

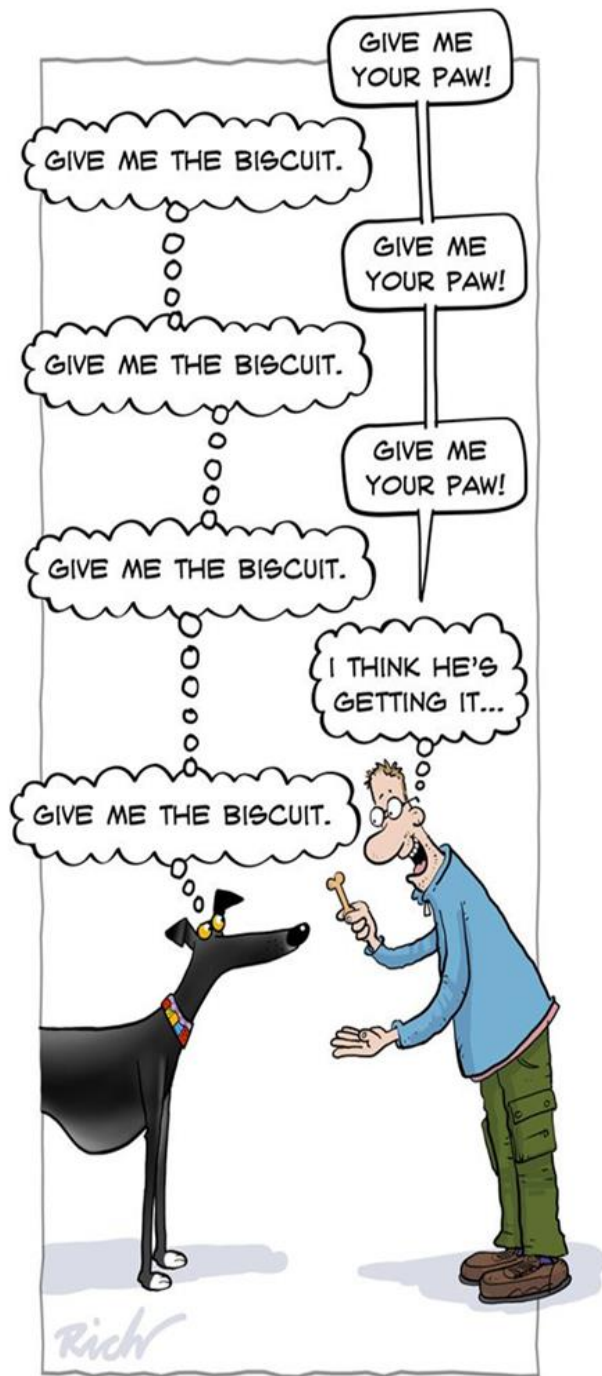
Animalizing ethnography?

Or..

More-than-human methods? Critical reflections on the impossibility of getting away from ourselves



Erika Cudworth



Animalising method

- Social science methods 'imbued with anthropocentrism' (Segerdahl 2012)
- Difficulty of representing the non-human – language (Sanders and Arluke 1993)
- Non-linguistic communication - are we likely to 'read everything wrongly'? (Hamilton and Taylor 2017)
- Standard methods/practices predominate
- How far can ethnography incorporate a dog's experience and point of view?

Ethnography and other animals

- Field work in
 - Animal shelters (Alger and Alger 2003, Irvine 2004)
 - Veterinary clinics (Sanders, 1993)
 - Dog training (Sanders 1999, McHugh 2016, Smith et. al. 2021))
- Observation and interview
 - Reveals human-animal communication
 - Exemplified how animals make preferences known
 - Relational studies limited – what of multiple species? (van Dooren et al 2016)
 - Ethnographies of ‘passionate immersion’ (Tsing 2015)
 - Need for standpoint to avoid prioritizing human knowledge (Kopina 2017)

Ethnography facilitates....

- Curiosity (Van Dooren and Bird Rose 2016)
- Attentiveness (Marvin 2005)
Observing – concentrated attention

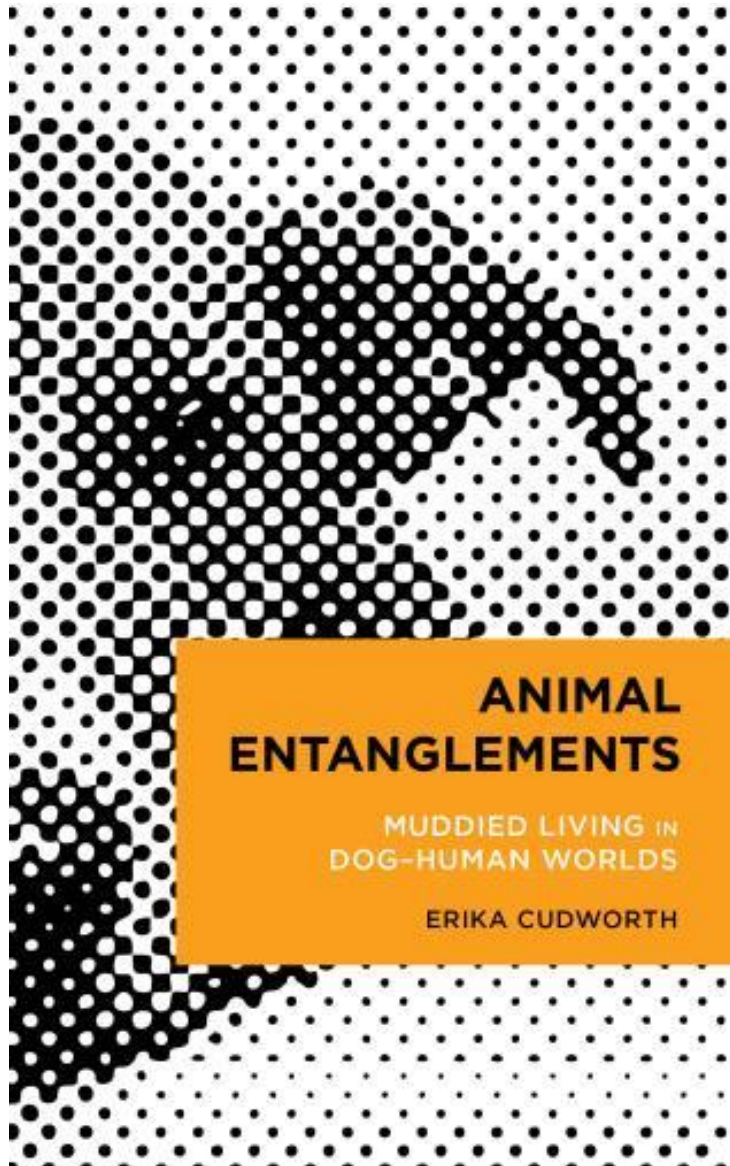


Ethnographies and mobilities

- Methods associated with the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006)
- Mobile methods involves 'taking the methods to the people' (O'Reilly 2009)
- Walking/riding/travelling/hanging around with
- 'Co-present immersion' (Urry 2007) – wandering around with people then interviewing
- The 'go-along interview' (Carpiano 2009)
- 'ask along' the way (Hall, Lashua and Coffey 2006)

What is different then?

- Standard ethnography foregrounds space/place but in a static way
- Research and subjects are mobile
- Sensory element: being there plus ‘feeling there’ (Fincher et al. 2010)
- ‘For the purpose of authenticity it is crucial to conduct “natural go-alongs” ...that follow informants into their familiar environments and track outings they would go on anyway...’ (Kusenbach, 2003)



Everyday encounters and ethnography

- Ethnography as inscribing the daily
- Mundane Methods (Holmes and Hall, 2020)
- Remarkable, not trivial or commonplace (Back 2020)
- A picture of a culture – humancentric?

Multispecies ethnography?

- 52 semi-structured interviews
- Mostly mobile interviewing, 'go-along encounter' (Kusenbach, 2003)
- One calendar year of observational data (ethnographic diary)
- Two field sites – London's Lea Valley Park, village in rural Leicestershire



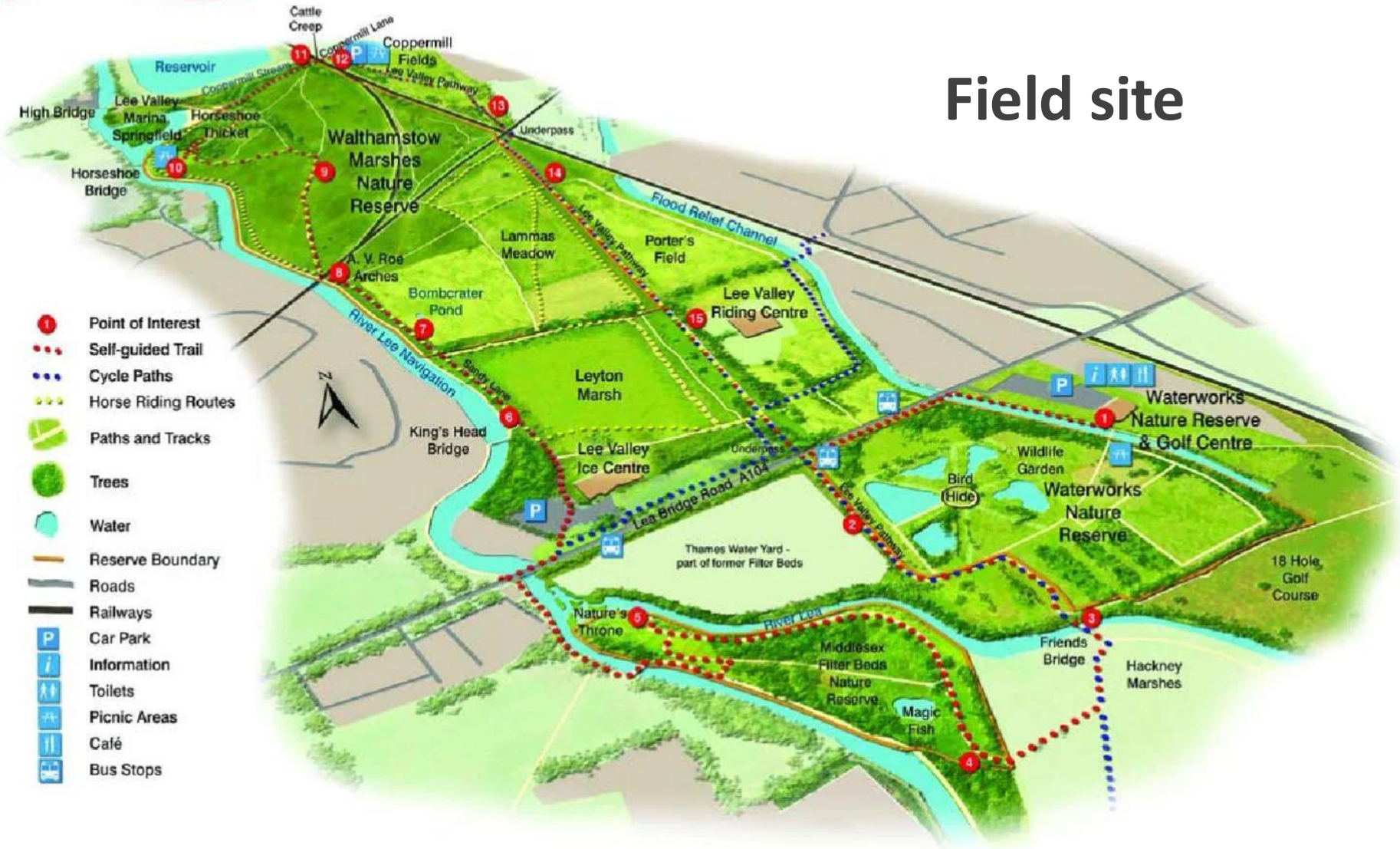
Edgelands

- Interfacial land (Shoard 2002)
- Rural edgelands – paths, farm tracks, edges of fields
- London edgelands – away from paths, open marshland
 - Off leash walking
 - Spaces for gathering
 - Places for ‘a proper walk’

it never occurred to me that I'd walk him on the roads where I live. (interview, London)



Field site



Walking with and talking dogs

- Field notes - an ethnographic diary of encounters with dogs and their people in part of London's Lea Valley Park, daily, for a calendar year (2009-10).
- Semi-structured mostly mobile interviews with dog guardians, investigating their relationships and everyday lives with canine companions.
- 37 (2010 and 2011) with people walking dogs on the marshes which form part of the Lea Valley Park.
- A second phase of interviewing (2014) 15 interviews with people walking dogs in and around a village in rural Leicestershire.



Research pack

- Sample is dog-shaped – only certain packs may be included
- Some research assistants are better than others!
- Deficiencies in research(er) training
- Secured legitimacy in the field
- Involvement of dogs ‘a condition of work’

Never work with animals

Wandering off, barking, chewing furniture or clothes, starting a fight, disappearing...

[running now] I'm just going through the process of where he would go to....Shame you're not making a documentary Erika, how are you going to describe this excitement and my fear?....

(Millie, Billie, here! Some barking – van coming down gravel road, dogs have to be rounded up and to the side etc).

S – We've spent so many 100s of 1000s of years domesticating them; they're not going to go away. They're always going to be here aren't they? (*Stop to retrieve Maude's ball, which has been picked up by another dog*). What was the question again? (**E – the good things about...**) Oh they get you out.

Co-produced knowledge?

- Dog-shaped data:
 - dog fight influences questions that are subsequently asked
 - wandering off influences route taken
 - meeting other packs who 'were not being interviewed' – messy data
- I did not 'treat all my participants with equal seriousness' – species inequality embedded in the project and its findings
- Human and human-centred method
- Lack of non-human agency as research assistants or subjects
- Lack of challenge to asymmetries of power

Ethics – who benefits when species meet?

the man rides his bike far too fast and the dog has to run at full pelt to keep up. He never slows down when he sees people and other dogs...the dog never has time to sniff, let alone socialise, so she is snappy and nervous. (field notes)

Interviewee [to dog] Jago, did you give your consent? [to interviewer] Do you want her paw print?

By the gate is R, on her bike, towing Sam on his lead. She has been shouting and swearing at him 'thank God you didn't hear, Erika' she says, 'I don't want that down in your notes'. (field notes)

...they ask Kevin how he is coping with his new roles as my research assistant and all the walking. I say he had to walk 4 hours the other day. 'Poor Kevin, are you tired? She's terrible'. 'You'll come in one day and find him on the phone to the Dogs Trust', and impersonating Kevin: 'I've got this new job, but I never realised how much was involved. I'm an exploited working dog. Look at the length of my legs, they're worn away!'. (field notes)

More-than-human human research ethics?

- A question for University ethical protocols if animals are not research tools?
- What would it mean for a dog to give consent?

- Unanticipated harms
- What would it mean for non-human animals to benefit from our research? Findings and process.
- The life of a researchers' dog



Care in interspecies homes – SSHRCC University of Guelph

- FIDO lab, human-animal connection, emphasis on dog-human kin networks (Breen, Linares-Roake, Van Patter).
- Re.Vision Centre for Art and Social Justice (Rice).
- Who cares for whom and how?
- What is the quality of relations and quality of care?
- Multispecies methods revisited?!
 - Mobile ethnographic interviewing: walks, homes etc.
 - Video storytelling
- Whose story for what? – about, for, who is telling the story and why?
- Themes: disability, trauma, normativity
 - gendering of care and parenting
 - problem of (human) vision
 - ethics of multi-species research

Travels with Ruby

- Material from 'Walking the dog' project on leaving and taking dogs 'on holiday'
- Autoethnographic diary keeping and other reflections with photo elicitation while travelling
- 'Vinnie's Holiday'

<https://vimeo.com/964515433/d8f41ed612?share=copy>

- Can I get away from myself without becoming an animal behaviourist?
- How can non-human experience be seen/counted?

Animalizing ethnography?

- Questioning the boundaries and concept of species
 - Inclusion of species in research practice?
 - Decentering the human in the research process – or human interests?
 - Centering the non-human?
- Moving away from humancentric methodology?
 - Multi-sensory methods
 - Mobile methods
 - Creative methods
 - Interdisciplinarity
- How much does this matter?
 - Human positionality
 - Paying attention!