

Vinciane Despret

Habiter en oiseau [Inhabiting as bird], Arles, Actes Sud, 2019, pp. 224

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Vinciane Despret's *Habiter en oiseau [Inhabiting asbird]* is published by Actes Sud in the collection *Mondes Sauvages*, a collection giving voice to researchers who go in "diplomatic mission" in the world of other living beings. And this is the intent of this book which brings us to the discovery of the world of birds and in particular to the relationship between birds and the researchers who, through the years, have developed theories and methods on birds. She has therefore conducted a thoughtful investigation on the "ecology of thoughts" (p. 55, my translation) concerning birds and their attachment to a territory. Vinciane Despret is philosopher and ethologist. She is an internationally recognized scholar on animal studies and on the relation between humans and non-humans. Her research is often associated to Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway whose works are mentioned in the book and to whom the book is dedicated. The book can be also related to other STS researches (Callon 1984; Law e Lynch 1990; Law and Lien 2012; Granjou and Mauz 2009) and feminist studies (Singleton 2012) on the sociology of scientific practice in interaction with the animal world.

It is a passionate journey through time at the discovery of how the territory as research object is mobilized in studies facing the same question: what are the "functions" of the territory for birds? According to dominant theories the territory has mainly two functions: assuring food supply and reproduction. Despret's intent here is to give voice to other studies and research methodologies – mainly remained in the shadow – which have taken the distance from those general theories in order to highlight the complexity of the relation between birds and the space they occupy. What these studies have in common is to show the limitation of talking about "functions" and that there is no *one* way for birds to inhabit a territory.

The book is an invitation to slow down in the way of doing research and to acknowledge the multiplicity of birds' modes of existence. As the author claims, the intent is not to become more "sensitive" which does not mean much (and which eventually can even provoke allergies) but to become capable of paying attention and to acknowledge that other beings are worth and entitled to receiving attention. In this regard, she claims sharing Donna Haraway's commitment in becoming with other species and of being "in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying and nurturing and killing" (Haraway 2008, p. 42).

In this she starts by evoking the relationship with a blackbird which comes to her window and has caught her attention by its singing. In this anecdotal episode is the essence of the book. Singing is the only thing that

matters for that bird and is an invitation to attention. But it is also a reminder that our responsibility as researchers is to receive and welcome those others' matters and not to generate them (Despret 2020b).

The book is divided in two parts. In the first one, she introduces the main theories on the birds/territory and some potential counter-stories that deserve attention. In the second part, she elaborates more what these other forms of attention may produce.

In the chapters of the first part, she introduces the research object: the fact that birds settle and develop a specific relation with the space, with a tree which is chosen as headquarter, where they develop routines and organize their living. In other terms, they become territorialized. As she explains, it is starting from the beginning of the 20th century that systematic studies appear and elaborate general hypothesis on the "functions" of the territory for birds. The term territory however is not new and dates back to the 17th century with the first observations on birds' territorial behaviours. On this regard, Despret recalls that it is in that period the idea of territory for humans emerges in connection with land use as appropriation and of property as an individual right. As she explains, if in the ornithological domain a theory of the territory as appropriation was never explicitly affirmed, it is no doubt that a certain terminology referring to the domain of appropriation has been largely used in studies on birds as well as the fact of focusing mostly on birds' aggressive and competitive behaviours. This tendency towards anthropomorphism reaffirms in the 20th century and goes in parallel with methods and practices of appropriation (bird breeding) for aesthetic reasons but also in order to kill them for research purposes. As she claims, the territory has nothing innocent.

The aim is to develop comprehensive theories of the territory, the most important of them are focused on reproduction and assuring food supply. These theories manage to persist in time because either they are simple to observe (like feeding practices) or because alternative studies do not bring to other new general "theories" and therefore most of the time they would not be published.

Despret's intent is precisely to account of the many studies claiming that territory cannot be reduced just to food (or reproduction) and that there would be a bias between food and birds' social organization.

She argues that in mainstream theories everything goes too fast and differences are not sufficiently taken into account. Birds have been approached through pre-established analytical frameworks whereby the tendency is "to silence" rather than listening to them. This tendency is even stronger in the '50s when economic theories are mobilized to explain animals' behaviours. In this period the theory of regulation becomes dominant. It claims that the territory has the function of regulating the population in order to avoid a surplus of specimens on a given territory and therefore limited resources in food. Birds would become aggressive and kill other birds in order to prevent that too many males reproduce, which may

produce a deficit in food. As Despret claims, this theory has been many times falsified. Some researchers show in fact that underpopulation may represent even a bigger risk for the maintenance of species (the human one included). What is rather put forward is the fact that all species are interdependent one another. The theory of regulation is the one closest to the concept of territory as property, but also the one that has encouraged the most brutal practices by researchers who, in order to test it, have killed thousands of specimens. The theory of regulation is therefore understood by Despret as a theory of inattention for not caring about one's own object of research. And this seems even more absurd today in view of the disappearance of species.

Moreover, these theories would be clearly gender biased, limiting female mainly to a passive role. Other researchers have instead observed that also female may become territorialized by choosing a territory – included the male occupying it– adapted for reproduction and also by defending it. Interestingly, then, not only female sing, even if less than males, but their singing would be very elaborated and in any case worth of attention.

In the second part of the book she develops what is anticipated in the first one, that is what do these alternative stories produce? Here the author talks about the territory by referring to Deleuze and Guattari in *Thousand plateaus* ([1980] 1987), that is as a performance or matter for expression.

The interest is no longer to try to formulate comprehensive theories on the territory but to follow and account for the thousand possible ways in which birds become territorialized. Here Despret goes back to some key concepts connected to mainstream theories to better explain her point. Concerning the idea of property, becoming territorialized is therefore not so much the act of making a space "*sien*" ("one's own", that is something that one possesses) but rather "*soi*" ("self") that is an expression of oneself. In this she recalls the central role of singing in this process of territorialisation. The song is way to territorialise a space as well to become with that space. The singing would be then an extension of the bird's body in space like the spider with its web. In this sense there would be a dynamic of reciprocity: "Appropriating a place consists in conforming it to oneself and in conforming to it" (p. 121, my translation).

In the same way, aggressiveness – which was seen as a primordial characteristic of the territory – is also reconsidered in this view. By referring to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), she recalls that "if aggressiveness is a constitutive element of the territory, it does not explain it" (p. 151, my translation). Fights are in fact less dramatic than one thinks and singing plays an important role in dealing with conflicts and in particular in avoiding them. As showed by different researchers it is mostly winners who sing. Showing the quality of the singing and displaying one's own colourful plumage work then as self-promotion aiming to warn potential intruders that going into a fight would be unnecessary costly. The singing is then all about spectacularization mainly addressed to other males, whereby "the winner is not the

best fighter, but the best actor” (p. 63, my translation).

Moreover, the outcome of the fighting would be most of the time already established in advance whereby the intruder almost never wins. So, the author wonders, why do birds keep on fighting? In this regard Despret claims that, if it is true that the territory is a way of organising distance (for assuring resources), in reality it is also a way of creating one’s own neighbourhood and sociality. It is said that one of the neglected functions of the territory is the social one whereby fighting is an opportunity to redefine and negotiate what happens at the borders.

In this sense, the territory is a system of conventions which establishes what is allowed and what is not. It becomes then a system of anticipation to simplify complexity and uncertainty. As she explains “the territory only exists through territorialization and deterritorialization since it is always in relation to some entries and exits from the territory that it takes shape. Territories only exist in action” (p. 144, my translation). Territories are then forms which enact and organise relations and give shape to a society. Everything happens in local negotiations and in the composition among different forces. What is affirmed is a performative conception of the territory and the capacity to affect (and of being affected).

In the last part she comes back on the central role of singing in this performative process of territorialization. A territory is proposed as melodic composition or even as partition, that is as a way to organise and distribute singing time with the neighbours of the same species but also with other species, resulting in polyphonic collaborations, or what she calls “expressive cosmopolitics” (p. 176, my translation). In this sense she agrees with Haraway’s proposition – after Despret’s performative reading (2020a) – of calling our era Phonocene to remind the multiple sonic ways of inhabiting the earth as well the risk for them of becoming silenced.

By inviting us to follow birds’ parades and singing, this book brings us also to the heart of the posthumanist debate on agency and on the relationship between human and non-human, on post-qualitative investigations of the relationship between the researcher and their object of research and on ethics and responsibility in doing research in anthropocenic times. This book is an original and engaging reading for researchers interested in these topics.

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Juliane Jarke

Co-creating Digital Public Services for an Ageing Society. Evidence for User-centric Design, Cham, Springer, 2021, pp. 228

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In recent years the Science and Technology Studies (STS) debate about how ageing, technology and society are intertwined is rapidly emerging, as living conditions improve and life expectancy increases, especially in wealthy countries. The growing importance of this phenomenon is extensively supported by EU and national fundings that promote projects to design new technologies and services for the aging society. These research trajectories lay on normative narratives that describe ageing as a problem to fix, and so they lead to an extensive development of assistive technologies that strongly focus only on a medicalized, individual dimension of aging (Cozza et al. 2017). These approaches picture humans as isolated biological machines, forgetting that humans are also (and especially) social beings, made by their relationships with others and the context they live (and age) in. In this context, STS researchers have been fruitful in highlighting two aspects of the phenomenon of active ageing technologies. The first aspect is that STS scholars analyzed how behind the apparent healthy and