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Epistemological Dogs:

Describing Examinations in a Veterinary Clinic

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## Introduction

Since the seminal debate now known as the “epistemological chicken debate” in 1992, science studies have been concerned with the question of whether only humans should be considered actors or whether non-humans should also be allowed in the sacred hallways of discourse in the social sciences. During the last few years, following the end of the artificial intelligence debate, a new emphasis was given to *animals* as non-human actors.<sup>1</sup> And yet, the question: can non-humans act? is still regarded to be solvable by all the proponents.

In this paper I propose another route. Instead of looking for arguments for or against non-human actors I regard the question to be unresolvable. As a consequence I start with extending the idea of reflexivity from personal reflexivity to theoretical reflexivity. By producing different texts with different theories on one single event, I attempt to show what different theories are made for. In my line of argument, reflexivity is not a medium for inserting authors' positions into texts, rather, it is a medium for multiplying the voice of the author into different theoretical voices.

Next, I will review three different theories of non-human agency. The first theory I shall call human-constructivism. It is the position put forward most fiercely in science studies by Harry Collins. The second position which I shall call expansionism is less known among the peripheries of science studies. It is not so much a single theory rather than a bundle of approaches in the sociology and anthropology of human-animal relationships that tries to include animals into theorising within the social sciences. The third position is the actor-network theory as put forward by Bruno Latour and Michel Callon.

Finally, I will narrate three times one little episode that I observed during fieldwork in a veterinary hospital.<sup>2</sup> Each time I tell the story the veil of a different theory will disguise it. As I will show, it is possible to tell three entirely different stories that tell us something different about veterinary practice and humans and animals.

## Reflexivity

When Collins started the "epistemological chicken" debate, he not only attacked actor-network theory but also the reflexivists like Steve Woolgar and Malcolm Ashmore. In Collins view, reflexivity was an unfortunate turn because it softened the claims of the social sciences on reality (Collins and Yearley 1992). According to Collins, the recognition that even discourses of STS are open to sociological analysis may be true but it does not serve any purpose, except for producing an endless chain of observations about observers. Therefore, reflexivists' accounts only weaken the discourse of STS.

But in my view the whole debate started with too narrow assumptions on the capacities of individual scientists. The point of departure for reflexivity was always that the researcher herself works under specific social or cultural conditions and that these conditions themselves should be analysed. There were then two different approaches on how to achieve this.

The first possibility for the author is to write about herself. Instead of producing seemingly objective texts, devoid of a specific author with feelings, problems, a sex life and so on the experiences of the author and the circumstances of the act of writing would be documented.<sup>3</sup> This style was termed "narcissistic" reflexivity by Bourdieu and its obvious weakness was that in the end readers knew more about the author than about the subjects she was writing about (Bourdieu 1993).

The second version proposed by Bourdieu himself, "scientific" reflexivity, is not accomplished by the scientist herself (ibid.). Rather it is an achievement of the scientific community that positions the researcher within her social and cultural context.

However, both perspectives of reflexivity assume that scientists are only capable to think in one thought style or one frame of reference. Social scientists are almost completely determined by certain assumptions, and the only possibility they have is either to contemplate on these assumptions in an endless series of regresses or even worse, to leave the job of demystification to others.

But by doing this, the role of theories is underestimated. The social sciences are not paradigmatic sciences with dominating theories at a given point in time. Instead, a whole stock of theories coexists at any given time and it is perfectly possible to think along the lines of different theories at the same time. In principle, this is something

that every ethnographer knows about when she is going native. In the words of Clifford Geertz, an ethnographer should neither produce "an ethnography of witchcraft written by a witch" nor "an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer" (Geertz 1984, 125). This means that in the process of going native one should *partially* suspend one's own background assumptions, i.e. to live and know two - sometimes incompatible - worldviews at the same time. However, in anthropology theories never played this crucial role. Western thinking *per se* was seen in opposition to different ethno-knowledges. Anthropology always assumed that there exist thought styles and that these thought styles are like tacit knowledge. It is not my aim here to deny that thought styles contain certain aspects that are tacit. Instead I argue that theories can be used to admit multiple views on a subject. So I try to use theories as a media by which the character of a theory-subject connection is made visible. This is what I call *theoretical* reflexivity.<sup>4</sup> Theoretical reflexivity does not intend to focus on the relationship between the researcher and his subject but between the researcher, different theories, and his subject. Further it does not attempt to verify or falsify theories but to show how theories affect the way we see the world. Thereby, it takes the constructivist worldview literally and does not deny the fact that it is rather the theories that set up a certain world than vice versa.

Non-human action is a suitable test case in point for testing theoretical reflexivity. In everyday life, people are inconsistent in respect to non-human agency. Even the most behavioristic researcher working in a lab testing animals will talk with his kitten after coming home. And most of us behave as if computers would understand our swearing when they show error signs. The problem with non-human action is not whether non-humans act or not, but whether we are willing and able to tell stories about acting non-humans or not.

Before I tell the different stories let me first introduce the three theories.

### Human-constructivism

What I call human-constructivism is elsewhere known as social constructivism and takes as its premise that it is humans who are able to act in a sociological sense. It is the dominant position in interpretative social science and defended most prominently in STS by Harry Collins and dates back at least to Schütz for sociology and Boas for anthropology.<sup>5</sup> During the founding hours of anthropology and sociology some of the

exponents felt a need to distance themselves from biologicistic explanations of human behaviour (Horigan 1988). This was achieved by drawing a sharp distinction between the properties of humans and animals. Depending on the theory humans were said to be the only species capable of thinking, or thinking about their own death, or of using language or tools or of having culture. In each case the social sciences were based on anthropological assumptions that divide humans and non-humans and lay the grounds for a specific science that requires specific methods.

In Collins' version the dividing line between humans and non-humans is the capacity to follow rules, as discussed by Wittgenstein and his interpreter Winch.<sup>6</sup> To follow a rule, so the argument goes, it is impossible to make explicit all tacit assumptions. To explain why most of the people know how to continue "2, 4, 6, 8" one has to refer to training, the evolution of arithmetic concepts in the West, i.e. to cultural factors. This also means that there is variation among humans in following rules, since there exist different ethno-mathematics in the world. When people without exposition to western arithmetic concepts and training are asked to continue "2, 4, 6, 8" they might go on with "2, 4, 6, 8, 2, 4, 6, 8 ...".

Therefore, for Collins, sociology is "the exploration of the consequences of whatever it is that allows there to be the kind of variation between groups of human beings that is not found between groups of horses, cats, and dogs" (Collins 1998, 495).

For Collins this "whatever it is" is the capacity to follow rules and this capacity is termed "socialness" (ibid., 497). But instead of testing every entity in question for displaying the quality of socialness Collins wants a clear-cut line. Although he admits that this line is not easily determinable, he asserts that it is a divide between species and that it is hereditary.<sup>7</sup> Up to this point the argument is ontological. But ironically it was STS that showed that ontologies have regulations of work that are set empirically (Knorr Cetina 1993). This is why even Collins would have to offer a test for the "socialness"-criterion. But here his arguments becomes circular: "... one cannot know whether something has socialness until one sees it demonstrate social fluency, and one cannot recognise social fluency unless it is exhibited in a social language in which one is fluent oneself." (ibid., 498) Instead of testing socialness in general we now test whether something is member of a culture that *we* can understand!

The problem can be seen more clearly when we consider Collins' examples. One of these is that dogs cannot tidy up rooms because they do not know the rules for clean

and dirty, valuable and non-valuable. But obviously, this is also a problem with most humans. When I was a child I always got angry when my mother cleaned my room, because she didn't know what was valuable and non-valuable *for me*.<sup>8</sup> Or to put it the other way round: How does Collins know that dogs don't have an idea about what's clean and dirty *at all*? As long as we cannot confirm that dogs do not even have their very own concept of clean and dirty we could assume that they have their very own, as I had, when I was a child.

Notwithstanding these theoretical flaws, Collins believes that human constructivism - or "social realism" in his more general terms - has to be used for political reasons (Collins and Yearley 1992, 308). If STS wants to oppose the representation of science as a path-dependent metaphysical task or AI-research representations of robots as social beings it has to adhere to social realism. "Natural realism", that is, the belief that non-humans are able to shape the world, may be a useful worldview for natural scientists or lay-people but if one wants to accentuate human responsibilities it does not help.

### The expansionists

The expansionists share with the human-constructivists the emphasis on a rich account of action.<sup>9</sup> They subscribe to a conception of action as meaningful and purposeful, but they disagree with the human-constructivists that it is only humans that are able to act.<sup>10</sup> According to the expansionists it was only the Western philosophical tradition that dislocated animals from the realm of the social world. In contrast, in the realm of western common sense and many non-western traditions animals are part of the social universe. Take this programmatic statement of Barbara Noske, writing about her childhood:

„Had I been all wrong about animals, had I only projected my own romantic notions onto animals and onto my relationships with them? Yet I remember distinctly that animals and I not only were having a relationship from my point of view but also from the point of view of the animals themselves.“ (Noske 1989, vii)

For the expansionist there exist basically two strategies to include animals in the social world whereby both are often employed at the same time. First of all one can deny that animals lack the capacities that make humans unique according to the human-constructivists. This is usually done with reference to empirical findings of

naturalists, ethologists and most often primatologists who show that animals indeed have culture, have a language, or do use tools. The only problem is that we as humans are not able to understand these languages and actions properly.

The other strategy is to expand the notion of action. Disputing the importance of language for the execution of interactions usually does this. Here again, there are two possibilities.

The first is to argue that an interaction, as defined in terms of G.H. Mead, the main source for expansionists is not dependent upon the qualities of *alter*. Role taking, in the concept of Mead is then a projection of *ego* (Cohen 1989) or it just doesn't happen, even with respect to humans (Hilbert 1994). The second possibility is to accept that *alter* too, has to be able to interact. In this case, as is argued by Alger and Alger, interaction requires self-consciousness, internalised conversation and the possibility to evaluate alternative ways for action, but not necessarily language (Alger and Alger 1997, 70, see also Alger and Alger 2003, Myers 2003 and Sanders 2003).

In any case, the main problem for expansionists is to find out what animals mean when they act. Going back to the citation of Noske at the beginning of this chapter, how does she know that she had a relationship “also from the point of view of the animals themselves?” This is usually found out by relying on *empathy*. Kenneth Shapiro who developed the concept for human-animal relationships understands it as „ a moment in which I, if only focally, forget myself and directly sense what you are experiencing.” (Shapiro 1990, 191). This concept in turn obviously depends on some problematic epistemological questions, such as how do I know that I understand what you mean or intend and not only project what I assume that you mean? Shapiro, who is an exception among the expansionists, is very conscious about this problem and he asserts that empathy is framed by social constructions, i.e. the societal perception of animals, and history, i.e. shared experiences among individual humans and animals. To conclude, a complex expansionist would assert that, having accepted the limits of social constructions and history, it is in principle possible to interact with animals through empathy.

### Actor network theory

In contrast to expansionism and human constructivism actor-network theory<sup>11</sup> seemingly operates without ontological assumptions about humans and animals. The

great achievement of ANT is exactly its dissolution of ontology in favour of a general constructivism that is interested in just how ontologies are created and sustained.

Basically, this is achieved with the notion of the „actant“, defined as "a list of answers to trials - a list which, once stabilised, is hooked to a name of a thing and a substance. This substance acts as a subject to all the predicates - in other words, it is made the origin of actions" (Latour 1991). With this definition actants are radically disconnected from any notion of subjectivity or the capacity to follow rules as discussed in the previous theories. It is the intention of ANT not to care about whether actants are social, natural, or technical in origin. This is made clear in a simple but famous example: If a hotel manager wants to have his guests leave their keys at the reception desk, he may talk with them or write something on the key or make the key so heavy that nobody wants to carry it around or even replace the key with a number and an electronic lock. However, what is important for ANT is not that it is once by technical and once by social means that the guest is forced to leave the key at the reception, but the fact that the guest does it for different reasons: In the case of words and phrases she does it because she respects the wishes of the manager, in the case of the heavy key she does it for egoistic reasons.

As a result of neglecting the distinction between humans capable of meaningful actions and things, ANT is often accused of being anti-humanistic. What goes unnoticed in all these criticisms is that ANT is a theory of representation. But the representers are always humans and this is where a hidden humanistic anthropology slips in. In ANT everything can be an actant with the capacities to “exit” or to be “loyal”, to use Hirschmans terms (Hirschman 1970). But it is only humans that can have “voice”. At the head of every network is a human as can be seen in all the empirical ANT investigations. It is the biologists that set up a network with the scallops (Callon 1986), it is Pasteur who conducts microbes (Latour 1988), but it is never computer keyboards that enrol engineers to pursue their goals.

However, this crucial point was reformulated, with Mike Michael's proposition of a “hudogledog”-hybrid (Michael 1997) or Latour’s notion of a “collective” (Latour 1999, 175). I will shortly discuss the intriguing case of the hudogledog: Hudogledog is an abbreviation for human-dogleash-dog, a very common collective, that can be observed on most streets of western cities and that has been the most prominent client of the veterinary clinic. The hudogledog proposes a very tricky problem, because

there is no starting point any more to define this hybrid. When a hudogledog attacks a little girl on the playground, whodunit? Is it the responsibility of the human or the dogleash or the dog? On the one hand one could argue that it is the human who is responsible for the dog, because only he knows about the rules of conduct. On the other hand it is the dog that bites. And last but not least, it is the dogleash that makes the human master of the dog. As Mike Michael shows, it makes sense to treat the three as a *hybrid* that has certain qualities *only as a hybrid* and not as three distinct entities. Therefore, there must be a particular attribution of responsibility and a particular concept of agency to account for the qualities of hybrids.

### A short detour to Collins' and Yearley's attempt to theoretical reflexivity

It would be presumptuous to claim being the first to propose theoretical reflexivity. When Collins and Yearley<sup>12</sup> attacked Callon and Latour they attempted the same by rephrasing some passages of Callon's essay on the scallops of St. Brieuç bay. C&Y argue that actor-network theory is nothing more than a fashionable and inappropriately anthropomorphic language to describe the world.

When Callon is writing a sentence such as:

"The larvae detach themselves from the researchers' project and a crowd of other actors carry them away. The scallops become dissidents. The larvae which complied are betrayed by those they were thought to represent." (Callon 1986, 219)

C&Y argue that this may be rephrased without any loss of meaning as

"The larvae fail to attach themselves and get carried away. The larvae seem to have changed their nature – the first experiment appears to have succeeded under unrepresentative experimental conditions." (Collins and Yearley 1992, 316)

But is the second text really the same as the first? Are C&Y right in asserting that "the language changes, but the story remains the same" (Collins and Yearley 1992, 315). And if so, why all the fuss about ANT? But obviously C&Y don't believe their own story. Otherwise, why did STS (with major contributions by C&Y) want to change the way we tell stories about scientific controversies?

Obviously, C&Y are afraid of losing power to things and thus moving power to shape the world from those who know and talk about this power (social scientists) to those who know, but don't admit it, or really don't know (natural scientists, politicians, lay people) (Collins and Yearley 1992, 308). But there is also a problem inherent in the English language. Even mechanomorphists like C&Y still write, "the larvae fail to

attach themselves..." which is clearly anthropomorphic!<sup>13</sup> The English language is inherently anthropomorphic so that it is virtually impossible to evade all anthropomorphisms. If C&Y really wanted to avoid anthropomorphism they would have to write something like: "In principle the larvae should be attached to the net by a natural suction force but unfortunately this force is overruled by another force." But what would this help us? By rephrasing the sentence, the text resembles more a text from the natural sciences instead from the social sciences. According to Collins, I am only allowed to write in my own scientific language about the entities that my own discipline is allowed to talk about, or I have to write in everyday language about entities foreign to my discipline. That means, that as soon as a social scientist writes in the language of a natural science she makes a contribution to the natural sciences. But why does Collins want to prohibit me to write about cars as if they were humans or about humans as if they were dogs or about dogs as if they were, well, humans, or machines, or dogs; something every poet does? This latter problem is endemic in most of the biological subdisciplines and is mainly due to the fact that we have only two languages, one for humans and one for things, but none for animals in particular. Hence every researcher has to decide whether she wants to write anthropomorphic, that is, to denigrate humans by making animals proto-humans or to write mechanomorphic that is to denigrate animals by turning them into things. Theoretical reflexivity is thus nothing else than a way of testing the effects of these decisions.

Now let me introduce my test episode. When I wrote it first down in my fieldnotes, it was written in a mixed mode, in everyday language so to speak, of an ethnographer, where sometimes animals are actors and sometimes they are not. I will leave aside this version because it is too 'normal'. The test episode tells a very common story from the field of veterinary medicine, namely, animals that don't want to be examined. This was fairly often the case and usually animals would get a sedative in this case. Only in very rare cases, as in the following, there were major obstacles.

### The silence of the dogs

Let me first describe an ordinary veterinary consultation to introduce this first episode. I conducted my research at a large veterinary clinic for small animals. In this hospital, there is a waiting room with an electronic door. At this door the doctors meet

their patients and take them to the examination room. This room is open towards a second examination room, so that animals and humans can move around freely. There are two examination tables in the room, and therefore no privacy can be guaranteed for the clients. Usually there are several people present during an examination. Apart from the owner and the veterinarian there often is an assistant and at times additional doctors who were consulted for help. After the client has entered the room, the animal is usually put on the examination table where the assistant holds it firmly. Then the veterinarian fills out a questionnaire with questions concerning the personalities of both owner and animal, before he starts to examine the animal. For the case of dogs, this consists of routine inspections of the mouth, the eyes, the limb nodes, the anus and so on, before the examination is started. But there are several possibilities of leaving this track and I will report on one of them.

An older, not very concerned man brings his little dachshund for examination. Soon after the veterinarian starts to examine the dog, the dog gets very aggressive. The incidents that followed were very unusual, not only because of the aggressiveness of the little dog, but also because of the passive behaviour of the owner. I will now report these incidents three times, starting with the human-constructivist account.

Following Collins, I will keep quiet about the behaviour of the animals. As a social scientist I am not qualified to comment on the animals' behaviour. But then, who should be able to do this? When I asked the veterinarians whether they were trained in interpreting animal behaviour, they all answered that they had heard some lectures about ethology, but they had not been particularly interested and had forgotten everything. They gained all their knowledge on animal behaviour through "learning by doing", as they said. So, for the following episode, I will invent a hypothetical ethologist to make some comments.

As soon as Y. starts to examine the dog, he withdraws his hand. (*An ethologist would have to insert here: Because the dachshund is a fear-biter and finds itself in a state of fear, he attacks instinctively everything that approaches it*). Y. seems to be afraid of the dachshund. He says: "Snaily<sup>14</sup>, it's okay, Snaily." This seems to be a very strange anthropomorphic Ritual with the purpose to diminish fear among the personnel of the clinic. O., the assistant tries to hold the dog. But even O. fails. Y. and O. are now trying to approach the dog slowly. (*And now again, our ethologist: A certain level of stimulus has been transgressed, the dachshund is very*

*aggressive*). Y. reacts too slowly and shows signs of pain. He is visibly upset and fetches a huge glove made of thick leather reaching up to the elbow. Nonetheless Y. is bitten a second time. He says: "I don't want to rape him." This is a metaphor, that imagines animals as unwilling objects, whose will has to be broken. In this context it has the purpose of making the veterinarian look thoughtful. The owner has been sitting on a chair in the background all the time. He keeps quiet. Now he asks calmly, if they often see patients like his dog. Y. answers cynically, that this patient is rather exceptional, because he doesn't just snap but really attacks. Y. now interprets the dogs' behaviour as attack, because he has been hurt. He tries to justify his behaviour attributing intentions to the dog. The owner who couldn't find anything extraordinary in this situation is treated with cynicism, because he despises the self-endangering behaviour of Y. But for Y. this is part of his professional attitude toward animals.

What happens in this story? It focuses on the strange actions of humans. It is the classical ethnographical gaze, that produces a whole set of rituals and attributions, that makes the world appear strange, because the explanation for the actions is located outside of the site of action. Not the dachshund compels Y. to fetch his monstrous glove; but his professional ethos. This becomes more obvious when we compare the situation with the following passage from an interview with another veterinarian:

M (author): You were never bitten?

E (veterinarian): By a dog? No, not as far as I can remember. There are certain cases, where I think *this one* could bite, but in these cases I use a muzzle. (...) And if the owners don't want that, just because some owners don't want that, then it's over. I don't expose my hands to danger, only because some people don't want their animals look ridiculous. My hands, my health always comes first.

(...)

E: There was a cat and this cat bit its owner, because this owner thought, she can hold the cat, she knows the cat, you know, and then she had some holes in her hand and I had none, because I thought from the very start, I don't like this cat. And in the end she was bitten and because the cat should go to the X-ray, we have to anaesthetize. And she doesn't want that. I said, well without, we do not make an X-ray.

M: So you didn't X-ray?

E: We didn't X-ray. You know, I can't ... (indignated)

In the clinic there exists no rule up to what point or under which circumstances animals should be given treatment. It is up to the veterinarian whether she wants to

expose herself to risk. The owner (or the animal) too, has no right to treatment. To return to our episode, for the human-constructivist this poses the problem why Y. exposes himself to risk instead of just sending the dog home as E. did. The human-constructivist has to explain this with reference to a certain professional ethos. His self-endangering behaviour is due to his individual responsibility. So the strength of this human-constructivist narrative lies in the emphasis on the different ways of dealing with animals and owners.

### The dilemma of the expansionist, or: diverging empathies

Telling you the story in the expansionist mode holds a serious problem. As asserted by cautious expansionists, to understand an animal requires having a personal relationship with it. Empathy, the mode by which to know it, is not only achieved by doing, but by training. But in a veterinary clinic, this is very difficult, because there are dozens of animals visiting every day, and there is little time to empathise with singular animals in the sense of Shapiro, qua history. Empathy can only be achieved by applying generalised knowledge of dogs in general to a particular dog. So, is this to prevent me from writing? Maybe, but for the sake of my task I will try to make sense of empathy. This also allows considering the role of trust in writing empathetically. Namely, trust is crucial for a reader of an empathetic text. You have to trust me to be able to interpret the dachshund's behaviour correctly, because the reader has no means of verifying it.

As soon as the examination starts, the dachshund jumps up and snaps at Y. The dachshund is very nervous and obviously overwhelmed by the strangeness of the situation. He disapproves of being touched, and because Y. didn't react to earlier signals he now snaps. Y. says to the dog: „Snaily, it's okay Snaily." The assistant O. approaches the dog. A second human attacker is too much for the dachshund. He feels his physical integrity violated and therefore also snaps at O. Y. and O. now try to approach the dog together. They still don't understand, so the dog jumps up and bites Y.'s hand. This seems to be the only signal that is understood by Y. He is bleeding. ... Y. is bitten a second time. He says: "I don't want to rape him", and fills a syringe with a sedative that is injected into the dog's back in a moment of surprise. Then he prepares a disinfectant bath for his hand and waits for the dachshund to calm down. (...)

This narrative is not bizarre, but it seems to have lost scientific credibility. My empathising resembles more the tone of early evening tv-programs about wild animals than a text in the social sciences. But all I have done is to extend the interpretations of the personnel in the clinic to the dachshund. The change of genre is nothing but a consequence of the extension of agency to the dog.

In addition to the change of genre a new ethical issue has appeared. Most expansionists like Sanders, Noske, and Haraway think that the mode of empathy also implies a different ethical stance. By taking the position of the animal, the ethnographer has to leave her impartial view sometimes:

“We also contend that coming to see the world through the eyes of the animal naturally leads to situations in which the objective, nonjudgmental stance of the conventional ethnographer is inappropriate.” (Sanders and Arluke 1993, 378)

In my text I have not followed this advice (and even less so in the clinic). But the idea is clear: By granting the dog agency, it becomes quite obvious that the dachshund didn't want to receive treatment. The usage of the term „rape“ just masks the fact that the dog was treated against his will. One could argue that the dog was not capable of understanding the situation, namely that the veterinarian was acting for the dogs' own best.

But a more complicated problem arises here. Donna Haraway, who has her very own expansionist program, wants to have “close” people as the spokesperson for those who can't speak (Haraway 1992, 312). It is not so much the animals, which should be granted rights, but those humans that are the “close” co-actors. For her case studies, this means that the people in the rainforest should speak for the jaguars and the pregnant women for the foetuses. But this idea is strongly opposed to the logic of a modern differentiated society with experts who know better. In this respect, medicine as a very modernistic enterprise produces experts who know more about bodies than the owners of bodies and who represent the body of an owner against the owner's interests. Haraway's idea is linked to the critique of medicalisation that wanted to give the rights over the human body back to its owner.<sup>15</sup> But if we apply this to our episode, the question now is: Who should speak for the animal: the animal itself, the owner or the veterinarian?

The problem is that in our episode, the owner, who, following Haraway, must be considered the “close” representative, does not care at all about the situation. He just assumes that his dachshund must be treated without representing the dog's point of

view. Even the veterinarian and his assistant did not care about the dogs' point of view. The only person, who did so, in this case being myself must be considered the most remote spokesperson for the dachshund.

What else can be said about this story? In contrary to the human-constructivist story, we learn relatively little about the culture of veterinarians. Of course we could integrate this in our episode too, but expansionistically speaking, there is no need to do so.

### Falsification of ANT: obstinate actants and disempowered representatives

"After all, who says that the whales need someone to speak on their behalf? Perhaps the test of this Latourian hypothesis would be whether it is possible to construct a narrative of animal-rights activism in which the animals resist their spokespersons. According to Latour (...), such things happen whenever the animals survive even when the activists fail to liberate them!" (Fuller 1996, 470)

Or: After all, who says the dogs need someone to speak on their behalf? Who is the spokesperson for the dachshund? This question links up with Haraway's "close" representatives but must be rephrased in proper ANT-language.

Before telling the ANT story, it must be decided who should be considered an actor, i.e. a builder of network and who will be an actant, i.e. who will be enrolled. The veterinarian is on the actor side, for sure. He wants to build a network including the dog, the owner, and the whole technical apparatus of the clinic. And the owner? He does nothing. Does this mean that he doesn't attempt to build a network? I leave him out of the game, because I don't see an answer. And what about the dog? Is he building a counter-program? No, because he enters the game unarmed. I start with a hudogledog that breaks up as soon as it enters the examination room.

A hudogledog enters the examination-room. Y., the doctor, welcomes the hu- (-man part), and advises him to put his dog on the examination table. After recording the patient-history, he wants to examine the dog. To make examination possible, the hudogledog gets dismantled. The owner steps back and permits the dog to be turned to an actant. As soon as Y. starts with the examination, the dachshund jumps up and snaps at Y. The dog started its counterprogram. Y. tries to break this with a first actant: he speaks with the dog: "Snaily, it's okay Snaily..." The words equip the dachshund with subjectivity, it provides him with the possibility to react to

language. But his reaction is not a desired one; he is still snapping at Y. The second module of the counterprogram is O., the assistant who should hold the dog firmly. O. is a substitute for Y's. words, but the reaction of the dog doesn't change. On the contrary, its attacks become more and more aggressive and he bites Y.'s hand. Y. is seemingly enervated and changes to a technical programme. He fetches a huge glove. The substitution of social with technical actants puts Y. in a safer position, but it doesn't help him attain the goal of treating the dog. Even a muzzle to shut the dangerous mouth doesn't help because the dog is too alert. Y. is bitten a second time. He says: "I don't want to rape him", and changes to another category of actants by replacing technical with chemical ones. He prepares a syringe with a sedative and injects it in a moment of surprise and waits until the dog has calmed down. The sedative has made the dog immobile. It is reduced to very limited physical properties.

The owner has been sitting on a chair in the corner of the room all along. He has been keeping quiet. Now he asks if they often see patients like his dog. He doesn't make any attempt to re-evoked a hudogledog. Y. answers with a cynic ...

### The order of means

The main difference between the ANT version and the other two versions is that in it all the qualities of the dog are effects of the actions of Y. The ethical problems of the expansionist story were due to a subtractive model of properties. Humans and animals possess certain properties and as soon as these are disputed, they give raise to concern. The human-constructivists use this model of subtraction for humans only. For animals on the other hand, they use a model of additive qualities – animals have very limited qualities, and to assert more qualities is a fault. However in ANT it is possible to think of properties without any reference to an ideal. At the beginning of my story the dachshund is accorded social qualities – such as the capacity to react to the human language. These are successively withdrawn from him until he is reduced to his basic bodily functions. Unlike the two other versions, from the very beginning the dog shows no dog-specific qualities that could be withdrawn in a degrading act. And because there is no invocation of any of these dog-specific qualities in defence of the dog by any of the participants (Y., O. the owner, myself) nothing happens to save the dog from being reduced to bodily functions. The fact that the dog is snapping and biting cannot be regarded as an attempt to defend animal rights on the dog's behalf, because he is unable to play on the field of ethical discourse. To do this he would

need a representative to establish a counter-program. It is important to note here, that there seems to be a rule (in the very sense of Collins), that doctors follow a certain path, i.e. they start with social means and then use technical means at first external and only in the very end applying internal means. The same rule is valid in Latour's example of the hotel key. This order is something that Latour never mentions, but I think it is crucial to understand most of the technoscientific events happening in the world. It is this order, germinated out of a civilisatory process so well described by Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias that directs all the actions of the veterinarians. This order I call *the order of means*. This order is deeply entrenched in our everyday ethics and is independent of its object. We first shout at our laptop or car and then smash it with our baseball bat. It is not that there is no difference between humans, animals and cars, but the order of means employed to force something to obey is always the same.<sup>16</sup>

The order of means is not, as Latour suggests, a mere substitution of social means by technical means, it is this substitution that goes along with a heightened consciousness of doing something ethically problematic that constitutes the whole situation. This is also why some of the doctors, as we have seen, never "rape" animals.

### Epistemological dogs: A comparison

In my view, the ANT episode is the most "realistic" one. It can account for most of the details of the story. But to do this, ANT had to be reformulated in several ways. We had to admit a complicated hybrid, the hudgetdog that can be disentangled in a complicated way. Then we had to add an order of means to the story. But the crucial advantage of ANT was that it did not presuppose a certain behaviour or certain faculties from the part of the dog. This is exactly what makes ANT realistic: As a narrator I can talk about the oscillation of qualities without always having to record their deviance from my ontology. But this has a cost that the expansionists do not want to pay. Namely, it is not possible to make a statement on whether the actions of the veterinarians and animal owners are ethically desirable.

The expansionist version suffers precisely because it is tailored for this purpose, vis-à-vis a too quirky reality. The more empathetic a description, the more the dog's rights are violated. It gets even worse when we take into account the idea of the "close" representative. For, in my example the "close" representative was an immoral

representative and I myself, the most remote representative of all, should have been the one to bring about the dog's rights.<sup>17</sup>

The third, human constructivist story produces a truly anthropological episode resembling a ritual. The human actors seem remote; their actions are not explained by their intentions, but by their professional roles and ethics. This makes the description rather difficult, for two reasons. First of all, there is hardly any conversation in the episode. Language, the main constituent of the human-constructivist universe, isn't important at all to understand the episode. Second, the human-constructivist stands in his own way, because he has to add to every instance of talking with animals the subordinate clause: it is anthropomorphic, it is illegitimate, not true. This is a main obstacle, because I should write from the native's point of view. In this case, this is a rather difficult task, because "the natives" points of view are not accessible for me for different reasons. The dog's view I am not allowed to take, because human-constructivism excludes animals as legitimate subjects from the start. The owner's view is very difficult to take, because he stays passive during the whole episode. And finally, the veterinarians point of view I cannot take because it is anthropomorphic, a view excluded from human-constructivism for theoretical reasons. Instead of only reconstructing how actors, as is usually done by human-constructivist studies produce qualities, and not by making any qualifications about our subjects, I am forced here to show the illegitimacy of the veterinarians own constructions.

#### Coda: resistance or co-operation?

From 152 protocolled examinations, 19 cases showed animals resisting examination. Is this number large or small? The whole question depends on the concept of action one pursues. But there is also a problem hidden in the words resistance and co-operation. The word resistance is much more impregnated with agency than the word co-operation. This is not only evident in everyday language; it is also a facet of most theories of science. From Rheinberger to Latour, it is the resistance of objects that has to be broken by the scientist, and not the scientist who co-operates with her object.<sup>18</sup>

The story I told was based on the assumption that the fact that the dog shows signs of resistance has to be considered as some form of action, i.e. a reaction to another action that can be interpreted as being based on an understanding of this first action. However, in most of the cases dogs keep quiet during examination. To describe this

case where animals co-operate is much more difficult and shows an aporia of all observation: One can only observe social *actions*, but sometimes actions are not visible, or to be more precise: the action may consist exactly in doing nothing. This can be seen very clearly with human acts like "pretending to sleep". If we consider the fact that animals co-operate, that they do "nothing", as a social interaction, then Collins socialness-criterion doesn't hold. The fact that different animals obviously are able to act different in the same social context and usually are able to follow what is demanded from them suggests that they understand exactly this context.

For the expansionist it is equally difficult to interpret co-operation. To empathise with an animal that doesn't show a reaction at all seems to be a rather difficult task. Does co-operation mean that the animal agrees, or is it a sign of indifference toward the veterinarian, or does it express fear? Even if we consider co-operation as a social interaction it is very difficult to decide what this action means. In comparison, it seems much easier to interpret the non-standard case of resistance.

In ANT the story of co-operation is simply meaningless. ANT always talks of stories of resistance and never of co-operation<sup>19</sup>, due to the concept of actants as answers to trials. Co-operation is no answer to a trial because co-operation is an implicit prerogative of each examination. For ANT, properties just do not matter unless they are made visible in a trial. In this way, ANT-trials can be understood as ethnomethodological breaching-experiments with things. Or, to put it the other way round: Some actions may resist being made visible, like this delicate entity called co-operation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See most prominently on this the special issue of science, technology and human values on "humans, animals and machines", vol. 23. Issue 4, 1998. But see also on animals in science studies Birke (1998), Brown and Michael (2001), Crist (1999), Haraway (1989), Lynch (1988), and Phillips (1994).

<sup>2</sup> The empirical material used for this paper was collected during four month of fieldwork at different units of a large veterinary hospital in Switzerland.

<sup>3</sup> The classical texts are found in Clifford (1986). For an overview of reflexivism in science studies see Woolgar (1988).

<sup>4</sup> A similar attempt was made by Gesa Lindemann in a fascinating article on transsexuality (Lindemann 1994).

<sup>5</sup> The term „human-constructivism“ is my coinage. The problem with the term social-constructivism is that in this context, animals are social constructivists too, as will be described below when I discuss the ideas of the expansionists.

<sup>6</sup> Collins' argument regarding animals is put forward in Collins (1998). His theory of action can be found in Collins and Kusch (1998).

<sup>7</sup> This point is highly problematical, first because this clear-cut line is not verified by the experts in the fields concerned with this problem (primatology, biology). On culture among primates, to take a prominent case, see Whiten (1999). Second these are precisely the fields that - as STS researchers like Haraway or Gould have shown - are most permeated with white-male eurocentrist assumptions (Gould 1995; Haraway 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Laurent Thévenot discusses the problem of cleaning a room with regard to different kinds of actions or what he calls régimes (Thévenot 2001). In his terminology one could say that Collins equates actions performed under the régime of familiarity with those performed under the régime of planned action, not realising that actions performed under the régime of familiarity are per definition not interpretable by outsiders.

<sup>9</sup> I coined the term „expansionist“ to make clear that expansionists expand the notion of interaction to animals. Obviously, this is to be understood in relation to the anthropocentric foundation of common theories of action in the social sciences.

<sup>10</sup> A critical reader might object that I am confusing action and interaction or different theories of action in general. It could also be argued that the concept of rule as used by Collins and the concept of interaction as used by the expansionists are two different things. But I want to highlight here some basic commonalities of all these accounts in order to provide the grounds for what is to follow. For this reason differences between theories of action are not that important. For a recent assessment of theories of action see Emirbayer and Mische (1998).

<sup>11</sup> Henceforth abbreviated as ANT.

<sup>12</sup> Henceforth abbreviated as C&Y.

- <sup>13</sup> I have adopted the term „mechanomorphism“ from Spada (1997).
- <sup>14</sup> This is a direct translation from the Swiss-German word „Schnäggli“, which is a rather uncommon term of endearment that can be used for animals and humans equally well.
- <sup>15</sup> For a wonderful reformulation of the problematique of medicalisation see Cussins (1998).
- <sup>16</sup> This is not to say that the order of means is universally valid. I find it valid for one-to-one interactions only. The general point to be made here is rather that such orders are always in use and have to be taken in account when describing situations as the one described above.
- <sup>17</sup> This would obviously be a serious problem in many other areas as well, for example in lawsuits against parents that are accused of misusing their children.
- <sup>18</sup> This topos of the scientist-hero breaking the resistance of his objects is criticised in Keller (1983, 197 ff.).
- <sup>19</sup> This was criticised from very early on especially by Haraway and Star (Star 1991).

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