Chapter 9
Whispering Empathy: Transdisciplinary Reflections on Research Methodology

Harry Wels

9.1 Introduction

'What makes us moral?' is the leading question of this volume. Morality can be considered a *sine qua non* for animals, both human and non-human, to live a social life (cf. De Waal 1997; Ridley 1996; Dugatkin 2006). This morality seems based on the ability of social animals, again human and non-human alike,[1] to be empathetic towards others (Bekoff and Pierce 2009, p. 1). *Ergo*, empathy might be considered a precondition for morality. An abundance of rather convincing (empirical) evidence is being brought forward nowadays, primarily from the biological sciences, stating that empathy is certainly not uniquely human, but is widespread amongst many other social animals like elephants, dolphins, primates and even animals like vampire bats (see Bradshaw 2009a; De Waal 2009; Bekoff and Pierce 2009; Balcombe 2010). A review of a recent publication on 35 years of elephant research in Amboseli, Kenya, by Cynthia Moss and her team, says that 'Moss's team has individually tracked about 2,500 elephants, observing and recording their lives over the decades. They conclude there is 'no doubt that elephants display empathy for one another . . . . The sheer range of emotions and their ability to use tools shown in the new study has led researchers to conclude that elephants should be considered at least as

[1] In this paper 'social animals' refers to both human and non-human animals, unless indicated otherwise. This is in line with Calarco (2008), who is following Donna Haraway's 'A cyborg manifesto' in which she states that 'By the late twentieth century . . . the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached . . . many people no longer feel the need for such a separation' and argues that '*we could simply let the human–animal distinction go*' (Calarco 2008, pp. 148, 149, italics in original). For a thorough historical exploration of what it means to be human, see Bourke (2011).

H. Wels (✉)
Department of Organisational Sciences, VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: h.wels@vu.nl

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similar to humans as some of the most advanced animals.'[2] However, this idea is complicated by questions about the boundaries of empathetic capabilities in social animals (cf. Coetzee 1999). Can any given social animal be empathetic with any 'other', even across the species divide? Can an elephant feel empathy for a wild dog? Can a human being feel empathy for a cow? Can a wolf feel empathy for rodents? Or is empathy limited to *certain* others? The closer the other is to you in terms of species, the more empathy is to be expected? Therefore you can feel empathy for your pet dog that is considered part of the family, but less for the pig on its way to the abattoir? These are all questions about empathy *in* social animals, but what about the research methodologies used to study social animals? To what extent does this type of research depend on the empathetic capabilities of the researcher, as is the case when studying human animals? And how does that link to my earlier questions? Should a cognitive ethologist have as many empathetic capabilities for studying animal behaviour as an ethnographer studying human behaviour?[3] In this paper I want to explore the concept of empathy in relation to research methodologies in the social and biological sciences, and develop the argument that a research approach to studying social and moral behaviour in human and non-human animals based on empathy could be explored as a transdisciplinary research methodology that will bring ethologists and ethnographers together to further our understanding of social behaviour. Furthermore I will argue that Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) concept of 'becoming (animal)' can be used as a stepping-stone for deepening our conceptual understanding of empathy as a research methodology.

9.2 Ethological and Ethnographic Research and the Need for Empathetic Understanding

A great breakthrough in the study of social animals, certainly in popular imagery, was brought about by the ethological fieldwork of Jane Goodall on chimpanzees, Dian Fossey on mountain gorillas and Biruté Galdikas on orangutans (Montgomery 2009). It was considered revolutionary because 'their methods of study were much more like those approved for anthropologists than like those approved for wildlife biologists' (Marshall Thomas in Montgomery 2009, p. xiv). It was also seen as groundbreaking because with their particular fieldwork approach they challenged 'the masculine world of Western science' (p. xix), and their work was therefore to be heralded as a triumph of the feminine approach to science (p. 238). An approach that could be captured by the Japanese word *kyokan*, derived from Kawai Masao (1969), a primate researcher from Japan. *Kyokan* means '*becoming* fused

[2] *The Sunday Times*, 5 June 2011, 'Jumbos just like us.'

[3] 'Cognitive ethology' is a concept coined by Donald Griffin (1978), meaning 'an approach to animal behavior which attributes "mentality" to animals' (Skipper 2004, p. 483). Whenever I refer to 'ethology' or 'ethologist', this implies 'cognitive ethology' or 'cognitive ethologist'.

with the monkeys' lives where, through an intuitive channel, feelings are mutually exchanged', that is, 'to feel one with them' in a shamanistic way (pp. 238–239, my italics). A shamanistic way of 'becoming animal' that is also proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980): 'A similar ontological process to shamanism which undermines fixed identities, as well as crossing thresholds' (in Westwood 2008, p. 4; also see the extensive discussion on 'becoming' in Ten Bos 2008, pp. 75–91). This view is described in a tongue-in-cheek manner by Michael Ryan writing about Merlin Tuttle's interest in bats, saying that he had 'rarely met anyone with such *a feel* for their study animal' (Ryan 2010, p. 478, italics added), and jokingly remarking that he thought that 'Merlin was part bat' (p. 477). At the same time it should be recognized that this close proximity to and scientific study of animals can also lead to a rather mechanistic perspective on animals, as the life and work of famous and Noble prize winning ethologist Niko Tinbergen illustrates. He is regarded as the father of the strand of ethology that assumes that 'we cannot know what an animal feels or what it intends, so scientists should not speculate on its subjective experience' (Kruuk 2003, p. 3). In the same biography though, it is observed that this particular position and argument may be attributed to the fact that

> Niko never felt comfortable in the presence of dogs, and did not keep any himself in later life. It is quite possible that if he had grown up with one, it would have been more difficult for him to see animals mechanistically as he did in his later science, and it would have been more difficult to sideline animal emotions and feelings. (Kruuk 2003, p. 19)

One of the most well-known scientists studying empathy in social animals (chimpanzees) is probably Dutch primatologist Frans de Waal, who defines empathy as the capacity to: (a) be affected by and share the emotional state of another; (b) assess the reasons for the other's state; (c) identify with the other, adopting his or her perspective (De Waal 2008, p. 281).

This definition seems to refer as much to the object of study, that is, empathy in chimpanzees, as to empathy as a research methodology, without De Waal making the distinction explicit. It becomes clear from this example that we need to make a distinction between researching empathy in social animals and using empathy as a research methodology. My suspicion is that many scientists interested in empathy in animals, actually also use empathy as a research methodology without overtly stating so, and without defining clearly what empathy means as a research methodology. De Waals's approach actually seems to be very similar to the definition of *kyokan* given above. This shouldn't come as a surprise, as throughout his many books De Waal has always written very highly of his Japanese colleagues, who, according to him, were also the first to start researching 'culture' among primates. This research was inspired by the work of Kinji Imanishi, who argued that non-human animals are not instinct-driven, i.e. Cartesian machines, and do not learn and know by instinct (i.e. genetically), but through social learning (i.e. culture) (De Waal 2001). This has resulted in various culture studies among animals, led by Japanese researchers (De Waal 2010). De Waal's appreciation for the specific contribution of Japanese primate researchers is shared by others, Asquith (2002) among others. In the foreword of his 2002 book, Hiroyuki Takasaki, one of the translators of the

work of Imanishi, writes that the 'discovery of cultural behaviours [of primates] is also traceable to his worldview, which encourages anthropomorphism when judged appropriate' (Asquith 2002, p. xii).[4] It seems that De Waal's interaction with his Japanese colleagues over the years has almost inevitably led him to the concept of empathy, to which he has devoted one of his latest books (2009). De Waal is interested in the extent to which empathy can be observed in non-human animals, and more particularly primates. He argues convincingly, as others do (see for instance Bekoff 2007), that empathy is widespread amongst social animals, but he does not seem to be explicitly aware of his use of the concept as a research methodology.

Interestingly enough, it seems that 'empathy as an approach to fully understand others, especially non-human animals' has penetrated popular culture more deeply than it is broadly recognized or accepted as a route to knowledge in science. Popular culture abounds with stories, articles, documentaries and books about people who through sheer empathy learn the ways of an animal and are able to literally live with them. The rather scientific ring of the word empathy has found its expression in popular discourse, in all sorts of (wild) animal whisperers, whispering to dogs (Fennell 2001), horses (Roberts 2008), lions (Richardson 2010), wolves (Ellis 2009), bears (Treadwell and Palovak 1997), and elephants (Anthony 2010). It is important to note here that the various whisperers talk about 'understanding' the other in the realm of their ordinary and everyday life. Whisperers do not focus on extravagant events, dramas, festivities, or celebrity aspects of the animals' lives. It is all about the everyday. Naturally, to every human animal the everyday of the non-human animal is out of the ordinary. It is this methodological approach of the peculiarity of the everyday that shows that ethnography, as the study of the everyday of human interaction, and ethology, which investigates the everyday in non-human animal behaviour, actually share the same roof.

The proof of this pudding could be the following quote from a recent edited volume on organizational ethnography:

> Ethnographic fieldwork typically involves the development of close connections between the ethnographer and the subject and situations being studied; (. . .) in order to understand 'what goes without saying', intimate knowledge of other people's lifeworlds is indispensible. (Ybema and Kamsteeg 2009, p. 101)

If I change this quote just a little, I suspect that no readers' eyebrows will be raised:

> *Ethological* fieldwork typically involves the development of close connections between the *ethologist* and the subject and situations being studied . . . in order to understand 'what goes without saying' . . . intimate knowledge of *the animals'* lifeworlds is indispensible.

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[4]Liebenberg reports similar observations about the San in southern Africa. 'In order to understand animals, the [San] trackers must identify themselves with an animal' (Liebenberg 1990a, p. 88). Therefore, 'the [San] knowledge of animal behaviour essentially has an anthropomorphic nature' and 'although their knowledge is at variance with that of European ethologists, it has withstood the vigorous empirical testing imposed by its use.' Therefore, 'anthropomorphism may well have its origins in the way trackers must identify themselves with an animal' (Liebenberg 1990a, p. 83).

Ethologists and ethnographers share a belief in and a passion for fieldwork on everyday lifeworlds. They are 'out there' together. I could pull the same trick (the other way around) with the following long quote from Marc Bekoff on what fieldwork means to him as an ethologist:

> If I begin my research, as I often do, with a deceptively simple question like, 'what is it like to be a dog in such-and-such situation?' then I must try to understand how dogs get through their [every]day and nights from their dog-centric view of the world. On many occasions I've walked around on all fours, done play bows, howled, barked, bitten their scruffs, and rolled over on my back – though I draw the line at mimicking the all-important hindquarter sniff (I gladly leave that to the dogs). I try to go where the animals live to observe them, and as I study them, I also try to empathise with them. How would I feel if I were in the same situation? Of course, I always remember that *my* view of their world is not necessarily *their* view of their world, but the closer I can get to their view, even by personal analogy, the better I might be able to understand it. (Bekoff 2007, pp. 37–38)

Ethologists and ethnographers not only seem to live under the same roof, but even go in through the same door; both starting from the assumption that 'empathy increases understanding' (Masson and McCarthy 1995, p. 36). Lestel et al. argue for an 'ethno-ethology' that 'grants all living beings the status of relational beings, that is, agents interacting on the phenomenon of "culture" that was hitherto reserved for human beings' (Lestel et al. 2006, p. 168). According to Lestel et al. this approach should be complemented with 'etho-ethnology', in which an animal can be 'defined as a natural or artificial, human or non-human agent that attempts to control its actions and those of others as a result of the *significations* it ascribes to their behaviors'. Taken together this approach would be able to study the '*shared lives*' of human and animals, 'on the paradigm of *convergences* between the two, of *life shared* by *intentional* agents belonging to different species' (Lestel et al. 2006, p. 156). Other voices from the anthropological discipline speak of 'multispecies ethnographies' in which 'becomings' [cf. Deleuze and Guattari] – new kinds of relations emerging from non-hierarchical alliances, symbiotic attachments, and the mingling of creative agents ... – abound' (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, p. 546). There is a clear overlap with Lestel's work (although he and his colleagues are not cited), since multispecies ethnographers, like in the approach that Lestel et al. propose, put 'a fresh emphasis on the subjectivity and agency of organisms whose lives are entangled with humans' (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, p. 566).

But empathy not only offers shelter to ethologists and ethnographers, as many other disciplines increasingly make use of the same door. Take environmental historians for instance. In the conclusion of her latest book, which analyses the role of horses in South African history, Sandra Swart (2010) argues for studies that look at particular histories through the horse's eyes: 'It is an interesting and helpful exercise to write history through the eyes of the horse, forcing the human historian to adopt a new and sympathetically imaginative perspective' (Swart 2010, p. 217). Another example is psychology, a discipline that has already paid a lot of attention to the concept of empathy in its thinking about understanding the (ways of the)

human psyche (for a fascinating overview, see Hakonsson 2003). To move from the psyche of men to the psyche of non-human animals is but a small step:

> Trans-species psychology allows us to imagine – without undue anxiety about anthropomorphism – what it might be like to walk in elephant 'shoes' and experience what these awesome herbivores might be thinking and feeling, in much the same way that we think about ourselves and other people .... (Bradshaw 2009a, p. 18)

'In merging ethology with psychology we recognize what humans and elephants share in brain and behavior, and we learn to ask more expansive questions about elephants than are usually included in ethological investigation' (Bradshaw 2009a, p. 72). The 'trick' I used above, playing around and swapping words in a quote, actually comes from Bradshaw, who did more or less the same when presenting an obvious case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in elephants to five mental health specialists (that is, human mental health) without mentioning that the case was about elephants instead of humans (Bradshaw 2009a, pp. 95–98 and 108–112). All experts reached the PTSD diagnosis and suggested similar treatment. No one gathered from the neutrally formulated case description that it was not actually about humans. Bradshaw (2009b) actually argues for a trans-species psychology, as 'psychology and psychotherapy apply not only to the human psyche but equally and seamlessly to the psyches of our animal relatives' (Bradshaw 2009b, p. 157). Approaching and trying to understand another through empathy makes no distinction between the human and non-human other; empathy does not seem to be curtailed by 'speciesism' (which, according to some animal rights activists, should be compared to racism, see LaFolette and Shanks 1996)[5]; empathy seems to recognize social distress (in this case PTSD) across species.

Nevertheless, in *The lives of animals* (1999), Nobel laureate John. M. Coetzee lets his characters discuss the limits of our sense and applicability of empathy beyond our own species in a fictious setting, inspired by the famous essay by American philosopher Thomas Nagel, entitled 'What is it like to be a bat?' (1974). Here another aspect is added to our thinking about empathy, because the question Nagel tries to answer is not whether we can imagine how it would be for us as *humans* to be a bats, but 'what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat' (Nagel in Coetzee 1999, p. 31). Can we become another life form? Coetzee's main character, Professor Elisabeth Costello, thinks that we can, and argues that:

> there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. If you want proof, consider the following. Some years ago I wrote a book called *The House on Eccles Street*. To write that book I had to think my way into the existence of Marion Bloom .... *Marion Bloom never existed*. Marion Bloom was a figment of James Joyce's imagination. If I can think my

[5] Speciesism is defined by Joanne Bourke (2011, p. 132) as 'discrimination based on membership of a species'. As Bourke in her book (2011) makes abundantly clear, 'historically the two [speciesism and racism] are inextricably intertwined, the former being used to bolster, explain, and justify the latter' (LaFolette and Shanks 1996, p. 41). Based on Bourke's (2011) analysis we can add sexism as a third 'inextricably and intertwined' thread to LaFolette and Shanks quote.

> way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life. (Coetzee 1999, p. 35)

Hilary Mantel, Booker Prize winner for her novel on Thomas Cromwell in 2009, entitled *Wolf Hall*, tells us in a recent interview in a Dutch national newspaper: '*Ik stap in Cromwells schoenen*' (I step into Cromwell's shoes) and, '*het is me gelukt om* Wolf Hall *te schrijven alsof ik in hem zit. Ik overlap in tijd en ruimte*' (I managed to write *Wolf Hall* as if I lived inside of him [Cromwell]. I overlap in time and space). On the process of writing the novel, she tells the interviewer: '*was [ik] bezig Cromwell te worden*' (I was becoming Cromwell) (Roodnat 2011). In other words, training empathy is a training in imagination and becoming: 'We need to exercise our imaginative faculties, stretch them beyond where they have already taken us, and observe things we have never been able to see before' (Masson and McCarthy 1995, pp. xxi–xxii).

Training the imagination is maybe best done by reading stories on human–animal relations, in a way as suggested by Pierce's 'narrative ethology' (Bekoff and Pierce 2009, pp. 36–38). I followed that route when I read all kinds of popular stories about animal whisperers and looked at television series and movies about the same animals and whisperers. Another training device is reading philosophical studies, especially on human–animal relations, like for instance the posthumously published works of Jacques Derrida on human–animal relations, famously based on his experience of the gaze of his cat (2008) which brings him to an 'acceptance of the point of view of the cat' (Westwood 2008, p. 3). In this difficult text Derrida basically shows how the European philosophical tradition, from Kant to Lacan, to Descartes' animal-as-machine, to Heidegger, to Levinas, has systematically marginalized animals (see for a similar argument Calarco 2008). By not granting them a plural ('the animal'), as 'though all animals from the earthworm to the chimpanzee constituted a homogeneous set to which "(the hu)man" would be radically opposed' (Marie-Louise Mallet in Derrida 2008, p. x); by not ever granting animals the independent agency to respond (react yes, but not respond) to humans. As they do not speak our language, and as we are still far away from understanding the numerous languages animals speak (see for instance O'Connell 2007; Shanor and Kanwal 2009), we tell ourselves that they do not respond to us, and with that deny them independent agency. By not granting them a law that would make it possible to label the killing of an animal as murder, an animal is basically denied its own death, as it is denied its own life: 'The animal doesn't die, that is, . . . one can put it to death without "killing" or murdering it, without committing murder . . . .' By not recognizing its ability to speak on its own behalf, in a sense the animal does not exist. Heidegger argues that stones are worldless (*weltlos*), animals are 'poor in world' (*weltarm*) and humans are world-forming (*weltbildend*) (in Derrida 2008, p. 151). Humans give meaning to the world, a widespread notion in most if not all the social sciences, especially since the 'interpretive turn' (see Yanow and Schwartz in Shea 2006). Typically for European philosophy, animals are sidelined with one blow: 'The animal can *mitgehen* with us in the house; a cat, for example . . . can inhabit the same place as

us, it can “go with us”, “walk with us”, it can be “with us” in the house, live “with us” but it doesn’t “exist with us” in the house’ (Derrida 2008, p. 145); according to Heidegger, it cannot *mitexistieren* (for interesting discussions on this work of Derrida, see Westwood 2008; Ten Bos 2008; Calarco 2008). Perhaps because of this persistent philosophical tradition, most people still feel that it is morally legitimate to eat animals in the large quantities produced in a mechanical way through the meat industry (cf. Pachirat 2011); as long as we cannot kill or murder animals, they cannot suffer by our hands and therefore it is no problem to eat them (see Safran Foer 2009). This philosophy inspired by Derrida and his post-modern contemporaries will maybe trigger our imagination in order to train our empathetic capabilities, but it will at the same time confront us with the fact that we have to transcend our species in a post-humanist way in order to be able to become the other. Would it still be possible to be warned against or accused of anthropomorphism, once you practice empathy and try to transcend species boundaries?

9.3 Developing Empathy as a Transdisciplinary Research Methodology

Any scientist daring to suggest this type of empathy-based research approach is often warned by fellow scientists not to go that route because of the danger of anthropomorphism, ultimately considered ‘a form of scientific blasphemy’ (Masson and McCarthy 1995, p. xviii), and an accusation in academia that is considered serious enough to hold your breath and think twice before going on. Nevertheless, a rather persistent challenge of this accusation seems to be going on both in the biological sciences and in the human sciences (Westwood 2008, pp. 5–8). We probably refrain from fully embracing cross-species empathy as a research method due to something that is strongly related not so much to the anthropocentrism as to the *logo*-centrism in social-science research.

It can be argued that a lot of ethnographic fieldwork, especially since the discursive turn, has become strongly focused on the audiovisual senses in terms of recording only (spoken) words and (written) texts. This is to the detriment of other research methods in empirical fieldwork, especially those making use of the other senses; smell, sounds and sights (other than words), touch and taste (cf. Pink 2009). While it is generally acknowledged that “*jij en ik (. . .) juist door te praten een hoop dingen niet [laten] zien*” (You and I . . . precisely by talking [leave] many things unseen) (Ten Bos 2008, p. 127), and that body language is far more important in communication than the spoken word (Mehrabian 1981), *logos* seems to be the centre of research attention in much of the ethnographic enterprise (nowadays); logo-centrism is the word that reigns. Contrary to ethnographers, ethologists in general, and those studying wild animals during extensive periods of fieldwork in particular, cannot rely on words and human language in their research and therefore develop all their senses in a broad range of observational skills, trying to understand

the language animals ‘speak’ in a myriad of ways, ranging from body posture to smells, sounds, signals and combinations of these. Like a tracker they have to ‘read the signs’ (cf. Walker 1996) with all their senses. Louis Liebenberg (1990a) even argues that ‘the art of tracking’ is to be considered a form of pre-scientific thinking: on the basis of a range of tracks (i.e. ‘signs’, from prints to smell, to broken branches, to sounds, many of them incomplete), a tracker has to hypothesize where the animal has gone. If a tracker ever wants to catch up with the animal, he cannot look for every successive spoor, but has to try to define in what direction and where the animal is heading. Only finding the animal will prove the hypothesis. If the animal is not found, a new hypothesis has to be developed, until the animal is ‘tracked down’. Although this may sound as a rather straightforward process, it is fraught with difficulties and complexities, as ‘the art of tracking involves each and every sign of animal presence that can be found in nature, including ground spoor, vegetation spoor, scent, feeding signs, urine, feces, saliva, pellets, territorial signs, paths and shelters, vocal and other auditory signs, incidental signs, circumstantial signs and skeletal signs’ (Liebenberg 1990b, p. 3). In other words, a data set that seems at first chaotic and is often incompletely constructed, needs to be interpreted in order to be able to find the animal. Clive Walker, perhaps with a little sardonic smile on his face, observes about a party that is taking a course in the art of tracking, that ‘*it* [is] *interesting* how many of the party ventured different interpretations of what animal had passed (Walker 1996, p. 10, italics added). Tracking is a methodological approach that makes use of all the senses and that can metaphorically be considered as a stepping-stone in developing empathy; tracking could then be seen as the basic methodological skill that ethnographers and ethologists alike should master, as ‘tracks … give an account of the animal’s undisturbed *everyday life*’ (Liebenberg 1990b, p. xi, italics added).[6] In this approach the researcher is attempting, by almost literally tracking footprints, to step into the footsteps of the Other, in order to find him or her; it is an attempt at ‘becoming Other’ in order to come to a better understanding of his or her wanderings and whereabouts, i.e. about ‘finding’ their everyday life. In this respect we as researchers could learn something from the most domesticated animal, at least according to ethologist and Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz, who wrote in his classic 1949 study on domestic dogs and cats that particularly ‘the degree to which dogs understand human expressions of feeling is little short of a miracle’, due to his understanding that ‘everything that socially living animals … “have to say” to each other belongs exclusively to the plane of those interlocking norms of action and reaction which are innate in the animals of a species’ (Lorenz 2002, pp. 129 and 127).

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[6]The skills of especially the San people in southern Africa in tracking animals have been extensively and notoriously used both in Zimbabwe (by the Selous Scouts) and in South Africa (by Koevoet) to track down humans in the context of counter-insurgency operations, where so-called ‘terrorists’, or ‘terrs’, were ‘tracked down’ in order to be eliminated; people were ‘hunted down’ like animals (cf. Kamango 2011).

'Becoming Other' is a philosophical concept most explicitly developed by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980), while at the same time forming part of a broader discourse in postmodern (primarily French) philosophy that seeks to capture and conceptualize the volatility of social reality. Deleuze and Guattari participate in this discussion by introducing the concept of 'becoming', which stands for the ultimate fluidity and flux of social reality, a reality that never reaches any final state or destination; 'becoming' never totally 'becomes', as it always remains an exploration of the other (Janssens and Steyeart 2001, p. 131). In that sense 'becoming' always lingers 'in the middle of difference'. 'Becoming animal' is therefore not an attempt to ultimately become the animal itself, but to try and understand the animal from the middle of one's relation with it; from the 'middle of difference' (Ten Bos 2008, p. 80). 'Becoming' aims to avoid looking at the Other from a dominant position of the self. Describing animals as 'non-human animals' for instance, categorizes them as something that is not similar to the dominant human, instead of trying to approach the animal from its own self (cf. Neolan in Janssens and Steyaert 2001, p. 128). 'Becoming' steers clear of using difference as an absence, or failure, of similarity, but aims instead at studying the other from the perspective of difference itself, from the middle. This means that becoming is a process of anonymizing the human subject, trying to reach the middle of difference in the relation with the other. In a way, 'becoming' leaves the self behind in its exploration of the other; in its journey to the middle. Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari refer to children as an example of how to relate to animals without taking the self, which is not yet developed as such in children, along (in Ten Bos 2008, p. 89). This brings to mind the Biblical notion that to 'really' believe in God, is to *become* like a child, as only they will enter the Kingdom of God (cf. Mark 10:13). This parallel is even more suggestive as Ten Bos, following George Kampis (2008, p. 87), suggests that 'becoming' basically asks for a 'knowing without knowing', which seems to echo the Biblical dictum that to have faith is 'to be certain of the things we cannot see and to be sure of the things we hope for' (Hebrews 11:1). 'Becoming' asks for 'intensities of relationship', not with a single animal, because in order to try and understand the animal we must appreciate the totality or collective of contexts in which the animal lives, which in itself is continually 'becoming' (cf. Ten Bos 2008, pp. 87–89). It is an argument and interpretation that seems to fit and conceptually frame the stories about 'Tippi of Africa', a child born in the bush in Namibia who grows up loving, interacting and communicating with all the wild animals that surround her (Robert and Degré 1996) – in a way becoming them. She was called 'the real-life Mowgli', after Rudyard Kipling's famous jungle boy (*The Telegraph*, 12 November 2008). 'Intensive relationships' with the other, be it animals, plants, or other, facilitates 'becoming'. Barbara McClintock (1902–1992), the famous geneticist, basically asked of her students to work towards 'becoming plant', without the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari yet developed or available to her at the time. The students had to stay with a maize plant when it germinated and grew, cell by cell, into a full-grown maize plant, and she herself did the same. As McKlintock said, 'I don't really know the story if I don't watch the plant all the way along Only by cultivating an intense relation with the plants' becoming was

she able to understand them and to work on their genetic modification: 'Over and over again, she tells us one must have the time to look, the patience to "hear what the material has to say to you", the openness to let it come to you". In short, one must have '"a feeling for the organism"' (McClintock in Fox Keller 1983, p. 198). McClintock maintained that 'good science cannot proceed without a deep emotional investment on the part of the scientist.' She sounds a bit like the trackers described above: 'At any time, for any plant, one who has sufficient patience and interest can see the *myriad signs* of life that a casual eye misses' (Fox Keller 1983, p. 200, italics added).

Barbara McClintock's example is significant for other reasons as well, since she was also a woman making a scientific career at a time when universities in the United States of America were dominated by white males. Critical feminists have therefore embraced Barbara McClintock as an example and icon of women's emancipation in science (see for example Tuana 1989). Of course more postmodern-oriented feminists have also taken up Deleuze and Guatarri's concept of becoming, emphasizing how it leads to the 'inter-connection of self and others, including the non-human or "earth" others' (Braidotti 2006, par. 36) in a way that resonates with 'the non-anthropocentric epistemologies of Donna Haraway' (ibid. par. 11; see also Haraway 2008). The Centre for Gender Research (GenNa) of the University of Uppsala in Sweden has started a specific research group on gender and animals, organized in the HumAnimal Group.[7] At a seminar in October 2011, they argued for the development of so-called 'zoo-ethnographies', which resonates much the same approach and themes as pointed out by Calarco (see above), and by Braidotti and Haraway in their call for papers for the seminar:

> Humanimal encounters are simultaneously creative and political as we ... open ourselves to the lively presences which make and disrupt our more-than-human social worlds and explore the politics and powers which infuse and define interactions. This diversity, fluidity, and creativity raises significant questions regarding how we approach the questions animals raise, what methods we employ to engage these issues, and how we write in a zoo-sensitive manner.[8]

9.4 Tentative Conclusions and Discussion

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming (animal)' belongs to the same family of concepts as empathy, and its elaboration actually offers a pathway for developing empathy as a transdisciplinary and interpretive research methodology. I have argued that we are able to practice 'becoming' because of our empathetic capabilities and imagination as social animals, which gives rise to the exciting perspective that other (social) animals, being active agents in their own right who are part of our communities and share our livelihoods, could meet us halfway.

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[7] www.genna.gender.uu.se/themes/animals/, accessed 21 April 2011.

[8] www.genna.gender.uu.se/themes/animals/events/zooethnographies/, accessed 21 April 2011. See also Bourke (2011).

In this paper I have argued that both ethologists and ethnographers use empathy as a research methodology, but rarely in an explicit way, and certainly do not develop empathy conceptually in this context. I have explored and argued that Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) concept of 'becoming (animal)' could offer us a way forward in developing empathy as a research methodology. This highly abstract exercise was, ironically, mainly informed by the hype in popular culture around all kinds of animal whisperers, who basically whisper 'empathy' and 'becoming' into the ears and minds of other social animals. A particular operationalization of this abstract exercise of becoming was offered by introducing the metaphor of 'tracking' for describing a possible transdisciplinary research process and its use of 'the senses' as tools, as methods to actually do the etho-ethnologies (cf 'doing ethnography', Geertz 1973).

This chapter should also be read as my first attempt to try and reflect on formulating a transdisciplinary research methodology, essentially trying to 'merge' the social and biological sciences. Other disciplines like psychology, literary criticism and philosophy are equally included, as are other knowledge producers, for example the various 'whisperers' from the domain of popular culture. It is a transdisciplinarity that lives up to the notion that:

> The non-specialist's representations of animals are no less 'right' and more 'popular' than those of the scientist because they are contextual and not objectified. It would be bold to claim that the ethologist knows dogs 'better' than the best dog-owners, or that he or she knows more about deer than the best hunters. (Lestel et al. 2006, p. 169)

This perspective echoes the observations made by Liebenberg about the San trackers' knowledge of animal behaviour as compared to that of ethologists (see note 3). Combining biology and the social sciences has been tried before, probably most famously and controversially by E.O. Wilson in his highly contested 1975 publication, entitled *Sociobiology. The new synthesis*.[9] But as far as I know, the more encompassing transdisciplinarity that I argue for here and its focus on synthesizing research methodologies along the lines of the concept of empathy has not been explored extensively before. Although I hope to have shown in this chapter that, conceptually at least, this approach could offer a fruitful pathway towards a transdisciplinary research methodology, I have not (yet) offered an operationalization of the methodology into concrete empirical methods that can be used in the field. Although I hint at a broader use of all the senses in fieldwork, in order to prevent an overly constraining reliance on (spoken and written) words and language, that avenue has to be explored in (far) more detail, to see how it could be included into a conceptual approach of 'empathy as becoming'.

I return once more to the key question of this volume 'What makes us moral?' The answer, following the argument developed in this chapter, would be: Certainly not the fact that we are human. Definitely not, in fact. It might instead be something we share and whisper together with other social animals: empathy.

[9]For an extensive critique of sociobiology from an anthropological perspective, see Sahlins (1977).

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