially inseminating cows and horses, responding to mice and ferrets in laboratories.

In the first section on *Fieldwork* the narrator is wiser than her/his past self, the researcher *in situ*. In ‘Yuendumu Dog Tales’ Yasmine Musharbash tells delightful stories of how her knowledge of dogs and how to ‘train’ them is shifted by living traditionally with a pack of dogs. Dogs take on an agency they are never permitted in conventional western ways of dog training. As a dog becomes a research assistant to Musharbash, so a cat intervenes in Alex Nading’s fieldwork in Managua, Nicaragua, breaking down his isolation and connecting him with locals. Hyenas too are agentive in Marcus Baynes-Rock’s research, a heartfelt account of his understandable lack of courage after he sets himself lower in rank than the lowest hyenas. That Andrew Halloran and Catherine E. Bolton are upbeat about the adaptability and resourcefulness of chimpanzees being able to survive in their very small habitat in Sierra Leone is some solace in an age of extinctions.

In the section on *Communication* Agustín Fuentes and Michael Alan Park in ‘Walking with Dogs’ suggest that the activity is about ‘multiple perspectives’ (75) and collaboration with their dogs. Such imagining decentres the human, opening up myriad possibilities. Ventriloquizing an animal’s experience, on the other hand, can foreclose such complexities. A few of the essays in *Living with Animals* have an animal speaker and while such accounts may be highly informative (‘Working with a Service Dog in the United States’, for example) this strategy is problematic. While presenting an animal as narrator might be a strategy for advocacy this ventriloquizing of animals undermines the subjectivity of that animal and may confirm an anthropocentric point of view. The account of habituating a new gorilla to a zoo troop is well-informed, but the voice assigned to the low-ranking gorilla who is about to introduce the newcomer to the troop is distracting. Giving an animal a narrative voice may go along with the playfulness the editors want to foster but the fictionalising of such points of view can lend itself to sentimentality and a denial of difference.

When an essay imagines multiple perspectives and an animal speaks, but only briefly, and along with other elements, this fluctuating point of view is more engaging. Frédéric Keck’s ‘How to Release Viruses from Birds: A Field Guide for Virus Hunters, Buddhist Monks, and Birdwatchers’ has all these titular aspects speak about the ramifications of Buddhist practices of gaining merit from freeing captured birds. The mismanagement of such rituals including the cruel treatment of the captured birds has become fraught with the possibility of zoonotic diseases. In connection with disease, Robert G.W. Kirk’s absorbing guide ‘Healing with Leeches’ gives minute details of the deployment of these creatures, the intricacies of their capture and conservation, their application in an embodied medicine.

Many of the essays in *Living with Animals* bravely describe bonds across species in locations detrimental to animal lives. In ‘How to Act Industrial around Industrial Pigs’ Alex Blanchette’s description of working in a hog ‘factory’ is chilling, especially his disabuse of the assumption that if only factory farmers would acknowledge the sentience of pigs penned all their lives they would not be able to continue ethically with their practices. On the contrary, Blanchette shows, these so-called farmers recognise and manipulate the sensitivity of the pigs instituting rules of behaviour for workers, the more efficiently to keep the animals calm in order

to promote meat production. As Eva Hayward maintains in ‘Oysterous’ a provocative essay on veganism and sexualities ‘To be alive is to be murderous’ (123). Many of the essays here illustrate this. Genese Marie Sodikoff’s ‘How to Protect Yourself from the Dead with Cattle’ includes an excruciating description of the killing of a zebu cow and her calf as a sacrifice to the ancestors in Madagascar.

Two essays about human manipulation of animal reproduction are both discomfiting and instructive. Jeanette Vaught’s ‘How to Make a Horse have an Orgasm’ minutely delineates the ‘carnal, bestial interspecies act’ (160) of the euphemistically termed ‘collection’ of horse semen. The uneasy switch of human and bovine perspectives in Scout Calvert’s ‘Making Babies with Cows’ is redolent of Michel Faber’s novel *Under the Skin* which depicts the process of men farmed as meat by creatures disguised as humans.

Case studies of conservation bring the book to closure. A guide to rescuing dogs, Natalie Porter’s ‘Read, Respond, Rescue’ conveys the urgency required in saving dogs destined for euthanizing. Nicholas D’Avella’s ‘How to Care for a Park with Birds’ not only foregrounds the presence of birds within urban politics but tells a story with a positive outcome about the reclaiming of the Lago de Regatas in Buenos Aires.

In spite of my reservations about the politics of speaking for other animals, this is a rich and lively collection with most essays conveying an embodied groundedness of both researcher and subject. *Living with Animals* is an entertaining and informative read and it will serve as an excellent text for class debate.