

Article

Animal Autobiography; Or, Narration beyond the Human

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Abstract: In engaging with acts of self-narration that cross species lines, creators of animal autobiographies also broach questions about genre, truth status, and the structure as well as the politics of narrative representation. To address these questions, the present article draws not just on scholarship on (animal) autobiography but also on ideas from the fields of linguistic semantics, politeness theory, and discourse analysis, including the “framing and footing” approach that focuses on talk emerging in contexts of face-to-face interaction and that derives most directly from the work of Erving Goffman. On the basis of this research, and using case studies that range from animal riddles to Ceridwen Dovey’s *Only the Animals* (2014), a collection of life stories posthumously narrated by a variety of nonhuman tellers, I profile autobiographical acts that reach beyond the human as ways of speaking for or in behalf of animal others. Some animal autobiographies correlate with acts of telling for which humans themselves remain the principals as well as authors; their animal animators remain relegated to the role of commenting on human institutions, values, practices, and artifacts. Other examples, however, can be read as co-authored acts of narrating in behalf of equally hybrid (or “humanimal”) principals. These experiments with narration beyond the human afford solidarity-building projections of other creatures’ ways of being-in-the-world—projections that enable a reassessment, in turn, of forms of human being.

Keywords: animal narrators; anthropocentrism; cultural ontologies; discourse analysis; fiction–nonfiction distinction; framing and footing; life writing; narratology; politeness; self-narratives

1. Introduction

In animal autobiography, a nonhuman teller provides an account of situations and events in which he or she has, over the course of the life history leading up to the current moment of narration, participated as an experiencing self. As in other kinds of autobiographical acts ([1], pp. 11–55; [2], pp. 63–102), these earlier experiences at once shape and are shaped by the assumptions, values, and priorities that, it can be inferred, now lie at the heart of the nonhuman narrator’s self-conception, and that manifest themselves not only through the substance of the story that the animal tells but also through the teller’s manner of narrating [3]. In such contexts, questions that have crystallized around the study of self-narratives¹ told by human selves apply mutatis mutandis to animal autobiographies, where a kind of doubled or layered relationality is at work: that between the human author of the narrative and the nonhuman agent whom the author projects as telling it, and that between the animal narrator and the range of others, human as well as nonhuman, to whom the animal teller, in

¹ As in Herman [4], I draw here on Gergen and Gergen’s definition of self-narratives as “the individual’s account of self-relevant events across time” ([5], p. 162). Resulting from persons’ attempts “to establish coherent connections among life events” ([5], p. 162), for Gergen and Gergen these accounts must be characterized in social and relational terms, since they are ultimately “symbolic systems used for such social purposes as justification, criticism, and social solidification” ([5], p. 163; see also Ritivoi [3], pp. 27–36).

turn, orients in recounting, contextualizing, and explaining or justifying the actions and reactions that make up the story of the teller's life. But what is more, in engaging with acts of self-narration that cross species lines, creators of animal autobiographies also broach questions about genre, truth status, and the structure as well as the politics of narrative representation—in this case, the practice of narrativizing the experiences of subjects who communicate via resources that extend beyond human language systems.

To address questions of this sort, the present article draws not just on scholarship on (animal) autobiography but also on ideas from the fields of linguistic semantics, politeness theory, and discourse analysis, including the “framing and footing” approach that focuses on talk emerging in contexts of face-to-face interaction and that derives most directly from the work of Erving Goffman [6,7]. This research allows cross-species acts of speaking-for to be situated on a continuum that parallels the one stretching between “butting in” and “chipping in” in the domain of face-to-face interaction among human interlocutors [8,9]. When butting in, a speaker voices an utterance of which he or she is not only author but also the principal, whereas when chipping in a speaker voices an utterance in which the spoken-for party or parties function as co-principal(s). Along the same lines, using case studies that range from animal riddles to Ceridwen Dovey's *Only the Animals* (2014) [10], a collection of life stories posthumously narrated by a variety of nonhuman tellers, I profile autobiographical acts that reach beyond the human as ways of speaking for or in behalf of animal others, situating such acts within their broader sociointeractional and institutional—as well as narratological—contexts.

2. Approaches to Animal Autobiography

DeMello [11] comments on the range of purposes informing autobiographies by nonhuman tellers, in effect situating instances of this narrative mode at different increments along what Herman [12,13] describes as a continuum of strategies for projecting nonhuman experiences in storyworlds.² At one end of the scale are methods for presenting animal experiences in relatively summative, globalizing terms—as refracted through human-centered practices and values. At the other end are accounts designed to anchor interpreters in a conception or model of what it is or might be like for nonhuman agents to interact with their environment on a moment-by-moment basis; these accounts project nonhuman experiences in a more detailed, granular way. DeMello describes the two poles of this continuum as follows:

These animals [i.e., animals narrating their life experiences] often speak for us—allowing writers to discuss concepts like loneliness, alienation, or slavery, through the voices of animals—helping us understand what it is to be human. But speaking animals today are much more than simply allegorical devices. Increasingly today, animals are allowed to speak for themselves, demonstrating a new awareness of animal subjectivity, and a desire on the part of many animal lovers to give that subjectivity a voice. ([11], p. 4)

Dwyer [16] demonstrates the fruitfulness of investigating how animal autobiographies situated near the more explicitly human-centric end of the spectrum can be used to allegorize unresolved tensions and contradictions in the broader culture. Focusing on the production and reception of such narratives in post-Civil War America, Dwyer suggests that even as they adopted the conventions of slave narratives, these animal autobiographies remained entangled in social and species hierarchies that are consonant with slavery. More specifically, argues Dwyer, in cross-mapping species difference onto racial difference, animal autobiographies in this context helped give rise to a “discourse of black criminality crucial to the reconsolidation of white hegemony after the formal end of racial slavery” ([16], pp. 4–5).

² As noted by Bernaerts et al. ([14], p. 75), Ziolkowski [15], in an analysis of texts with canine narrators, sets up a comparable scale between anthropocentric and cynocentric narratives.

For texts situated at the other end of the spectrum of nonhuman self-narratives, a key question is the following: to what extent does the voicing of animal subjectivity, despite the participation of autobiography (as a generic category) in the domain of nonfictional discourse [17–19], necessarily remain a fictional enterprise? Do such accounts, by virtue of their shared premise of a nonhuman agent using human language to tell that agent's life story, always and everywhere exemplify the mode Saunders calls autobiografiction, or "fictional works in auto/biographical form" ([20], p. 9)? Colombat, for her part, answers in the affirmative, suggesting that "writing the autobiography of an animal is indeed a wonderful idea, and a great temptation and challenge to a writer . . . , but it just cannot be. It can never be anything but fiction" ([21] p. 48). By contrast, Savvides [22], in her account of canine autobiographies used to promote the welfare of street or "soi" dogs in Bangkok, Thailand, finds in those animal autobiographies a more thoroughgoing hybridity. Drawing on Franklin's sociological studies of human-canine relationships vis-à-vis domestic living arrangements ([23]; see also [24,25]), Savvides describes such accounts as a product of identifications that, result in ontological as well as generic hybridization. She argues that the canine autobiographies in question "allow their human readers to understand...soi dogs as not-unlike-humans, or, perhaps, to understand that humans are not-unlike-soi dogs" ([22], p. 241). From this perspective, the hybrid status of animal autobiographies can be aligned with what Schwalm describes as the broader hybridity of autobiographical discourse as such: "While autobiography on the one hand claims to be non-fictional (factual) in that it proposes to tell the story of a 'real' person, it is inevitably constructive, or imaginative, in nature and as a form of textual 'self-fashioning' ultimately resists a clear distinction from its fictional relatives (autofiction, autobiographical novel), leaving the generic borderlines blurred" ([26], para. 1; see also [1]; [2], pp. 204–10; [27]).

Indeed, the variety of critical positions on animal autobiography reflects the complexity of the issues raised by this storytelling mode. Ratelle, in her study of animality in literary works and movies targeted at children, suggests that in animal autobiographies "the animal's-eye view compels the human reader into a close emotional bond with the animal as it relates the story of its difficult life" ([28], p. 10; see also [11], p. 8). By contrast, Huff and Haefner [29], in their discussion of "animalographies" included on websites maintained by organizations and corporations across the political spectrum, from the Animal Liberation Front to the Purina pet food corporation, attribute only limited scope and resonance to accounts presented as if they were authored by nonhuman animals. Huff and Haefner characterize these narratives as instances of "popular posthumanism", as opposed to the critical posthumanism outlined by theorists such as Donna Haraway [30].³ Meanwhile, Bernaerts et al. [14] have, for their part, established an important precedent for inquiry into narration by nonhuman agents, laying foundations for a narratology beyond the human more generally. They argue that narratives told by nonhuman narrators engage readers in a dialectic of defamiliarization and empathy—defamiliarizing (at least in some instances) human-centric frames of reference while also promoting empathy with other-than-human ways of being-in-the-world ([14], pp. 72–74).

However, in describing nonhuman narration as a super-category containing the sub-categories of tales told by animals and the tradition of it-narratives ([14], pp. 82–88), or narratives presented by inanimate objects [31,32], Bernaerts et al. downplay the differences between these two kinds of narrative situations. In this way, the co-authors in effect follow Latour [33] in making a flattening-out move whereby animals and other sorts of actants that can be categorized as nonhuman (artifacts, built structures, etc.) are lumped together. By conflating animal and object narrators, in a manner that threatens to obscure the contrasting meanings that these kinds of beings have in the broader cultural ontologies in which they figure, insofar as they populate distinctive subregions of the realm beyond the human, Bernaerts and his co-authors become vulnerable to the critique articulated by

³ But see Section 4.1 for a discussion of how some animalographies demonstrate more complexity than Huff and Haefner [29] suggest.

Kohn: “the distinction Latour makes between humans and nonhumans...fails to recognize that some nonhumans are selves” ([34], p. 5; see also [35], pp. 91–92).⁴ At the same time, because all of their examples are fictional autobiographies, i.e., texts that squarely belong to the genre of fiction, the fundamental hybridity that accrues to autobiography in general, animal autobiography in particular, receives short shrift in Bernaerts et al.’s [14] discussion. Thus, the co-authors’ account both under-generates and over-generates necessary analytic distinctions. On the one hand, it does not make sharp enough ontological discriminations between animals and other kinds of beings; on the other hand, by relegating (all) nonhuman narrators to the domain of fiction, it draws too sharp a border within the landscape of narrative genres, and obscures how acts of animal telling can, when resituated in the larger context of autobiographical acts, be viewed as collaborative, trans-species narrational performances cutting across the fiction–nonfiction divide.

To develop alternative strategies for engaging with these issues, I turn now to a discussion of how integrating ideas from the fields of discourse analysis, politeness theory, and linguistic semantics affords different perspectives on autobiographical acts that extend beyond the domain of the human.

3. Nonhuman Narration Reframed: Finding One’s Footing in Animal Autobiographies

As Goffman has argued, participants in the forms of talk that emerge from face-to-face interaction regularly change how they align themselves with one another and with the utterances being produced. Goffman characterizes such changes—that is, changes to “the alignment that [discourse participants] take up to [themselves] and others present in the way [they] manage the production or reception of an utterance” ([7], p. 128)—as changes of footing, with “a change in our footing being another way of talking about our frame for events” ([7], p. 128). Such frames can be defined, in turn, as more or less fully shared understandings of what kind of interaction is unfolding, and what kinds of moves, conversational and other, are expected or normative given the kind of interaction participants take themselves to be involved in and contributing to [6,40,41]. Thus, very different sorts of discourse contributions are expected in a service encounter—e.g., an exchange with the cashier at the grocery store—than in an academic debate, the delivery of a eulogy at a funeral, or for that matter interactions with a companion animal.

In the pioneering analyses that have informed more recent research into framing and footing across different settings for and kinds of conversational interactions, Goffman sets out concepts and distinctions that have proved foundational for research in discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and related fields (see, for example, [8,9,40–42]). Crucially, Goffman proposes “breaking up the primitive notion of hearer and speaker”, which constitute folk imagery associated with communicative interchanges, “into more differentiated parts, namely participation framework and production format” ([7], p. 153). The terms speaker and hearer, on this view, are insufficiently nuanced to capture the many (and fluctuating) statuses that one can have as a discourse participant at once contributing to and making sense of emergent frames for talk. Relevant statuses include, when it comes to production format, that of author, or “someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded” ([7], p. 144); animator, or “the talking machine, a body engaged in acoustic activity, or, if you will, an individual active in the role of utterance production” ([7], p. 144); principal, or “someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say” ([7], p. 144); and figure, Goffman’s term for contexts in which speakers represent themselves through personal pronouns such as “I”, hedges and qualifiers such as modal auxiliaries (“would”, “could”), remedial statements or corrections of previous utterances, or accounts of what they said on

⁴ Here I draw on the work of Kohn [34,35] as well as that of analysts like Candea [36], Descola [37], and Viveiros de Castro [38] to define cultural ontologies as sets of orienting assumptions that specify, in the form of common knowledge, what sorts of beings populate the world and how those beings’ qualities and abilities relate to the qualities and abilities ascribed to humans. See also Herman [4,39].

past occasions, such that the speakers in question become figures in a statement, that is, “a protagonist in a described scene, a ‘character’ in an anecdote, someone...who belongs to the world that is spoken about, not the world in which the speaking occurs” ([7], p. 147). The possibility of adopting the status of figure thus allows for embedding one’s own or others’ past, future, or hypothetical utterances into a current stretch of talk, including quotations, ironic revoicings, and maxims, as well as stage performances and recitations ([7], p. 150). Such embeddings, which can be recursively nested within one another, also lead to changes of footing, since in reporting what someone else said or reproducing sentiments one used to espouse but no longer condones, one is taking up a different alignment to the ongoing discourse than the alignment entailed by reporting “the [current] feelings of the ‘addressing self’” ([7], p. 151).

When it comes to what Goffman calls participation frameworks, which can be used to rethink the notion of “hearer”, relevant statuses include orienting to the unfolding discourse as an addressee, an unaddressed but ratified participant, or an unaddressed and unrated participant—e.g., an eavesdropper or a bystander. For Schiffrin, such participation frameworks, which in her definition overlap somewhat with Goffman’s production formats, concern “the way speaker and hearer are related to their utterances and to one another” ([8], p. 233). The frameworks in question are anchored in what Tannen and Wallat [40] term interactive frames, or “what people think they are doing when they talk to each other” ([8], p. 233).

In analyses that elaborate on these general ideas, and that provide a basis for rethinking the structures and implications of animal autobiography, Schiffrin ([8]; [9], pp. 106–36) examines microinteractional details associated with “speaking for another”. In this mode of alignment, one expresses knowledge of and sometimes solidarity with the person—more precisely, the discourse participant—whose voice one animates. Depending on the circumstances—and to invoke an indicative range of stances or alignments it will be important to discriminate among, in intra- as well as interspecies contexts—in being animated the voice in question may be assumed, remembered, inferred, hypothesized, or imagined. Further, as Schiffrin [9] suggests, in multiparty talk, speaking for another can be a way of “chipping in” (engaging in a display of what Brown and Levinson [43] term positive politeness and what Goffman [44] calls positive face wants, whereby one signals that one shares so much with another discourse participant that one can take up his or her position in talk, building solidarity) or else “butting in” (engaging in a violation of negative politeness requirements or negative face wants, whereby one fails to respect another’s desire not to be intruded upon, threatening solidarity) (Schiffrin [9], pp. 234, 238; see also [43], pp. 91–228; [44]). Hence “speaking for another can be seen as either deferential, or demeaning, to the one spoken for” ([9], p. 234). What is more, such transfers of the responsibility for speaking can be institutionally allocated, as when a lawyer enters a plea for his or her client in court, and also performed on the fly by conversational peers who thereby signal (and potentially reconfigure) their understandings of gender-related, ethnic, and other aspects of identity—as researchers working in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis have explored [45,46].

For their part, building on some of the sociological and discourse-analytic scholarship that informs Schiffrin’s approach, Arluke and Sanders ([47], pp. 61–81) use human-canine interactions in a veterinary hospital as well as a guide-dog training program to underscore the relevance of practices of speaking-for in constellations of social agents that extend beyond the human. Arluke and Sanders identify a variety of reasons that may motivate human caretakers to speak for their companion animals in such settings, whether through first-person, ventriloquizing constructions or through more distanced, third-person attributions of experience. Relevant motives include using the animal as a means to transmit, in a more or less oblique way, possibly face-threatening directives or complaints to a spouse or another family member; offering “surrogate explanations” for behavior that caretakers construe as needing to be excused, whether because of its potentially disruptive or transgressive effects or because of how, in the caretaker’s estimation, the behavior at issue might bear on interlocutors’ assessments of the kind of person he or she is; and empathically identifying with—and giving voice to—the suffering of a nonhuman being in order to obtain appropriate treatment for a sick or injured

animal. As this range of motives suggests, and as my case studies in the next section confirm, acts of speaking-for that cross the species boundary are as much subject to fluctuations between what Schiffrin [8,9] calls butting in and chipping in as are intra-species acts—that is, acts in which both the speaking and the spoken-for parties are human.

This line of inquiry, which connects ideas from discourse analysis and interactional sociolinguistics with work in human–animal studies, and which the present article further seeks to link up with scholarship on animal autobiography, underscores reasons for diverging from Bernaerts et al.’s [14] account—more specifically, from their conflation of object and animal narrators as well as their relegation of (all) animal tellers to the domain of fiction. The ascription of self-narratives to nonhuman tellers should, rather, be situated alongside a multiplicity of discourse practices that involve speaking in behalf of another being who is assumed, inferred, or hypothesized to have a perspective on and interest in situations and events—with such acts of speaking-for encompassing a range of practices that cut across the fiction–nonfiction contrast. As these comments also suggest, when it comes to speaking for another, questions of modality intersect with those of framing, footing, and genre. Accordingly, it is advantageous to shift from the fiction–nonfiction polarity, a binarized distinction, to another continuum—in this case, the continuum that specialists in linguistic semantics have developed to map out the degree to which a speaker is committed to the truth of the proposition expressed in an utterance, with such degrees of commitment falling under the heading of “epistemic modality” ([48], pp. 387–89; [49], p. 141; [50], pp. 508–9).

At issue are the expressive resources—including, in English, sentential adverbs such as “undoubtedly”, modal auxiliary verbs such as “may” or “would”, and statement types such as interrogatives and imperatives—that are used by speakers to signal where their attitude toward a proposition falls on a scale stretching from the epistemic modality of certainty to that of uncertainty (Herman [51], pp. 310–11). One end of the continuum corresponds to the “realis” mode, in which one is strongly committed to truth of the proposition about which one makes a claim; the other end of the continuum corresponds to the “irrealis” mode, in which one is weakly committed to the truth or factual status of the proposition—or even, as in fictional discourse, not committed at all.⁵ Acts of speaking for another can occupy various positions along this scale. Practices of speaking-for that cluster toward the realis end of the continuum include collaboratively written autobiographies ([19], pp. 185–215; [52]), the co-production of discourse in interactions between persons with and persons without aphasia ([41]), acting in the formal capacity as a court-appointed attorney making a plea in behalf of a defendant accused of a crime ([53], pp. 81–82), or taking someone’s side in a conversation in which one defends an absent or present party against the criticisms ventured by an interlocutor. Practices of speaking-for that cluster toward the irrealis end include conjecturing about what a person from a different culture (or even an extraterrestrial being) might say about current world affairs, predicting one’s own future reactions to contemporary events, or projecting oneself into the role of the homo- or autodiegetic narrator presenting a fictional account, whether within or across the species boundary. The point to emphasize here is that, like acts of speaking-for more generally, animal-autobiographical acts can fall at different increments along this scale—even as an extended animal autobiography can span different segments of the continuum over the course of its telling.

Animal autobiography thus piggybacks on the hybrid generic status of autobiography itself [1,26,27], taking advantage of a flexible narrative environment in which the whole range of modes—from realis to irrealis—can be exploited when it comes to presenting an account of the situations and events that make up a given storyworld. In turn, these movements along the continuum of epistemic modalities in the context of animal autobiography translate into changes in the framings and footings entailed

⁵ In Crystal’s formulation, realis is “a term used in the study of epistemic modality: in a realis (“real”) assertion, a proposition is strongly asserted to be true, the speaker being ready to back up the assertion with evidence or argument. It is opposed to an irrealis (“unreal”) assertion, where the proposition is weakly asserted to be true, but the speaker is not ready to support the assertion” ([49], p. 321).

by acts of speaking-for that cross species lines. Who, or what, is the self for whom claims are being made in autobiographical writing, and what is the status of those claims?⁶ These questions are already challenging ones, and they become even more complex and multidimensional when such acts of speaking-for-a-self extend beyond the realm of the human.

As Cosslett [53] notes, Lejeune's [19] work on collaborative autobiographies anticipates some of the issues at stake in animal-autobiographical acts, with the writer of another's life story creating a narrative that would otherwise have remained untold, and thereby taking on the role of "a mediator between two worlds" (qtd. in Cosslett [53], p. 88). Describing the practice of collaborative autobiography as one in which the writer tries to imagine himself as the model, or the autobiographical subject whose story is being presented, Lejeune characterizes the autobiographer-model relationship as parallel to that between a novelist and his or her narrator-protagonist ([19], p. 190; see also [52]). Collaborative life writing thus breaches the boundary between fiction and history, and in doing so gives the lie to the apparent unity and coherence of autobiographies that do not result from explicit collaboration ([19], p. 188). From this perspective, the structure of the animal autobiography not only mirrors the practice of collaborative (inter-human) autobiography, with the difference that the writer projects himself or herself into the position of a nonhuman model; what is more, animal-autobiographical acts also root themselves in the necessity for ghostwriting, or self-displacement, even in cases where, to revert to Goffman's model, the roles of author, animator, principal, and figure would all seem *prima facie* to coincide.

4. Case Studies in Cross-Species Speaking-For

With this additional context in place, consider again how Goffman's [7] approach to framing and footing can be brought to bear on acts of speaking-for that cross the species boundary. These acts can be situated on a continuum that parallels the one stretching between "butting in" and "chipping in" in the domain of face-to-face interaction among human interlocutors [8,9]. To reiterate—and taking into account the complexities of authorship noted by Lejeune [19] and Iadonisi [52]—when butting in a speaker voices an utterance of which he or she is not only author but also the principal, whereas when chipping in a speaker voices an utterance in which the spoken-for party or parties function as principal(s). As the previous discussion suggests, however, the role of principal is no more atomic or indivisible than the role of author. To accommodate the non-primitive nature of principals, or the way an utterance can be voiced in behalf of multiple parties or a single party of more or less uncertain preferences and predispositions, a second continuum can be posited; this continuum, which cross-cuts the one that spans butting in and chipping in, corresponds to a scale of epistemic modalities whose increments fall between the *realis* and *irrealis* poles. By situating acts of speaking for nonhuman others on both continua, those acts can be profiled along two dimensions—not only as embodying more or less human-centric interests (determined in large part by the nature of the author-principal relationship in a given instance), but also as reflecting, and helping consolidate, a stance that marks those interests as ones about which it is appropriate to make assumptions, draw inferences, engage in hypotheses, or bracket as elements of fictional worlds, as the case may be.

4.1. Nonfictional Animal Autobiographies

This two-dimensional model helps explain why, in part because of the hybrid status of autobiographical discourse in general, not every act of speaking-for that crosses species lines should be categorized as fictional, or for that matter as centering primarily on human interests and concerns. Some of these acts, rather, can be situated closer to the *realis* pole of the continuum of epistemic modalities

⁶ In Marcus's account, part of the anxiety about autobiography's instability and hybridity arises from a concern over whether autobiography is "a way of ordering and objectifying the self, and thus importing alterity into the self that engenders it, or [a form] mirroring [the self's own] vacillations and alterations" ([1], p. 16).

than fictional projections accomplished through storytelling acts, and also as more analogous to chipping in than to butting in when it comes to the framings and footings involved. Animal riddles, for example, are grounded in an animal's attested habitats and behavioral patterns, and to that extent can be falsified; hence such riddles stand apart from the category of fiction. Thus, on a website containing animal riddles written by Jerry Jindrlich for young children⁷, the riddle whose answer is "frog" reads:

My skin is green and slippery.
I have four legs and webbed feet.
I eat bugs and little fish.
I can swim under water and hop on land.
I am a...

Similarly, the riddle whose answer is "whale" reads as follows:

I live in the ocean.
I swim wherever I want.
I sing to my family.
I can breathe through a hole in the top of my head.
I am a...

Arguably, the acts of speaking-for associated with riddles of this sort sometimes go beyond cross-species paternalism, or forms of human-centric butting in that can be assumed to violate nonhuman creatures' (inferred or inferrable) negative face wants [43,44]. Rather, the acts in question may result from a hypothesized human-animal interchange, in which the sentiments expressed in the riddle are, in effect, shared between a human author and a counterfactual nonhuman co-author—sentiments that the human designer of the riddle infers and seeks to reinforce via an act of co-telling driven by positive face wants. The subject of the riddle, which I am here characterizing as a nonhuman co-author, contributes to a model or profile that derives from what humans know about the animal in question coupled with hypotheses concerning what kind of self-narrative the animal would tell if it were equipped with the capacity for verbal expression. The role of principal is likewise split, or hybridized, in such contexts. Thus, the telling of the riddle can be interpreted both as an act of speaking-for that constitutes cross-species chipping in and—particularly when the riddle is targeted at children learning about the lifeways of animals—a puzzle designed in behalf of a human addressee.⁸

Animal riddles form part of a broader category of nonfictional instructional narratives that serve the purpose of modeling animals' behavioral routines, capabilities, and (potential) viewpoints on their environments. For instance, in the first volume of his multi-volume *Curious Critters* series, targeted at readers aged 3–8, David Fitzimmons [54] includes, along with an image of the animal with its claws extended toward the reader, the following profile for "Ohio Crawfish":

Do you know why I'm waving my giant claws?
I'm warning you: Don't come any closer.
Snap! Snap! Snap!
I catch my food with these claws. I also attack and defend myself with them.
Snap! Snap! Snap!

⁷ The website may be found at <http://www.meddybemps.com/Riddles/index.html>.

⁸ The pervasiveness of animals telling riddles in educational and other material targeted at children speaks to issues raised by Degnen [55]. As Degnen notes, at a time when they themselves are still in the process of acquiring the status of persons, "young children are actively encouraged to invert Western naturalist ontology (whereby human beings and all other living beings are segregated into radically different domains) and invest their imagination in a cosmos where human and nonhuman animals are commensurate" ([55], p. 677).

Do you want to know something really cool? If any of my legs gets hurt, including my giant claws, I can grow new ones. Pretty neat, huh? Now, enough chitchat. Back off!

Snap! Snap! Snap! ([54], p. 4)

This narrative profile, like the ones emerging from the adult- and student-designed animal riddles, can be viewed as the product of trans-species co-authorship. Here too the crayfish's attested display behaviors, habits of predation and self-defense, and recuperative powers contribute to an account that, although it is mock-voiced by a crustacean in dialogue with child readers who are cast in the role of direct addressees, remains within the domain of falsifiability. But note how the footings associated with this act of cross-species speaking-for change over the course of the ventriloquized self-profile. Some of the crayfish's projected utterances can be taken as the result of chipping in on the part of the human co-author of the profile, whose positive face wants motivate him to infer and co-articulate, on the basis of the animal's observed dispositions and behavioral tendencies, what he takes to be the crayfish's preferences and priorities. Other utterances contained in the profile, however, including the interrogatives "Do you want to know something really cool?" and "Pretty neat, huh?" as well as the locution "Now, enough chitchat," can be glossed as originating from a human—rather than hybrid—frame of reference. Such utterances can be construed as imposing upon negative face wants that may, given the evidence available, be more or less plausibly attributed to the animal. These elements of the profile extend beyond any extrapolation from observed behaviors, or for that matter any technique for modeling an animal's experiential world; instead, they can be interpreted as strategies for enhancing readability through an engagement with forms of dialogic exchange anchored in humans' own communicative practices.

Self-narratives attributed to shelter animals in need of adoption also exemplify nonfictional acts of speaking-for that cross species lines. These autobiographical accounts, like the instructional narratives just described, can involve complex shifts of footing. Thus, whereas the animal autobiographies included in a post to the Animal Liberation Front's website titled "Interview from an Animal Shelter" present hypotheses about (rather than fictionalizing) the lived experiences of shelter dogs, in doing so they reveal fluctuating degrees of alignment with human frames of reference.⁹ In one of the accounts, perhaps attributed to the animal on the basis of a separate (unreported) interview with one or more of the shelter's human attendants, a female Jack Russell terrier named Patsy recounts how "My owner surrendered me. She said she wanted a cute little dog like the one on the TV show, *Frasier*. She didn't bother to look into the type of dog I am...I suppose she expected me to just lie about and only need a short walk each day, just like Eddie [the dog on the TV program], but my energy was so high that I needed to run and play." Granted, the mode of telling here somewhat occludes the experiential texture of the dog's life story; but far from being an instance of fiction, this animal autobiography cautions against using fictional narratives as templates for understanding animal lives, or human-animal relationships. The account attributed to Patsy therefore suggests how animal autobiographies, even when ventriloquized by tellers familiar with television serials and animal actors, can nonetheless reveal traces of trans-species co-authorship. Such hybrid authorial agents take their place within production formats that feature a more-than-human principal—in this case, a principal that oscillates between the mistreated dog and a human concerned about those who may be prone to adopting (or abandoning) a companion animal for ill-thought-out reasons.

4.2. Fictional Animal Autobiographies

A model integrating research on framing and footing also helps account for the variety of animal autobiographies clustering at the other pole of the continuum of epistemic modalities, with these nonhuman self-narratives framing propositions about the animals' experiences not just in a provisional

⁹ See <http://www.animalliberationfront.com/Practical/Pets/Stories/InterviewAnimalShelter.htm>.

or hypothetical mode but furthermore as fictional, or nonfalsifiable. There are indeed significant differences among fictional animal autobiographies, confirming that a second analytic dimension (in addition to modal status) is needed to account for variation in such virtual acts of cross-species speaking-for. As with the nonfictional examples discussed in my previous subsection, when fictional animal narrators recount their life stories the author-principal relationship determines degrees of human-centrism; at issue is the extent to which the account can be read as one that, having been co-authored across species lines and motivated by the human designer's positive face wants, attempts to avoid any violation of inferred or assumed nonhuman negative face wants. And once again, shifts of footing entailed by the foregrounding of different aspects of hybridized, "humanimal" authors and principals can obtain not only across various fictional animal autobiographies but also over the course of a single text's unfolding.¹⁰

Thus, at a macro-analytic level, provisional distinctions can be drawn between classic as well as contemporary animal autobiographies designed to promote more humane treatment of companion animals, such as Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877/2007) [57], Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* (1893) [58], and Ann Martin's *A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray* (2005) [59]; the more or less collaboratively composed autobiographies of members of species that have been subjected to scientific experimentation or exposed to the abusive treatment associated with factory farming or industrialized agriculture, ranging from the autobiography told by Nicodemus the rat in Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1972) [60], who was injected with an intelligence-enhancing serum in a fictionalized research laboratory maintained by the National Institute of Mental Health, to some of the life stories told by the animals who feature in William Kotzwinkle's *Doctor Rat* (1976/2014) [61]; and texts in which writers, sometimes working in different storytelling media [62,63], have enlisted the resources of fictional animal autobiography to unsettle in an even more concerted way broader assumptions about cross-species relationships that both shape and are shaped by practices of giving voice to nonhuman experiences—as in the life narratives told posthumously by the nonhuman narrator-protagonists included in Ceridwen Dovey's story collection, *Only the Animals* (2014) [10]. At a more micro-analytic level, different modalities of speaking-for manifest themselves within (and not just across) these and other texts falling in the relevant subcategories.

Take *Black Beauty* [57], for example. As with other fictional autobiographies featuring nonhuman tellers, it would be a category mistake to attempt to falsify Sewell's acts of cross-species speaking-for; but here again attending to the specifics of the author-principal relationship allows for a finer-grained analysis of the text. Specifically, Sewell's discourse can be positioned at various increments on the continuum of self-other alignments stretching between butting in and chipping in, depending on the scope and quality of the humanimal co-authorship in a given segment of the narrative and also the degree to which Sewell can be read as seeking to uphold the inferred negative face wants of the animal agent(s) involved—in this case, the species of whom Beauty is a representative. To be sure, Sewell's frequent interactions with and close observations of horses maximized opportunities for a cross-species compositional dynamic, in which possibilities for chipping in rather than butting in were increased.¹¹ Yet, the text's reliance on institutions and practices that include slavery as it was constituted in the nineteenth century, filial relations based on the concept of the nuclear family, and others can be read as a superimposition of human frames of reference on equine experiences.

For their part, Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* [58] and Martin's much later *A Dog's Life* [59] are marked by an even more thoroughgoing use of human-centric projections, with the attendant risk of a desire for trans-species solidarity trumping equally exigent, and species-specific, needs for autonomy. Both texts can be read as containing co-authored propositions about dogs based on attested canine behaviors and dispositions, as when Saunders has Joe report that "dogs love variety and excitement, and like

¹⁰ See DeKoven on the concept of humanimals, or "oscillating characters who are neither/both human and animal" ([56], p. 20).

¹¹ As Norris [64] notes, because of illness Sewell was unable to walk and depended on horse-drawn transportation for most of her life.

to see what is going on outside as well as human beings" ([58], p. 40) and Martin's nonhuman narrator-protagonist recounts how he and his fellow stray dog, Moon, survive by foraging for food in the small town in which they spend a winter ([59], p. 135). Yet, human frames of reference preponderate in both texts, and the frequency with which Saunders and Martin rely on such frames as a source domain for fictional world building in effect privileges human positive face wants over nonhuman negative face wants; depending on the cultural ontology in which a given narrative is grounded, these wants not to be intruded upon will be more or less richly ascribed to the animal agents involved. Thus, Beautiful Joe is able to quote, verbatim, an extended discussion about animal treatment that he overhears while traveling on a train ([58], pp. 132–41), while Martin's canine teller grasps the concept of spaying ([59], p. 167), uses the names of tree varieties ([59], p. 179), and refers to specific pieces and styles of human clothing ([59], p. 192).

Other animal autobiographies, in projecting inside views of the experiences of animals subject to scientific experimentation or the methods of factory farming, leverage human frames of reference in order to subvert anthropocentrism, thereby reconfiguring acts of butting in, via ironic or self-reflexive modes of telling, as a kind of chipping in.¹² In O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, for example, Nicodemus the rat takes on the role, for part of the novel, of an intradiegetic narrator, presenting his autobiography as a story-within-the-story ([60], pp. 120–210). Nicodemus recounts how he and some fifty-nine other rats, along with eight mice, were captured and conscripted for an experiment designed to test "whether certain injections could help us to learn more and faster" ([60], p. 129). Nicodemus does not explain how he is able to understand conversations among the human scientists about experimental procedures even before he and the other members of the non-control groups of rodents are injected with the potentially intelligence-enhancing serum. Further, after Nicodemus and the other rats escape from the laboratory, they arrange their affairs in a way that appears to mirror human architectural, technological, and more broadly cultural practices, creating an underground meeting hall and library, building an elevator and using electric lights, stockpiling seeds for the purposes of crop production, transmitting to their offspring the ability to read that they acquired after being given the serum, and so on.

Yet Nicodemus's account also reflects the rats' awareness of their own interstitial, between-species status, and hence the limitations of human models for other-than-human social collectivities. Thus Nicodemus reports a fellow experimental subject's remark that "we don't know where to go because we don't know what we are. Do you want to go back to living in a sewer pipe? And eating other people's garbage? Because that's what rats do. However, the fact is, we aren't rats any more. We're something Dr. Schultz has created. Something new" ([60], p. 160). He also recounts how he and the other rats were glad to leave an abandoned estate they had taken over for several months: "we were never really comfortable there. Everything in it was designed for animals who looked, moved and thought differently from the way we did" ([60], pp. 191–92). Hence, in creating this autobiography of a laboratory subject O'Brien has, as Ratelle suggests, portrayed the lab as "a site of intersection between human and animal that...serves to undermine an exclusively human notion of subjectivity" ([28], p. 103).

Indeed, O'Brien's focus on rats' experiences, like Kotzwinkle's in *Doctor Rat* [61], enables his fictional animal autobiography to comment critically on a cultural ontology in which possibilities for subjectivity beyond the human are differentially allocated, often for pragmatic or instrumentalizing reasons, across different forms of animal life. As Ratelle puts it, "unlike companion animals, rodents had few advocates to speak against their inclusion in laboratories, and their small size and easily

¹² In her analysis of Paul Auster's 1999 novel *Timbuktu*, Ittner [65] identifies some of the issues that are at stake in ironized or self-reflexive acts of butting in across species lines. For Ittner, Auster uses Willy G. Christmas's relationship with his dog, Mr. Bones, to suggest how "by thinking of an animal, we construct it within our own consciousness and therefore what is reflected back to us is our own existence, irrespective of the point of view we choose to adopt...[Auster's] approach acknowledges this impasse and integrates it into its inquiry on animal alterity" ([65], p. 182).

facilitated breeding made them ideal laboratory denizens" ([28], p. 100). But whereas *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* was written for younger readers¹³ and resorts to a subtly self-subverting overextension of human frames of reference vis-à-vis the story of Nicodemus's life, with the embedded rodent autobiography invoking human-centric conceptions of societies or civilizations in order to imagine other-than-human social collectivities, Kotzwinkle's text, targeted at an adult audience, engages in blunt, sometimes brutal irony to stage its own anti-anthropocentric critique via animal autobiography.

Rather than presenting Doctor Rat's life story as an embedded narrative, about which readers (along with the rat's intradiegetic narratees) learn secondhand, Kotzwinkle uses retrospective autodiegetic narration—not only by his rodent protagonist but also by the other animals whose autobiographical vignettes alternate with Doctor Rat's account of his life history. Taken together these narratives tell the story not just of a variety of nonhuman lives but also of a worldwide animal uprising together with its devastatingly violent suppression by humans. Disturbingly, Doctor Rat, or at least the older, narrating I who produces the account on which judgments about what transpires in the laboratory must be based, appears to have internalized (and perhaps amplified) the instrumentalizing attitudes of the human experimenters. It is not just that Doctor Rat is, at least in his own mind, a recipient of the Claude Bernard Animal Experimentation Award ([61], p. 27), or that he aligns himself with humans by using the first-person plural in his account of the human scientists' experiments on rats and other animals—as when he reports that “naturally, we cut the dogs' vocal cords as soon as they enter the lab” to prevent them from howling or screaming in pain ([61], p. 7). What is more, the narrating I admits that he has come to “enjoy the smell of formaline—a 5% solution is satisfactory for removing all the soft parts of a rat's body. Yes, the smell is pleasing to my nose because I know the bones aren't mine” ([61], p. 1). In one of many echoes of Holocaust narratives found throughout Kotzwinkle's text, Doctor Rat refers to this 5% formaline solution as “the Final Solution”, which “after all is said and done...is death, and death is freedom” ([61], p. 1).¹⁴ Similarly, the narrating I, who at one point addresses his conspecifics by asserting that “You're all just basic models, fellow rats!” ([61], p. 18), recounts the following dialogue he has with a rat whose brain is scheduled to be “sucked out by a pneumatic tube”:

“Help, help!”

“Please, young fellow, there's no need to get so worked up about your little contribution to science. Have a bit of pressed biscuit before you die. Eat hearty and remember—death is freedom!” ([61], p. 4)

He also describes as hysterical and as “not showing the scientific attitude” a young female rat who has had a hole cut into her stomach and a plastic window inserted there so that scientists can use a strand of hair to tickle “the little ratlings as they grow inside her” ([61], p. 13).

It is thus entirely in character for Doctor Rat to tell his fellow rats to ignore the revolutionary message being broadcast, on a nonvocalized, intuitive wavelength, by the dogs and other animal subjects. As he puts it, “I would much prefer microscopic worms in my intestines to these blasted dogs in my eardrums with their slobbering tale of freedom” ([61], p. 23)—any given dog being, for Doctor Rat, “just a basic model. A convenient evolutionary offshoot expressly designed for the laboratory” ([61], p. 29). The degree to which Doctor Rat has internalized human values and priorities as normative (in contrast with Nicodemus and the other experimented-upon rats in O'Brien's text) is evident when he shouts out in response to a group of rebel rat mothers calling for the liberation of laboratory animals: “Close your ears, fellow rats! Don't listen to these irresponsible rabble rousers.

¹³ O'Brien's text won the 1972 Newberry Medal, awarded annually to books that contribute to American literature for children.

¹⁴ Other echoes include Doctor Rat's references to tattoos on rats' bodies, as well as his accounts of scientific papers published on the basis of sadistic experiments involving castration, decapitation, exposure to radiation, the grafting of body parts removed from one rat onto the bodies of other rats, and other abhorrent practices, including placing kittens, fully awake, in a microwave oven, with their paws taped down to the tray ([61], p. 38).

Remember that you are contributing to research, to saving the lives of human beings" ([61], p. 32). Kotzwinkle uses his rodent narrator, then, to ironize practices of speaking-for that disregard possibilities for subjectivity beyond the species boundary, and the negative face wants that can plausibly be associated with such other-than-human ways of experiencing the world. The very sophistication of Doctor Rat's account gives the lie to the unrelenting—and perverse—anthropocentrism that he endorses at every turn. Indeed, Kotzwinkle's use of Holocaust references suggests an analogy between this narrator's pro-animal experimentation stance and Jewish self-hatred—or even the desperate attempts at collaborationism undertaken by Jews seeking to ingratiate themselves with their captors and executioners in the Nazi death camps during the second World War.

In this respect, Kotzwinkle's text aligns itself with other norm-challenging animal autobiographies that use the resources of fiction to explore possibilities for anti-anthropocentrism in acts of speaking-for that extend beyond the human. Such texts bear the traces of trans-species co-authorship, arising from the hypothetical or counterfactual projections driven by humans' positive face wants (compare chipping in); but they also model how to avoid infringing on other creatures' inferred or assumed negative face wants (compare butting in). In turn, autobiographies of this sort not only reflect but also help shape cultural ontologies marked by relatively prolific allocations of possibilities for selfhood among animal agents.

Consider, along these lines, the autobiographies included in Ceridwen Dovey's 2014 collection *Only the Animals* [10], which consists of self-narratives told by deceased animals who die as a result of human projects and—especially—conflicts. Among these autobiographies are the life stories recounted by the soul of SS leader Heinrich Himmler's one-time German shepherd, after the dog has been killed in Poland in 1941, an explosive pack meant to blow up a tank having been strapped on his back; by the soul of a mussel killed after the battleship to which he is attached is destroyed during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, also in 1941; by the soul of Plautus the tortoise, who, having lived with Tolstoy's daughter, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, and Tom Stoppard, dies after being rocketed into space in 1968 for an experiment designed to test the effects of space travel on living creatures; by the soul of an elephant who dies while trying to come to the aid of her twin sister, after she is shot by militants during a 1987 civil war in Mozambique; and by the soul of a female dolphin who, having been trained by the US Navy to detect underwater mines and participate in other military operations, writes a letter to Sylvia Plath about how she too committed suicide—after learning that she had unknowingly attached a lethal weapon to an enemy diver during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.¹⁵ Overtly fictional in their use of animal narrators who are already dead at the time of telling, these autobiographies also oscillate between human-centric and biocentric frames of reference.

Thus, although capable of tracking references to vegetarianism, Hesse's *Siddhartha*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, Himmler's German shepherd is also able to sense an intruder's neck artery pulsing as he frames his jaws around the intruder's throat ([10], loc. 972). Similarly, the roving mussel and his conspecifics are caught up in a wanderlust with distinct echoes of that experienced by Kerouac and the other members of the Beat Generation; yet, they are also able to detect subtle changes in the temperature and salinity of sea water ([10], loc. 1328). For his part, Plautus the tortoise can quote Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1892 address to the US House Judiciary Committee concerning women's rights, as well as passages from Woolf's *Flush*, but also hibernate for months at a time and detect smells humans cannot perceive, including the icy smell of space outside his capsule's walls. As for the Navy-trained dolphin, even as she develops detailed interpretations of Ted Hughes's animal poems and converses (metafictionally) with the soul of Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello [67], she also embodies, as a "toothed whale" ([10], loc. 2430), distinctive cetacean capacities that she adduces as a

¹⁵ For more on the US Navy's Marine Mammal Program, which has engaged in the documented use of bottlenose dolphins, Beluga whales, and sea lions for purposes of surveillance and which is reported to have used dolphins for "swimmer nullification" missions, see Casey ([66], loc. 733–36).

counter-argument against humans' declarations that they are "a special-case animal", and that part of what makes them special is that they "ask the very question, Am I human or animal?" ([10], loc. 2437):

So I ask them in turn, can you use echolocation to know exactly what curves the ocean floor makes in every conceivable direction? Can you stun the creature you would like to eat using sound alone? Can you scan the bodies of your extended family and immediately tell who is pregnant, who is sick, who is injured, who ate what for lunch? The tingling many humans report feeling during an encounter with us isn't endorphins, it's because we've just scanned you to know you in all dimensions. We see through you, literally. Special case indeed. Perhaps you should be asking yourself different questions. Why do you sometimes treat other people as humans and sometimes as animals? And why do you sometimes treat creatures as animals and sometimes as humans? ([10], loc. 2437–44)¹⁶

In keeping with issues raised by the dolphin's closing questions, Dovey's text as a whole suggests how animal autobiography can be used to create oscillating human–animal alignments via (different sorts of) acts of speaking-for. Some life stories told by nonhumans can be read as co-authored acts of narrating in behalf of equally hybrid (or humanimal) principals; these experiments with narration beyond the human afford solidarity-building projections of other creatures' ways of being-in-the-world—projections that enable a reassessment, in turn, of forms of human being. But other animal autobiographies, or at least segments of them, correlate with acts of telling for which humans themselves remain the principals as well as authors, with their animal animators relegated to the role of commenting on human institutions, values, practices, and artifacts. Insofar as it uses this second, more human-centric strand of animal-autobiographical discourse, the form of Dovey's text mirrors one of its key themes: namely, the way anthropocentric ontologies deny proper selfhood to nonhuman beings, configuring them as so much collateral damage when they are killed or harmed as a result of human doings. Yet the other way of engaging in acts of speaking-for across species lines, closer to chipping in than butting in, manifests itself when the elephant narrator describes her herd's response to discovering the dead body of the group's matriarch, with the group in their grief "moving backwards towards her body and gently touching her with our hind legs, then moving away to circle and hover around her, then forward to touch her again...keening and throwing sand over the body, then covering her with branches" ([10], loc. 2087). This same strand of discourse comes into view when the dolphin narrator reports how her species' echolocation abilities surpass those afforded by human-built radar systems ([10], loc. 2704). In such moments, Dovey's ventriloquizing acts both reflect and help constitute an alternative ontology; this other way of configuring creaturely life allocates to a whole range of animals possibilities for selfhood that more restrictive ontologies limit to humans—or even to only a subset of the larger human population.

5. Conclusion: Toward a Narratology beyond the Human

Exemplifying different kinds of transhuman speaking-for, the case studies I have discussed here invite inquiry into the limits as well as the possibilities of animal autobiography, and into how this narrative mode bears on author-principal relationships both across and within the species boundary. What is more, the complexity and variety of my example texts underscore the advantages of pursuing an integrative, cross-disciplinary framework for investigating self-narratives attributed to nonhuman tellers. Using a research framework that combines ideas from language theory and discourse analysis with work in autobiography studies, the present article has sought to outline new ways of studying the structure and functions of such self-narratives, arguing that these accounts at once reveal and help shape broader assumptions concerning the qualities and abilities of animals—and hence of humans as well.

¹⁶ For more on dolphins' sophisticated echolocation skills, see Casey ([66], loc. 729–34), and Moore [68].

In turn, this approach to animal autobiography forms part of the larger project of developing a narratology beyond the human (Herman [4,69]). The overall aim of that project is to consider how ideas proposed by scholars of narrative bear on questions about the nature and scope of human–animal relationships in the larger biosphere, and vice versa. As I hope the present analysis has already begun to suggest, study of fictional as well as nonfictional narratives that include but extend beyond the realm of the human can open up productive routes of exchange among the arts, sciences, and humanities, even as approaching these narratives from a cross-disciplinary perspective can foster new ways of imagining and responding to trans-species entanglements in wider biotic communities. Because so many encounters with animals are mediated through narratively organized discourse, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive model of what storytelling practices, in domains ranging from conservationist discourse and instructional literature to avant-garde fiction and life writing, reveal about (human attitudes toward) the nonhuman world and its inhabitants. A model that integrates structural and contextual analysis, one combining the technical methods of narratology and related fields with research on cultural understandings of animals and human–animal interactions, can achieve such comprehensiveness, allowing for a step change in this area of inquiry.

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