

The Habit in Cohabitation

*(Or, How to Meet a
Tiger on the Path)*

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Abstract: As human and nonhuman animals increasingly share space, however enthusiastically or reluctantly, the concepts of habit, cohabitation, and habituation bear further scrutiny when applied to these makeshift arrangements. Many researchers have argued for greater recognition of the ways in which more-than-human relations are historically situated. Yet they sometimes unwittingly re-impart a timeless quality into their accounts by invoking a discourse of habit, especially when rendering field observations in the present tense. “Habit” and its cognates map fixed attributes onto animals. This essay critically examines the temporality embedded in the usage of “habit”, “cohabitation”, and “habituation” in discussions of human–nonhuman animal relations, arguing that a discourse of habit traps animals in an ethnographic present of the sort long critiqued within anthropology in its (post)colonial application to humans. Studies of human–tiger relations in Rajasthan, India, and auto-ethnographic material on human–bear relations in Alaska suggestively illustrate what a more sophisticated historical orientation has to offer by moving discussions of multispecies relations beyond the tropes of encounter and blurred human/nonhuman boundaries. Acknowledgment that nonhuman animals have historically inflected backstories, even when their experiences are not accessible to humans, is a step in the direction of more expansive possibilities for co-worlding.

Keywords: *animal studies, temporality, cohabitation, habituation, environment, India, North America*

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As human and nonhuman animals increasingly share space, however enthusiastically or reluctantly, the concepts of habit, cohabitation, and habituation bear further scrutiny when applied to an emerging array of makeshift accommodations in more-than-human relations. Many researchers have argued for greater recognition of the ways in which more-than-human relations are historically situated. Yet researchers have also sometimes unwittingly ended up re-imparting a timeless quality to even the most sophisticated accounts by implicitly or explicitly invoking a discourse of habit, especially when rendering field observations in the present tense. “Habit” and its cognates map fixed attributes onto animals, regardless of the historical/ecological circumstances cited to explain those attributes in any given instance. This essay critically examines the temporality embedded in the usage of “habit”, “cohabitation”, and “habituation” in discussions of human–nonhuman animal relations. It argues that the discourse of habit can trap animals in an ethnographic present of the sort long critiqued within anthropology in its (post)colonial application to humans.

One alternative to this practice of entrapment is to approach more-than-human animals as what Mahesh Rangarajan calls “animals with histories,” instead of treating them as members of species with fairly set characteristics who make cameo appearances *in* ecological histories, ethnographies, and field studies. The tigers and elephants, beavers and bears, racoons and coyotes who “inhabit” the following paragraphs are accordingly not denizens but visitors: guest instructors, if you will. Their stories nudge discussions of multispecies relations beyond the colonial trope of encounter and the blurring of human/nonhuman boundaries toward temporally more diverse accounts that honour the impact of previous events on even the most creative efforts to negotiate those boundaries. Although humans may lack access to more-than-human memories and experiences, an acknowledgement of animals’ historically inflected backstories opens more expansive possibilities for co-worlding.

My provocation begins, notwithstanding the subtitle of this article, with bears. And not even with bears as such, but with bears that

loom large in the imagination of humans, bears who take shape through fantasy confrontations in a meadow or in the woods, before those “encounters” ever materialize on the banks of a river or at a campsite. Other animals will join these spectral cousins of *Ursus arctos* in due course. Our guest instructors share a membership in *Animalia Charismatica*: the club for charismatic animals whose fates are increasingly mediated by the threats and charms they exert in the minds of humans.¹

Under such imaginatively inflammatory conditions, how are nonhuman animals and human animals supposed to live together? More specifically, how does the common socio-temporal framing of our interactions with reference to animals’ habits and behaviours influence the prospects for all concerned? If, as I will argue, the static yet cyclical time-out-of-time of habit (the habit in “cohabitation” and “habituation”) provides an unsatisfactory, even injurious, way of characterizing our mutual accommodation, how might humans begin to reconceptualize such relations?

When I travelled to Alaska for the first and only time, back in the 1980s, the ever-present instructions about how a person should conduct themselves if ever they meet a bear made a lasting impression on me. You saw handy educational tips posted at visitor centres, in campgrounds, on bulletin boards in laundromats and supermarkets and government offices. Surprisingly, all those posters, leaflets, and pamphlets did not add up to any consensus about what to do. One would advise us to stay very quiet and still, while another stressed the importance of backing away slowly. One might suggest that we try climbing a tree, while yet another would point out that bears, too, can climb trees (more quickly than one might expect). The next bit of unsolicited advice would urge us, as relatively scrawny humans, to hold out our arms to make ourselves appear bigger and more intimidating. “Intimidating, compared to a bear? Good luck with that!”

¹ Which is not to imply that unheralded stories of species judged by humans to be less charismatic have nothing to teach (see van Dooren, *A World in a Shell*), merely that a focus on animals whose stories already appeal to diverse constituencies of humans provides a strategic “way in” to a discussion of the longstanding preoccupation with habit in conceiving more-than-human relations.

I thought to myself. I practiced, feeling a bit ridiculous, but remained far from convinced.

A little further down the road, I would come across a reminder to try to remain calm and inconspicuous rather than panic if a bear decided to rear up on its hind legs. This behaviour was apparently not some precursor to a ferocious attack, like the ones depicted in Hollywood movies. On the contrary, the advisory materials maintained: standing up on two hind paws was an innocuous habit bears had developed because they have poor eyesight but a keen sense of smell. By repositioning their noses at a certain height, they could get a better whiff of their surroundings. None of these universalized explanations and instructions mentioned Indigenous modes of signalling human presence to passing bears, such as the way Anishinaabe trappers might pause to offer tobacco to them when moving through the forest.²

Bells tied to backpacks to warn bears of the approach of a human along the trail were almost as ubiquitous in that part of the world as posters filled with cohabitation instructions. How all this was supposed to work when Alaska's roaring spring streams drowned out the delicate jingle and jangle that accompanied human footfalls was anyone's guess. I dutifully fastened a bell to my gear anyway. The devil is in always in the details, I supposed, and for humans, anyway, they say it's the thought that counts.

Although most of this sage advice was meant to be protective, even lifesaving, not all of it was tendered in earnest. A few pedagogical entries in the "human–bear encounter" genre incorporated gallows humour, of the sort that prompted one ranger to post behind glass a cartoon of bears sitting around a fire stirring a big pot of stew. In a carnivalesque interspecies riff on cannibal stories — from the shape of the pot alone, you knew what was in that pot — one very satisfied-looking anthropomorphic bear had turned to its companions to remark, "I just love it when they play dead!"

The ranger who posted the cartoon admonished campers, in a more quotidian register, to forbear — no pun intended — from creating

2 See Willow, "Conceiving Kakipitapitmok," 269.

conditions that would encourage human–bear interactions in the first place. Keep a tidy campsite. Hang food on ropes over tree branches and never, ever, take food with you into your tent. The best course of action apparently was to allow cohabitation by humans and bears to work itself out in parallel rather than intersecting lives, like staging a farce in which the characters are constantly cycling on and off the stage, missing one another on the way in and out by a hair’s breadth. The best encounter was no encounter.

In crafting this opening passage about campers and bears who decamp for sites otherwise claimed by humans, I have utilized a methodological technique I have developed elsewhere called an “ethnographic stopgap”.³ Ethnographic stopgaps feature vignettes repurposed from a researcher’s memory in such a way as to apply ethnographic training and an ethnographic sensibility to past events that occurred outside the context of any formal fieldwork. For instance, it may be impossible at a remove of several decades to locate an unnamed ranger who presided over a campground that no longer exists, much less the source for notices and cartoons casually pinned to vanished bulletin boards. Yet ethnographic stopgaps like these can be invaluable when laying the groundwork for an inquiry. Points embedded in the stopgap narrative illustrate, frame, and foreshadow points that will feature in the ensuing argument, while calling attention to the need to augment research in specific areas.

For the purposes of this essay, the specifics of what to do when meeting a bear in the woods (or for that matter, when meeting a foraging bear in your kitchen) are beside the point. It is the very ubiquity of contradictory advice and its temporal framing that I find revealing. Bears appeared in these posted warnings and lists of helpful tips as creatures of regular comportment and habits, habits that it was incumbent upon humans who wished to share space with them to study. Bear sightings in these imaginary meetings floated free in what anthropologists would call an ethnographic present. The lumbering protagonists of a million cautionary tales might exhibit the occasional *change* in behaviour— as, for example, when

3 Weston, *Animate Planet*; Weston, “The Ethnographer’s Magic”.

humans corrupted them by leaving bags of chips unsecured at a picnic site—but humans almost never imagined the bears that fascinated them as having a *history*. Like nonhuman animals more generally, bears were said to be “creatures of habit” (or, sometimes still, instinct), but on this journey, the non-Indigenous humans whose hopes and fears revolved around meeting bears seldom accorded bear sociality much diachronic complexity.

The Habit in Cohabitation

All animals famously have a specific habitat: a region, complete with other fauna and flora, where humans say they belong, or by some definitions, “naturally” live. Being animals themselves, humans also lay claim to habitat, but to the degree that humans have adopted a colonizing stance toward a range of ecosystems, their claims have tended to be more overbearing. Headlines such as “Potential Human Habitat Located on the Moon” (or any number of exoplanets) illustrate this differential.⁴ Both sorts of animals, human and nonhuman, can *in-habit* and potentially *co-habit*, ecologically speaking. These terms share the sense of something present, something settled, no matter how it was acquired: a type of settled inclination, as well as, potentially, a shared space of geographical residence.

When it comes to climate change, however, all bets are off as to who belongs where and how long any particular species can hang on amidst the accelerating transformations. Rampant urbanization, forced migration, and escalating extinctions make it all the more urgent to think carefully and critically about the present-tense orientation and cyclical temporality associated with “habit” in dreams of multispecies cohabitation, as well as the prominence of habit more generally in accounts of animal life. There is a repetitiveness to habit that will not serve or survive the challenge of climate change, practically or theoretically. And that may not be such a bad thing, if the goal is to arrive at a more subtle understanding of the temporal dimensions of any grounds where human and nonhuman animals meet.

4 “Potential Human Habitat Located on the Moon,” *Science Blog*, 23 Oct. 2017, <https://scienceblog.com/497066/potential-human-habitat-located-moon/>; cf. Messeri, *Placing Outer Space*.

The etymological root of “habit,” *habere*, has signified variably over the centuries: to have and to hold, to be situated, to wear, but also to have in mind. Temporally speaking, habits combine aspects of fixity and cyclicity. They are notoriously hard to break, should anyone care to try. That makes them static, to the degree that they are well-established and relatively impervious to change. Yet recurrence is also a key feature. No single incident can constitute a habit. Habitual actions are the ones that happen again, and again, and again. In the way habit yokes fixity (the “same” behaviour) to recurrence, habit exists both in and out of time. But not just any time; for the cyclical time of repetition is not the linear time of history, a point that will become important as this essay unfolds.

Within the fields of animal behaviour and animal psychology, the heyday for explicitly framing research in terms of habit was the early twentieth century. This was a period in which the Scottish biologist E. S. Russell could proclaim, “everything in the animal life is under the dominion of habit,” and only rarely would a colleague blink.⁵ Habit had begun to displace an older concept, instinct, once widely enlisted to explain animal behaviours deemed to be characteristic. Unlike instincts, habits could be acquired within the course of a lifetime. In 1922, Knight Dunlap, President of the American Psychological Association, tried to resolve the debate about whether instincts even exist by arguing that instinct and habit were one and the same.⁶ Others treated the two concepts as distinct but allied, contending that “the bonds of instinct and habit [...] cause the situation to produce the act.”⁷ Such moves to amalgamate habit with instinct elided a longer history of philosophical debates in which habit could feature not as mindless behaviour but rather as a form of knowledge.⁸

During this period, habit formation emerged as a hot new area of investigation, with researchers championing the virtues of mazes and

5 Russell, *Form and Function*, 29.

6 Dunlap, “Identity of Instinct.”

7 Thorndike, *Animal Intelligence*, 18.

8 Carlisle, *On Habit*.

white rats for unlocking its secrets.⁹ Not to be outdone, other scholars launched experimental inquiries into “the formation of a simple habit in guinea-pigs”¹⁰ or “the relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit formation in the kitten.”¹¹ Although the focus was ostensibly on animal learning, the hope of extrapolating the findings about kittens or rats to human behaviour often shadowed such British and American studies. Susan Zieger, for instance, has shown how habit lost some of its culturally positive connotations of discipline and order when it became part of a generative discourse that surrounded the Victorian invention of the addict,¹² newly figured as a tragically divided self, possessed by something called a “drug habit.” Researchers who wanted to help human animals “kick the habit” hoped to gain insight into addiction from a better understanding of how all those white rats became fixated on rewards.

The animals who appear in various iterations of animal studies today might seem far removed from the creatures of habit who populated twentieth-century research in experimental psychology and animal behaviour. Contemporary researchers seldom propose to study animal habits per se. They seem to have fallen out of enchantment with habit: “a wonderfully old-fashioned, antiquated, antediluvian word,” as cultural theorist Geeta Patel puts it, one that was “so ordinary that it almost slipped by without notice. Both trivial and fraught with meaning; not worthy of attention and unpacking; a throwaway, but also something we glom onto as having the kind of import that it magnetises, draws, and seizes analytic impetus to itself.”¹³

These days, animal behaviourists have become more interested in the frisson of innovation than the conservative impulse of constancy.¹⁴ Environmental geographers have tried to convey the less predictable, less cyclical sensory diffuseness of animal interactions by

9 E.g. Maupin, “Habit Formation in Animals,” 574.

10 Grindley, “Simple Habit in Guinea-Pigs,” 127–147.

11 Dodson, “Relation of Strength,” 330–336.

12 Zieger, *Inventing the Addict*.

13 Patel, *Risky Bodies*, 24.

14 Reader and Laland, *Animal Innovation*.

elaborating nuanced concepts such as “animals’ atmospheres”.¹⁵ Multispecies ethnographers find themselves observing more-than-human interactions in settings so altered by industrialization, pollution, wildfire, roadbuilding, climate change, and even conservation that the repetitious behaviour embedded in habit will not suffice.¹⁶ None of these researchers any longer approach animals as rigidly bounded organisms with a species-specific portmanteau of set habits that they lug around. And yet...

And yet. The temporality of “habit” persists. Despite the calls for recognition of the “entangled histories” of human and more-than-human organisms,¹⁷ despite the epochal time invoked by notions of an Anthropocene and an Age of Extinction,¹⁸ despite the aspirational efforts devoted to “making kin” and “making-with”,¹⁹ it remains quite common for researchers across disciplines to frame their accounts of animals either in the present tense, or in the attenuated past of recent trips to the laboratory or the field. From there, it becomes easy for even the most sophisticated investigators to credit animals with the kind of repetitive actions and regularized attributes that might have been familiar to researchers of earlier generations.

Previous formulations were simpler: Brown bears feed on salmon, when they have a chance; antelopes, not so much. In the twenty-first century, habit discourse takes a bit more sleuthing to discern. Golden bell frogs, in one instance, surprise humans by thriving in toxic dumping grounds instead of the remediated habitats prepared for them. Anthropologists then worry about caring for said frogs who have become “dependent on” toxicity.²⁰ Cue the legacy of habit, quietly mediated by notions of addiction and habit formation, refigured as learning to adapt. Repetition retooled, with just enough plasticity to evade extinction.

15 Lorimer et al., “Animals’ Atmospheres.”

16 Kirksey, *Emergent Ecologies*; Münster et al., “Multispecies Care”; Petryna, “Wildfires at the Edges”; Van Dooren, *World in a Shell*.

17 Tsing et al., *Feral Atlas*; Tsing et al., *Arts of Living*.

18 Bastian, “Encountering Leatherbacks”; Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming*; Rose et al., *Extinction Studies*.

19 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

20 Kirksey, “Chemosociality in Multispecies Worlds,” 24.

This legacy association of animals with habits also persists in the acronyms used to represent certain technologies focused on animals. The Horse Automated Behaviour Identification Tool, or HABIT, for example, is an animal–computer interface, still in the design phase, for analysing horse–horse and horse–human interactions. Assuming all goes well, the UK-based HABIT project proposes to use cutting-edge technology to automate the generation of ethograms, which aspire to “comprehensive descriptions of the characteristic behaviour patterns of a species”.²¹ Early twentieth-century biologists and experimental psychologists would have found little to quibble with there. In another part of the world, HABIT stands for “Human–Animal Bond in Tennessee”, an organization that brings community volunteers and veterinarians together to sponsor pet visitation programs in care homes, retirement centres, and residences for children with special needs.²²

Then there is the *habit* in *cohabitation*, that yearning desire in a multispecies key to somehow find a way to “get along”. Cohabitation typically involves a desire to share space rather than cede space, to come to some sort of proximate accommodation, in contrast to coexistence, which at the scale of a wildlife corridor or a planet might not involve everyday interactions. To coexist, at a minimum, requires humans to create the conditions in which other animals can thrive rather than perish; to find a way to interrupt the Sixth Mass Extinction, with or without our paths regularly crossing. Cohabitation additionally requires more quotidian negotiations over space, lest you relocate the woodchuck that has decimated your garden to the other side of the river, while your neighbours across the river are busy relocating the woodchucks with whom they have lost patience over to yours. A friend in small-town Virginia calls this the “annual woodchuck exchange”.

Assuming you can see the folly and have no wish to endanger animals by displacing them, how are negotiations over the shared space implicit in cohabitation to be conducted? Here, the process of knowledge production about animals becomes important. If your understanding of animals is Indigenous, you might begin by

21 North et al., “HABIT: Horse Automated Behaviour Identification Tool,” 1.

22 See <https://vetmed.tennessee.edu/outreach/habit>.

reflecting upon responsibilities to particular species, or how “the long arc of colonialism” and dispossession has brought things to a certain pass.²³ But if your understanding of animals draws on a steady diet of habits and static attributes served up by media shows about wildlife, you might say to yourself, “Racoons are nocturnal, so they can have the run of the yard at night when I’m sleeping. Hmm, maybe I’ll find a more secure lid for that bin.” Not a bad idea about the bin. Notice, however, that to narrate matters this way applies a single temporal frame to the animal: the continuous present tense of habit, filled with enduring repetitive actions and inclinations that may vary seasonally yet always cycle back to where they started. To all appearances, a reasonable compromise about how to share space. But then suppose you keep spotting a “nocturnal” racoon lurking about during the daytime, getting up to all sorts of things that you might regard as mischief. A discourse grounded in habit does not offer much scope for figuring out why, for asking how the racoon’s actions relate to past events and changing conditions, much less coming to some sort of accommodation.

Sharing the same *habitat* with humans is one thing; *habituation* is quite another. As a “multidimensional, mutual, and complex process in which humans and animals continuously and reciprocally adapt to each other”, habituation unfolds in processual time over the course of days, weeks, even years.²⁴ Like the habit in cohabitation, the habit in habituation is never neutral. Researchers often *want* the great apes and meerkats they study to become habituated, all the better to study them.²⁵ They work hard at “the interface” to reduce any fear response to humans. They learn to discern which bits of the settings, in which the interaction takes place, affect the habituation process.²⁶ They may even end up questioning the tendency to approach animals as bounded scientific objects who engage in person-to-person relations, arguing that there are better ways to

23 Hatfield et al., “Indian Time,” 1; Whyte, “Our Ancestors’ Dystopia Now.”

24 Hernández Tienda, et al., “The Habituation Process,” 1.

25 Hanson and Riley, “Beyond Neutrality.”

26 Alcayna-Stevens, “Inalienable Worlds.”

understand habituation's transformative properties.²⁷ Over time, Lys Alcayna-Stevens contends, the researchers also change, cultivating their senses and shifting somatic modes of attention in order to dwell in familiarity with their more-than-human research collaborators.²⁸ They may come to perceive, with the subtlety of a Michelle Bastian, that temporal differences distinguish one animal from another in relation to their surroundings: "A jaguar's time is tethered to its shifting prey, a turtle's to the amount of plastic in its gut."²⁹ These relations are not static, but in this literature, the habituation that renders human/non-human animals knowable to one another takes place within a time frame of ongoing "encounters" that rarely investigate a deeper past.

Of course, there is another side to habituation. What happens outside of research settings when humans charge more-than-human animals with developing "bad habits"? For bears, rooting around in trash cans is a classic "bad habit", frequently portrayed as addictive. For elephants, pulverizing months of human labour invested in carefully tended crops might guarantee a meal, but for farmers, it often counts as a "habit" that is ruinous. For snakes, it might be the "bad habit" of returning again and again to the crawlspace under a house, long after wearing out an already ambivalent human welcome. These are animal equivalents of the pictures of slovenly glue-sniffing "juvenile delinquents", displayed on schoolroom charts of bad habits from the 1950s and 1960s, that admonished human children to "straighten up".³⁰ Human animals with a bit of spare change can take workshops on how to "creatively engage" with habits they hope to modify, but what are their nonhuman relatives to do?

In wildlife management settings, a verdict of "habituation" to humans may come with a death sentence, or at the very least,

27 Candea, "Habituating Meerkats."

28 Alcayna-Stevens, "Habituating Field Scientists."

29 Bastian, "Encountering Leatherbacks," 30.

30 For a more contemporary example, tendered in earnest, see Cherry Hill's "Bad Habits in Horses" chart, which foregrounds many scenarios in which horses prove less than cooperative when working with humans, including "Barn Sour," "Can't Catch," "Halter Pulling," and "Striking—taking a swipe at a person with a front leg".

transportation and exile. “Habituated” nonhuman animals are the ones who have become too comfortable with human company, or to flip the terms, too close for human comfort. Rather than owning up to the latter—the part that human comfort, safety, and judgment play in this state of affairs—“habituation” arrives to place the onus on the condemned animal. The following example, taken from a blog post about coyotes that frequent human neighbourhoods, is fairly typical: “Depending on a coyote’s level of habituation, it’s potentially reversible with hazing. However, a specific coyote preying on livestock or demonstrating habituation beyond the point of reversal could justify lethal removal.”³¹ This blog’s author is reasonably sympathetic to the coyotes, in the course of making the point that killing coyotes can have the paradoxical effect of increasing their population. Yet someone who sees “lethal removal” as the *only* answer to coyotes in a human neighbourhood could and generally would use “habituation” in the same way, as though the term were a neutral descriptor of the animal’s behaviour.

To be clear, by taking a more critical look at the usage of “habit” and its incorporation into related terms such as “habitat”, “cohabitation”, and “habituation”, I am not arguing that twenty-first-century animals of different sorts lack habits. Clearly, they, we, do not. For most humans, that point can be driven home by asking them to eliminate filler words such as “uh” and “erm” from their speech, or by trying to live without their phones for a day. Nor am I attempting to adjudicate the question of whether “targeted lethal removal” is an ethical way to treat animals, or whether it helps or hinders subsequent multispecies conflicts. If anything, the particular “habits of mind” and narrative conventions employed by human animals when they evaluate the merits of conservation proposals require further scrutiny.

In *Feral*, a book that looks at rewilding proposals through a bit of a rose-tinted lens, environmentalist George Monbiot tells the tale of a landowner who, after months of listening to biologists explain the details of a beaver reintroduction experiment in Britain, objected to beavers coming into *his* river and eating up *his* fish, still having failed to

31 Scrofano, “Killing Coyotes.”

realize that beaver diets are herbivorous.³² A local reporter who turned up to watch one of the beaver releases did not do much better:

“Is this where they’re releasing the badgers?”

“They’re not badgers, they’re...”

“Bloody hell, look at the size of that otter!”³³

“Habits of mind” seems as fair a way as any to characterize the socially configured sticking points that contribute to these sorts of comical yet highly consequential misperceptions. At the same time, however, there are ways in which the discourse of habit that insinuates itself into discussions of multispecies cohabitation can get in the way of multispecies endeavours. Even, and perhaps especially, for humans who work diligently to educate themselves about so-called animal habits in a well-intentioned move to come up with creative ways to live beside or amongst them, as I did on my Alaska sojourn. This confusion is down to what the discourse of habit backgrounds and conceals by distilling repetitive actions into attributes, allying itself with the colonial stance of encounter, and most significantly, confining nonhuman animals in a timeless present by eviscerating them of their histories.

Europe and the Animals Without History

The critical stance towards the discourse of habit developed here harks back to a moment in the 1980s, when the anthropologists Eric Wolf and Johannes Fabian staged influential critiques of the way that the routinized incorporation of certain modes of temporal description into ethnography had allowed anthropologists to keep the people they studied at a safe distance. Safe, as in no threat to the power relations that accorded the ethnographer a position of privilege; no threat to racialized assumptions about “Western” superiority haunting the text, and little threat to the ways in which imperialism continued to shape an emerging postcolonial order. In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, Fabian discussed epistemological practices and literary devices that insistently

³² Monbiot, *Feral*, 79.

³³ Monbiot, 81.

relegated subject-objects of anthropological study to an allochronic time grounded in a denial of coevalness with the researchers dedicated to producing knowledge about them.³⁴ Allochronic time did more than Other: it primitivized the Other by allowing researchers to occupy a today already edging over into tomorrow, while relegating the people they studied to representatives of the past.

What perpetuated all of this in an avowedly postcolonial era? One key culprit was the quotidian deployment of the present tense in ethnographic accounts. Readers of anthropological monographs had become inured to sweeping statements, unmoored from any historical provenance, about how the So-and-So's wear X, do X, eat X, whereas the Such-and-Suches are accustomed to Y. There were certainly allusions to change in these monographs, particularly when the topic was urbanization, but change tended to ally itself more with a sense of contingency in a comparative now-and-then framework ("continuity and change") than with any sort of historical periodization. At the time Fabian published his critique, many anthropologists did not seem to perceive a contradiction in couching analyses of admittedly changing field sites in the present tense. And what were their analyses filled with? Processes, practices, kinship systems, rituals, and the like, with the occasional old-school reference to customs, all of it cycling around and around again to produce implicitly primitivized descriptions.

In *Europe and the People Without History*, published just a year before Fabian's *Time and the Other*, Eric Wolf had taken aim at anthropology's penchant for conceiving societies holistically for the purposes of exploring their differences, as though they were isolated from one another, rather than grasping the ways in which even the most remote (remote from whom?) societies had been interconnected with others over the course of millennia.³⁵ To grasp these interconnections, the fuzzy concept of "change" would not be enough. "Change" could be, and had been, applied ethnographically to shore up the primitivism of the ethnographic present. By assigning change

³⁴Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

³⁵Wolf, *Europe and the People*.

to European modernity, many writers had implied that nothing much had changed in so-called “simpler” societies until Europeans stumbled across them. Wolf argued not for “continuity and change”, but for history, and for understanding the importance of the imperial ventures that had so profoundly shaped the “now” of ethnographic observation. Unless all humans (not just the descendants of Europeans) could be understood as having history, there would be no remedy for the denial of coevalness that Fabian identified as a consequence of a long line of (mostly white) anthropologists who had persistently Othered certain humans by trying to make them do the forced labour of representing a timeless “primitive” past.

Even back then, decades before our current more-than-human multispecies conversations, animals were in the picture. Do I need to reiterate that these were not breathing, scuttling, diving, ambling, nesting, slithering animals, but rather members of the *Animalia Charismatica* club whose spectral presence infused conversations about “human dignity” and “full humanity” in the shadow of nineteenth-century social evolutionism and its academic attendant, scientific racism? It is this still-pervasive legacy of racism, garbed in the deadly trappings of civilization, that makes it so tricky to suggest that nonhuman animals, too, have a claim on social scientific abstractions such as culture and, as I am arguing, history.

Laura Ogden makes precisely this point about white supremacy’s nefarious manipulations of animality when she puts together a case for the value of thinking about the travels and geographic redistribution of animals as diasporic.³⁶ This kind of move entails traversing the very line between humans and animals that many people of colour have fought hard to reinscribe by taking a stand on their humanity and calling out the racism in imagery that would depict them as animals with a nonhuman aspect. They understand in their bones that to do otherwise in societies that accord animals only the barest life when unindentured to human management may shore up the forces already at work that treat people of colour as though

36 Ogden, “The Beaver Diaspora”.

their lives were of no consequence.³⁷ In creative dialogue with this body of work is Joshua Bennett's moving analysis of the identificatory embrace of certain animals as kin and twinned captives in African American literatures of resistance.³⁸ To chip away at human exceptionalism in a white supremacist context like this is necessarily politically complicated, and an important point to keep in mind as the argument develops.

The evolution of animals might seem incompatible with the ethnographic present because evolution unfurls in geologic time, yet a mythic era of pre-human animality often anchors the epochs of evolution's narration. Both the progressive upward mobility stories of social evolutionism and the environmentally conditioned development narratives of natural selection feature animals living in knee-jerk responsiveness to their surroundings before a lucky few stepped out into human exceptionalism. This mythic time spools out into an ethnographic present that has given ample play to ahistorical concepts such as instinct and habit. Nonhuman animals might fashion a tool or two, if they are crows or chimpanzees, and engage in other inventive or deliberative activities once thought to be human-specific. But as quickly as the latest scientific study documents a cockatoo "spontaneously" straightening a wire to fish for food, these observations are taken out of time to produce revisionary discourses about behaviour and habits, or equally static qualities such as "animal intelligence".

Judging by most accounts, the lives of the animals "left behind", the ones who took a detour onto other branches in a forest of evolutionary trees, the ones who never became humans, lack history. Starfish and coyotes, tigers and bears, are regularly *inserted* into ecological histories as characters representative of a specific species who fill ecological niches and so on, but the activities and predilections of specific living nonhuman animals are rarely narrated historically. What might this attachment to thick descriptions of animals without history be missing?

37 Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Jackson, "Animal"; Garcia, "Sensing Incarceration". On the pervasiveness of human attempts to manage nominally wild animals, see Tønnessen, "Is a Wolf Wild".

38 Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself*.

Springing the Trap of the Ethnographic Present; Or, How to Meet a Tiger on the Path

Surprising only to those still implicitly committed to the project of primitivizing Others, the humans who live in and around land designated as tiger reserves in India are not suspended in some eternal ethnographic present. Nor are the tigers themselves, when there are any to be found in these set-aside areas. If humans were captives of an unchanging present, Indigenous groups and pastoralists would not have been displaced to create these reserves, nor would they have had to contest the tenets of fortress ecology for a right to remain on ancestral land in close proximity to what has only relatively recently become a protected species. If tigers were whiling away their days in some unchanging never-never land in which their lives could be adequately described in terms of habits and behaviours, there would be a lot more of them around. This may sound obvious, but the ramifications of viewing these behaviours, habits, and habituations in a more historical light are considerable, for the tigers and humans involved, of course, but also for their efforts to reach some sort of understanding.

In my book *Animate Planet: Making Visceral Sense of Living in a High-Tech Ecologically Damaged World*, I recounted environmental historian Paul Greenough's description of how Gujars who lived and worked in and around what became the Sariska tiger reserve in Rajasthan, India, approached a tiger when they happened to come across one on the path.

They have devised a protocol—an etiquette, if you will—for how to meet and greet a tiger, complete with specific vocalizations, that has proved remarkably successful in terms of minimizing human casualties. Paul Greenough calls this “interspecies accommodation,” no projection into the imputed mind or gaze of another creature necessary to carry it off.³⁹

³⁹ Weston, *Animate Planet*, 30–31. There were, and are, other communities living in the area as well. In addition to Gujars (65%), members of the focus groups assembled for Greenough's study included “Meenas (31%), Banjara, Rajputs, Brahmins, Snake Charmers (self-identified), Bhalaai, Raiger, and Maali Farmers”. See Doubleday, “Human–Tiger (Re)Negotiations”, 156.

Unlike the pedagogical advice about bears I received in Alaska, this elaborate protocol was not framed as a set of self-defence instructions, but rather as a tiger-specific variation on the respectful greeting a member of this community might offer upon meeting another human animal. Theirs was a sort of knowledge production—honed over decades, perhaps even centuries—that scientific studies and government surveys seldom reconnoitred.⁴⁰ It was also a far cry from European legacy conceptions of tigers and lions, including John Locke’s description of them as “wild savage beasts with whom men can have no society nor security”.⁴¹ If the goal of this protocol was “interspecies accommodation”, as opposed to the dreaded “habituation”, it had seemed to work.

But would it always work? Could a protocol like this be picked up, taken out of its sociohistorical context, and used to mediate tiger-human relations elsewhere? Or even in the same spot, somewhere farther down the path in terms of chronological time? If limited human knowledge about tiger habits and behaviour was the main issue, then surely tiger-human relations could be improved by drawing on the sort of closely observed local knowledges that had produced such guidelines. One might expect the repertoires developed by local communities at Sariska to be transferable, at least to some degree.

To my knowledge, no one has tried such an experiment, but a more recent study at the Sariska reserve seems to suggest that such protocols might not be easily transferable. At least, not without accounting for *animals with history*. Many things have impacted more-than-human relations in and around the Sariska reserve since Greenough recorded his observations. Back in the 1980s, mining for limestone and other minerals introduced new sounds, new chemicals, and a labour force recruited from far afield into the reserve. Court orders in the 1990s directed hundreds of these mining operations to close,

⁴⁰ This is, of course, not the only location or modality in which the production of interspecies practical knowledge goes on. Semaq Beri foragers, to take but one other instance, developed a sophisticated vocabulary for odours as they followed paths through forests on the Malay Peninsula, attending to the scent of tiger urine and learning to recognize the smell of pregnant animals in order to avoid hunting them. See Bower, “Foragers Show Off” and Majid and Kruspe, “Hunter-Gatherer Olfaction”.

⁴¹ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 126.

but the ban on mines inside the protected area proved difficult to enforce.⁴² The ability of the reserve's land base to continue to support tigers had come into question on many occasions, particularly given the lack of corridors to allow "its" tigers egress should resources within the reserve turn out to be inadequate to sustain them.⁴³ Scandals ensued, as tiger reserve managers around the country were accused of cooperating with poachers, puffing up tiger tallies, and planting fake pugmarks to try to hang on to their jobs.⁴⁴ People began to wonder if there were any tigers left at Sariska at all.

In "Human–Tiger (Re)Negotiations: A Case Study from Sariska Tiger Reserve, India," Kalli Doubleday examines the responses of local people to the reintroduction of tigers to the Sariska reserve after the government confirmed the absence of tigers within its boundaries in 2005. It might be easy to conclude, as the government's *Status of Tigers in India 2018* report does, that such reintroduction programs have been an unmitigated success, given that tiger counts inside the reserve and across the country have ticked up from that low point.⁴⁵ Doubleday, however, paints a more complex picture by taking into account how members of local human communities perceived the reintroduced tigers and what the implications might be for understanding "the human dimensions of rewilding".⁴⁶ This research calls the very concept of reintroduction into question, in the sense that locals insisted they had been *newly* introduced (not reintroduced) to a very different set of "familiar yet foreign" animals who had no historical relationship to them or to the reserve.

Many of the people Doubleday interviewed called the new tigers "vagabonds", using emotionally laden terms such as *awaara*. Human wanderers and vagabonds have long occupied a prominent place in popular culture in India. To take but two examples: The lyrics of

42 Jacob and Jain, "Despite Ban, Mines Thrive."

43 Such informed doubt persists. See, for instance, the comments by Ghazala Shahabuddin of the Centre for Ecology, Development, and Research in Dehradun in Ghai, "Sariska's Tiger Reserve".

44 Awasti, "Pug Marks Hide"; Mathur, *Crooked Cats*.

45 Jhala, Qureshi, and Nayak, *Status of Tigers*.

46 Doubleday, "Human–Tiger (Re)Negotiations", 148. See also Mathur, *Crooked Cats*.

Indian rapper Badshah's recent single *Awaara* glorify *basti* youth who roam the *galis* (narrow lanes) of Delhi, for whom “*har din hai celebration, na koyi destination*” (“each day is a celebration without any destination”).⁴⁷ *Awaara* might just as well call to mind the eponymous 1951 film by Raj Kapoor, a classic “Hindi social” that focused on the oppressive conditions that led its main character into a life of crime. The film’s hit song, *Awaara Hoon* (“I’m a Vagabond”), urged a sympathy for the wanderer that few of the people interviewed by Doubleday were prepared to extend to the “new” tigers.

“[Losing the old tigers] was painful. They were like family members and they had separated areas, and they use[d] to stay in their fixed areas,” one participant in the study explained. “But not these new tigers, they can go anywhere.”⁴⁸ Villagers who had felt safe around the old tigers described becoming quite fearful of the newly introduced ones, who showed up unexpectedly in the midst of villages and seemed to have no understanding of how to live in this place. There had once been reliable passageways through the landscape where the old tigers did not trouble humans, villagers said, even when met on the path, whereas the new tigers, with their vagabond ways, did not know how to conduct themselves and could pose a threat anywhere. In Hindi cinema, not to mention *awaara*-themed rap songs, it is not just the body that wanders: the heart (*dil*), too, can turn vagrant.

Doubleday makes excellent use of work in animal geography to underscore the importance of ties to place in negotiations between humans and tigers at Sariska. The study also suggests there was something more temporal at play.⁴⁹ Villagers were quick to situate the newer “vagabond” tigers within a comparative framework that repeatedly juxtaposed the less well-regarded qualities and behav-

47 Badshah, “Awaara (feat. Reet Talwar)”, 2020; see <https://www.lyricstranslation.in/2020/11/awaara-lyrics-english-translation.html>, accessed 9 July, 2022.

48 Doubleday, “Human–Tiger (Re)Negotiations”, 161.

49 This is not to say that animal geography has uniformly focused on space and place to the exclusion of temporality. Some researchers have, for instance, drawn on topology to apply the concept of spacetime compression to observed interactions. However, by and large, this area of research has not attended closely to history as a temporal mode that bears on narrative constructions of animal behaviour, interaction, and placemaking.

iours of the “vagabonds” with those of “the olden tigers of Sariska”.⁵⁰ One compared the new tigers to the Jersey cows introduced by the British: “foreign” animals that could not compare to *desi* (native, “of the country/land”) cows. Many portrayed the old tigers as respectful and cultivated, more refined, like a daughter who has had an education, and emphasized that the old tigers had maintained spiritual connections to the land and local temples that the new tigers lacked. The old tigers understood that they were supposed to give way if they met humans on the path in order to let them pass. The newer tigers stood their ground and could be confrontational. In sum, Doubleday concludes, “the people of Sariska perceive the new and old tigers as distinct nations with differing histories, contradictory intentions, and divergent spatial-understandings [sic].”⁵¹

Much of the Sariska story is site-specific, but it does gesture toward a larger lesson about meeting up with nonhuman animals in an increasingly dislocated world. Namely, that the ability to arrive at some sort of multispecies accommodation may well depend upon a better understanding of the multiple paths that lead parties to a crossroads in all their “habitual” and “behavioural” finery, paths that trail behind them distinctive histories. For humans whose families had sourced livelihoods at Sariska for generations, that history included their own displacement from the site in the 1970s to make way for the creation of a tiger reserve out of the wildlife park established in 1955. Shifting human residents out of the reserve created different sorts of human traffic through the park as villagers entered and exited on a daily basis to collect fodder and to milk livestock that grazed within the boundaries. For tigers transported to Sariska as part of the re-introduction program, that history was a bit harder to trace and remained opaque to the villagers, although, significantly, the villagers recognized that history was there. It included whatever shifting conditions had shaped the tigers’ lives before translocation, while they were coming of age at Ranthambore National Park, where a “Tiger Special Tour” still topped the list of “Ranthambore Best Sellers.”⁵²

50 Doubleday, “Human–Tiger (Re)Negotiations,” 157.

51 Doubleday, 158–59.

52 See the Ranthambore National Park website: <https://www.ranthamborenationalpark.com>

Through the Minefield of Social Science Concepts, with Elephants

The Sariska reserve in India is far from the only place where researchers have found themselves reaching for concepts that will allow them to go beyond overgeneralized notions of species change as they attempt to grasp the nuances of how animals (both human and nonhuman) are responding to conservation efforts and loss of “habitat”. In an important contribution to this line of inquiry, “Animals with Rich Histories: The Case of the Lions of Gir Forest, Gujarat, India”, Mahesh Rangarajan contends that Gir lions possess not only memory, but memory of memories, and that taking their capacity for memory into account is crucial for understanding the potential for humans and large carnivores to negotiate shared space, as increasingly it seems they must.

Rangarajan makes a case, on which I have built, that nonhuman animals like these lions are “products of history”; no more and no less so than their human counterparts.⁵³ Although the lions of Gir might not have shared the kind of historical consciousness that allows humans to reimagine the past “in multiple, contested ways to debate how the present came to be”, their capacity to remember and to learn meant that their experiences over time left impressions which they could access in a meaningful way, and which in turn influenced their actions.⁵⁴ Mark Elbroch makes a similar point about instances of animal reciprocity which depend on memory, as when cougars have shared their kills in anticipation of a future return of the gift.⁵⁵

In the current era of multispecies ethnography, many observations about animal capacities have unsettled the human/nonhuman animal binary along the lines Rangarajan suggests. There are antecedents for multispecies ethnography that stretch back to the nineteenth century, such as Lewis Henry Morgan’s *The American Beaver and His Works*, based on research undertaken at the suggestion of some of Morgan’s Anishinaabek (Ojibwe) acquaintances. This 1868

⁵³ Rangarajan, “Animals with Rich Histories”, 109.

⁵⁴ Rangarajan, 125.

⁵⁵ Elbroch, *Cougar Conundrum*.

monograph included thick descriptions of the goings-on at a beaver lodge that Morgan observed from the bank, as well as a chapter titled “Animal Psychology” in which Morgan stages an impassioned argument for the existence of animal memory.

Gillian Feeley-Harnik’s revisionist reading of Morgan’s piece as a proto-ethnography offers an early example of troubling the human/non-human animal divide by displacing ethnography from its then-accustomed sphere and applying the concept to animals other than humans.⁵⁶ Laura Ogden’s more recent thought experiment makes a similar move by applying the concept of diaspora — another historically inflected category previously reserved for humans — to beavers as a way of calling attention to the oppressive power relations involved in scattering their populations.⁵⁷ Yet this way of historicizing the experiences, capacities, and movements of nonhuman animals remains uncommon.

The special issue of *History and Theory* in which Rangarajan published his “Animals with Rich Histories” essay solicited its articles in response to the question: “Does history need animals?” As humanity’s footprint continues to expand and discussions about cohabitation gain urgency, it may be time to turn that question on its head by asking, “Do animals need history?” In response to that query, I want to take the argument about animals with history in a slightly different direction here, in order to consider what attunement to historical factors has to offer by way of supplementing other social science concepts that are commonly enlisted to account for the more social and idiosyncratic sides of animal behaviour, including personality, intergenerational training, culture, and adaptation. Unlike history, these have increasingly become go-to concepts when trying to explain what heretofore might simply have been recorded as a change.

Consider the implications of applying these disparate social science categories to some rather straightforward observations about the actions of elephants (elephants lately) that have generally struck humans

56 Feeley-Harnik, “Lewis Henry Morgan.”

57 Ogden, “The Beaver Diaspora.”

as remarkable. Documented incidents have depicted members of an older generation of elephants showing the next generation how to surmount human-installed barriers such as walls, how to lift electrified wires with their tusks, and even how to traverse minefields safely.⁵⁸ Any, or all, of the social science categories just mentioned could be applied to these elephant observations by way of illustration or explanation.

Until an observation is replicated, the action may be described as a quirk or a talent of a particular animal and thus put down to character or personality. “Personality” has the advantage of getting away from overgeneralized attributions that treat behaviours as characteristic of members of an entire species, but when linked to discourses of “habituation” and to behaviours that humans find inconvenient or threatening, “personality” can also get a particular animal killed.⁵⁹

Alternatively, the safe passage of mother and baby elephant through a minefield might be heralded as an outcome of teaching or training, which would be couched as socialization in a more human register. The concept of socialization features a transmission model for knowledge in which one generation passes knowledge on to the next. Those who favour a more situated understanding of knowledge production might quibble, arguing that knowledge cannot always be so neatly packaged into bits for onward transmission.⁶⁰ Yet socialization does underscore the relevance of memory and intergenerational communication for interpretations of animal behaviour.

Then there’s culture, an anthropological workhorse of a concept whose intimate entanglement with racialization and nationalism has inspired round after round of critique.⁶¹ A “they too have culture”

58 Marshall, “Elephants ‘Learn’”; Rangarajan, “A Giant in Peril”.

59 See Mathur’s *Crooked Cats*, which follows the fate of tigers and leopards assigned to the “man-eating” or “crooked cat” category for reasons variously ascribed to their idiosyncratic character, bad treatment at the hands of humans, etc.

60 Maan Barua, for example, implicitly argues for the situatedness of knowledge production among animals by contending that political ecology needs to credit the degree to which materials—in this case, landmines, in his case, alcohol—mediate relations between humans and elephants. See Barua, “Volatile Ecologies”.

61 Bauman and Briggs, *Voices of Modernity*; King, *Gods of the Upper Air*; Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*; Williams Jr., *Rethinking Race*.

approach to animal sociality provides some long-overdue recognition for collectively developed aspects of what nonhuman animals do, as well as what they refrain from doing. But “culture” adopts no particular temporal stance toward the doing of it. One culturalized account might be written in the timeless ethnographic present (“sea otters use rocks as tools!”). Another equally culturalized account might approach culture as something shaped over time (archaeological techniques “could tell us more about how long [otters] have been using tools”).⁶² In either case, “culture”, like “personality” and “socialization”, is no substitute for history. Likewise for “adaptation”, which is often forward-looking in its focus on what an animal might be adapting to, and which need not attend very closely to whatever has gone before. All of which brings the discussion back to history, and whatever value history may have for elucidating the things that happen when a more-than-human assortment of animals meets.

What is history, after all? In his novel, *The Ministry for the Future*, Kim Stanley Robinson supplies a lyrical definition, offered from history’s point of view:

Everyone talking together makes something that seems like me but is not me. Everyone doing things in the world makes me [...]. I am the tide running under the world that no one sees or feels. I happen in the present but am told only in the future, and then they think they speak of the past, but really they are always speaking about the present. I do not exist and yet I am everything.⁶³

The historical absence in animal studies that I have flagged in this essay does not involve the reconstruction of past animal lives or a search for traces of their “now-absent presence” of the sort already perceptively undertaken by historians such as Etienne Benson, Erica Fudge, and Harriet Ritvo.⁶⁴ My concern is to open a space for inquiries that recognize the impact of historical events and historical

62 Combs, “Sea Otters”.

63 Robinson, *Ministry for the Future*, 386.

64 Benson, “Animal Writes”; Fudge, *Quick Cattle and Brutal Reasoning*; Ritvo, *Noble Cows and The Animal Estate*.

conditions on living animals, a *longue durée* that exceeds the biographical lifespans of both those animals and the “writing animals” (a.k.a. humans) who reside amongst them.⁶⁵ To do that, it is not enough to stipulate that history matters. One must attend to the limitations of the temporal registers produced by filtering animals through a discourse of habit, cohabitation, and habituation, which tacitly reinscribes living animals within an ethnographic present.

History in this sense is a shorthand for whatever lands a raccoon in a situation that elicits behaviours never before seen by humans. History is a shorthand for the circumstances that propel human and nonhuman animals into collaboration or conflict, circumstances that may or may not permit them to pursue parallel lives. History is shorthand for the building of the wall, the mining of the field, the opening that materializes in the shape of a culvert, the laying of the railway tracks, and the arrival of the road.

History makes it possible to connect the dispossession and relocation of the villagers at Sariska with the dispossession and relocation of the “new” tigers by viewing both within the same frame. History offers less characterological ways to narrate movement and transience so that the next time someone argues that “responsible coyote management [...] includes differentiating between a transient or a resident”,⁶⁶ the fixity of such categories begins to dissolve. History is the famine or the war that drives elephants across a border, the meandering line of trampled fields, and the reconfigured “habits” of starving animals. History is the care and feeding of elephants for deployment on the battlefield, their pivotal role in state formation on the Indian subcontinent, and their subsequent marginalization as technologies of warfare, long before they ever saw the inside of an elephant sanctuary.⁶⁷

History shadows the coyote with a vagrant heart as he wends his way into the city where the climate change conference is meeting.

65 For further reflections on writing about animals as a writing animal, see Benson, “Animal Writes”.

66 Scrofano, “Killing Coyotes.”

67 Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings*; see also Rangarajan, “Contrasting Fates.”

History is also replete with tales of the failure of human attempts to understand what it is like to be that coyote, not to mention, as moral philosopher Thomas Nagel once famously argued, what it is like to be a bat:

It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task.⁶⁸

Fortunately, making worlds together as animals with diverse histories does not require the kind of human empathy that relies on such flights of fancy. Indeed, it can be presumptuous, even dangerous, to put that sort of imagination to work.⁶⁹ The very elusiveness that has helped some species persist in close proximity to humans has also allowed them to alternately signify excessive threat and virtual harmlessness to humans, neither in measures fully deserved.⁷⁰ History is a way out of captivity within this particularly treacherous form of the ethnographic present, a refusal of an animal's timeless induction into the *Animalia Charismatica* club.

Animals that are human become conversant with other animals based on what Vinciane Despret has called "partial affinities."⁷¹ Those affinities, while limited, can be powerful. They can shake you. Listen to Eastern Shoshone anthropologist Ren Freeman, reflecting on the through-line of dominance and control that links the idea of

68 Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," 439.

69 But see also, notwithstanding these caveats, Rane Willerslev on the importance of such acts of embodied imagination to Yukaghir hunters in Siberia, who viewed them as integral to the success of the hunt.

70 Gilman, "Chasing Ghosts", 31.

71 Despret, "Responding Bodies".

wildlife management to earlier histories of dispossession: “‘What has happened to them’ — wild horses — ‘has happened to us’”.⁷² The recursiveness of habit offers little to help make sense of the insidious effects of this colonizing stance in negotiations over shared space. Humans do not need to be able to find a way into the memories or the received wisdom acquired by tigers and bears, beavers and bats, in order to hold open a place for the *existence* of their backstories, to narrate the actions of animals as drawing on something other than an endless now, to consider how those histories might be bound up with the paths that humans trail behind them, and to adjust our co-worlding strategies accordingly.

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⁷² Lezak, “All My Relations”, 31.

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