"Interested Methods" and "Versions of Pragmatism"

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Karin Knorr-Cetina (1995) once noted how a constructivist approach was in part a result of the science studies method: when studying in close detail how facts are produced in ethnographic practice, the outcome will, almost inevitably, be an analysis demonstrating the construction of facts through those nitty-gritty practices one initially had set out to study. It is tempting to ask whether the practice-oriented method in STS is performative also in a somewhat different sense. The complexities you face when approaching practices as they play out in actuality easily become so pressing and overwhelming that it becomes too challenging to be concerned with the complexities of the past. Hence, the practice-oriented method seems to have invited a certain presentism in STS, that is, a concern with versions of the present rather than with versions of the past and how these may act upon the present (Mol and Law 2004; Asdal 2012).

Human-animal studies seems capable of moving beyond this somewhat sad division of labor—between doing history and doing studies of practices. In this special issue, the combination of historical, ethnographic, and "interviewing" studies is in fact prevalent. This is a timely contribution to the field of care studies in STS—which this special issue not only writes itself *into* but also significantly adds to. We could call this **a first version of pragmatism**: a pragmatic choice of methods, or of moves between methods. As part of these moves, the methods we use may also take on different shapes and be modified and moved. Moreover, the textual materials our analysis seek to trace may be on the move (Asdal and Jordheim, 2018), both from one site to another and from one point in time to a radically different one. A prominent example is the guidelines for animal care—the three R's of reduction, refinement, and replacement—that are the object of study in papers of this special issue (see Greenhough and Roe 2017; McLeod and Hartley 2017; Kirk 2017). In following the guidelines through time and between sites, the method not only does the past *or* does the present but also includes "time and text moves" in our objects of study.

The **second version of pragmatism** I propose concerns what theories *do*, or are *taken* or *assumed* to be doing (independent, so to speak, of their given discipline). Actor-network theory (ANT), one of the more influential approaches in both STS and human-animal studies,

is surprisingly often taken to be about a given *position* rather than a method that can help us ask better questions and expand our vocabulary.

It should come as no surprise that scholars initially trained in, or inspired, by actor-network theory easily tune in to the growing and related fields of care and valuation studies. I am thinking in particular of the pragmatist approach inspired by the American philosopher John Dewey (1939), who underlined how valuation is a continuous activity that scholars should empirically study. The issue then is not to settle what value *is* or who or what *has* value, but to trace the practices of valuations (see also Muniesa 2011; Vatin 2013). Actor-network theory treats agency in a similar manner: the issue is not about settling beforehand who *has* agency but about examining how agency can be *achieved* and by which means (Moser and Law 1999). There is an interesting tension here in human-animal studies: Is the decision taken already in advance that the "collective" must be extended and that agency is and must be granted equally across species lines? Or is it more about exploring in a more open and pragmatic way how agency (for instance) is enabled and distributed?

There is a related tension in the Foucauldian engagement with the issue of biopolitics (Foucault 2008). In order to investigate this tension, I have been engaged in working out different versions of reading Foucault in relation to the human-animal issue, or "the more-than-human condition" (Asdal, Druglitrø, and Hinchliffe 2017). One of the versions we teased out was in essence methodological (Redmalm 2017), which in turn raises a fundamental question: Does this imply that methods are simply objective, neutral, and without interest?

The argument from Knorr-Cetina above suggests otherwise. In fact, so does the German scholar and sociologist Max Weber, who is often taken to be the proponent for a clear-cut division between values and scientific facts. But as Weber ([1904] 2012, 113) formulated it, "There is no absolutely 'objective' scientific analysis of […] 'social phenomena' *independent* of special and 'one-sided' points of view, according to which [those phenomena] are—explicitly or implicitly, deliberatively or unconsciously—selected as an object of inquiry, analyzed and presented in an orderly fashion." Dewey (1927, 3) puts it in a related way: "No one is ever forced by just the collection of facts to accept a particular theory of their meaning […]. Only when the facts are allowed free play for the suggestion of new points of view, is any significant conversion of conviction as to meaning possible."

Latour, for his part, has underlined how knowledge practices are "instrumentized" (Asdal and Ween 2014) and how facts can only emerge in an intimate exchange with the tools applied. Hence, methods and objects are what we call "interested," that is, invested with interest (Asdal and Marres 2014). This is a way of highlighting the critical space between the two extremes of deciding on a position beforehand and assuming there is a neutral method that will simply reveal the facts. This does not imply that we must be passionate (cf. Latour and Lépinay 2009) or taken over by interest: you can be *dispassionate* but interested nevertheless (Asdal 2014). Hence, there are different versions of being interested. This relates to what we as scholars are interested in: Are we, for instance, interested in improving the non-human condition, or is it more a question of exploring how humans and non-humans are connected? Or is it perhaps both?

The approach to method, broadly conceived, is not the only reason I find this special issue to be so timely. Just as interesting is its way of relating to theoretical concerns. Often, STS research in general—and actor-network theory in particular—is taken to be part and parcel of "the material turn," that is, concern and attentiveness to **materiality**, to objects, things, bodies, "flesh," and natural entities. In some ways, this makes perfect sense. Actor-network theory developed, in part, in response to how social science kept upholding divisions between nature and society as two realms of reality, where social science could only legitimately relate to the latter. Curiously, however, the fact that actor-network theory is just as much a material-*semiotic* approach—one developed in part from semiotics—seems often to get lost when the approach travels to new sites and interests.

When the semiotic component is neglected, one of the problems that emerges from the turn to materiality is the false conflict that arises between discourse, texts, and documents on the one hand and "materiality" on the other. What seems to get lost then is the fact that materials, bodies, or nature objects are often accessed through inscriptions such as legal documents, scientific reports, and social media, and also how documents (broadly conceived) often help constitute and enact the very situation in question. The material *and* the semiotic are precisely what this special issue aims to capture, for example by investigating how written rules and procedures produced at one place are understood and made to matter in situations elsewhere.

More concretely, what we learn is, for instance, how rules and regulations do not simply constrain caring situations but work productively in them (Greenhough and Roe 2017).

Moreover, Davies et. al (2018), in the introduction to this volume, draws on Valverde (2003) and the notion of "legal complexes" to show how licenses (a particular type of document) operate within biomedical research and help shape relations between various forms of expertise. Hence, rules and procedures act upon situations and should therefore be regarded as intrinsic elements of the situations we study.

Wolfe (2013) has argued that we need to develop a more pragmatic and differentiating ethics for human-animal relations. But maybe we need to explore how this, in part, is already going on, in practice. The law for instance can be approached as a site for working out and doing versions of justice . The law is not only that which "cuts" and determines. Law also acts more pragmatically, as a moral technology that works upon moral capacities, upon our sense of responsibility and judgment of others (Asdal and Druglitrø 2017).

In fact, early animal welfare legislation (in the Norwegian context) explicitly stated that the law *should* act upon human duty and responsibility to treat animals with consideration, thus putting a particular responsibility on those who handled animals in different contexts and environments. This underpins nicely Davies's argument in this volume that the law has to be studied *in situ*, including, we could add, the law-making sites themselves.

As mentioned above, many of the articles in this special issue draw on the notion of care and thus add to the broader field of care studies in STS. Studies of care in STS are indebted to Annemarie Mol and others, whose work is explicitly pragmatic, in part in response to Michel Foucault. We no longer believe in Foucault's episteme, Mol (2002) used to argue, precisely as part of her reasoning in favor of a more open and pragmatic reading of the care situations in question. I will nevertheless draw on Foucault here, in particular his notion of "moral technology" and his concern with law. Including the law, and thereby also a version of the state machinery, does not necessarily bring us back to *discipline* or a determining episteme. To the contrary, since the pragmatic approach of actor-network theory may inspire us to read law, regulations, and state machineries differently.

I have also drawn on valuation studies as another, explicitly pragmatic tradition. My point here is certainly not to create conflict or even tension between these approaches, and we should certainly be careful when drawing from profoundly related versions. To return briefly to Dewey: when he proposed "valuation" as his concept, he did so in order to have a word and a vocabulary that worked *across* disciplinary traditions and empirical practices. Appreciation, pricing, and praising—everything could be covered by the notion "valuation"

or valuation work. But this is not to say that we must do the same in our studies of valuation (or of care, for that matter). Rather, we might just as well return to the more agnostic material-semiotic tradition that we used to call actor-network theory and search for useful concepts and vocabularies just as much as we search for something which we *predefine* as care (or valuation) practices. Even though "valuation" and "care" are indeed useful as analytical categories, it might be just as beneficial to study why we find precisely *these* concepts and phrases relevant, and why it is that these are the concepts that emerge to us from our objects of study. Hence, **the third version of pragmatism** could be to do pragmatism in a way that is pragmatic in relation to the material *and* the semiotic at hand. This would entail being more precise and not least more semiotically sensitive: to "things," to objects and bodies, as well as to words and vocabularies.

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