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## Grounded Theory and Serendipity. Natural History of a Research

### **Abstract**

The paper deals with the issue of “serendipity” (which constitutes the context of discovery) in field research and the analysis of data by using the grounded theory methodology. The thesis of the paper is: the methodology of grounded theory is naturally associated with serendipity. We describe two aspects of serendipity in grounded theory: 1. substantive, and 2. theoretical. We present in the paper serendipity phenomenon by using the case of research on the “social world of pet owners”. We show how the research is developed by a sequence of decisions being made by researchers. The process of emergence of the main analytical category, subcategories and the whole theoretical construction during the long time of the field research and theoretical group analysis is presented, as well as the procedure of coming to unanticipated theoretical conclusions. It was all possible because of the interactional character of serendipity happening during the research in grounded theory style of investigation.

### **Keywords**

Grounded theory; Serendipity; Qualitative sociology; Field research; Natural history of research; Sociology of interaction; Social world; Human-animals – non-human animals interactions; Anthropomorphization of animals

We want to present a research on human and animals interaction as a case study showing the serendipity issue in field research in which methodology of grounded theory has been used. The research is presented step by step to make us know how the conclusions were achieved and how serendipity was created by the open procedures of grounded theory. At the end of the paper we discuss the conditions of the findings caused by serendipity comparing to the concept of serendipity by Merton (Merton 1968; Merton, Barber 2004) and Fine and Deegan (Fine, Deegan 1996)

In the methodology of grounded theory one assumes that at the beginning of research one ought to avoid detailed conceptualization. The research concept (its main categories and/or hypotheses and the whole theoretical construct consisting of combined hypotheses and their descriptions) should emerge in the process of empirical research and permanent analyses accompanying it. The social reality described and explained gradually comes into the view of an analyst and a researcher. It is difficult to start research without preconceptualization, though. It is

common knowledge that every action has its beginning and in the case of every research project we should know what we are to observe<sup>i</sup> and/or investigate. The primary decision concerns the object of observation and/or the phenomenon and not the assumption of certain concepts pertaining to specific phenomena and hypotheses concerning their occurrence. The category describing the phenomenon of “serendipity” that constitute the context of discovery (Konecki 2000: 27, 101 – 102 and others, see also Fine, Deegan 1996; Merton, Barber 2004; Glaser 2004:7; Reichenbach 1938: 5-7, 231) is crucial here. The aforementioned social scientists write about the issue of serendipity and their orientations to the problem will be discussed in the paper. Merton’s structuralist approach situating serendipity in structural conditions of science, and Fine’s ethnographic approaches situating serendipity in conditions of everyday life (time, space and people) are quite different from each other. However grounded theory is different from both aforementioned approaches and gives new insight to the problem of serendipity in social science research. It is basically very open methodically and interactionally situated (in research practices and coding of data too) therefore it allows for serendipitous findings.

Serendipity we understand, at this moment, as an event that is an accidental discovery of something, especially when somebody looks for something else entirely (see Hannan 2006; Roberts 1989; Van Andel 1994).

Grounded theory postulating limitation of preconceptualization of research and of assumptions pertaining to the course of investigated phenomena, the methodology of grounded theory allows one to unveil their new dimensions and conditions. Frequently it enables one to reach new conceptualization of phenomena (not analyzed or investigated yet), which emerge in the course of investigation of the phenomena we have chosen to scrutinize. In both a substantive and theoretical sense we can find something we had not been searching for at the beginning of our research (*serendipity*). We deal here with the ability of seeing things difficult to perceive, the unveiling of which (in a theoretical sense) is the strength of scientific observation. The ability of finding valuable things one did not seek concerns, in our case, potential possibilities given by the methodology of grounded theory to researchers and theoreticians using it. The phenomenon of researcher’s surprise and amazement at some point of research and analysis is, most frequently, an indicator of the discovery of new phenomena and, as a consequence, social reality is uncovered in the shape of categories, hypotheses, collections of hypotheses and eventually new theoretical constructs built upon those hypotheses. Unplanned discovery and the role of coincidence in discovery do not mean, however, that one can assume the analytical strategy in which ‘everything is acceptable and possible. Application of certain analytical procedures is inevitable here, for instance the procedure of theoretical saturation of categories, method of constant comparison, theoretical sampling, open coding, axial coding, drawing situational maps being the preparation for the theoretical constructions of integrative diagrams (see Glaser, Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss 1987; Strauss, Corbin 1990; 1997; Konecki 2000; Clarke 2004; Glaser 2004; Charmaz 2006).

## **Natural history of the research**

In the below section of the paper, which is rather a methodological note, we describe the course of research and analysis of data on the topic of the “social world of pet owners” which have been continuing for about four years, just as they have

been developing in the course of time. The section is about how discoveries are made? How it sometimes happens in haphazard and coincidental fashion during the research process, that is conducted according to very open methodical procedures of grounded theory. As a matter of fact it is a presentation of the researcher's sequence of decisions concerning what to observe and analyze in the process of research development. The topic of research (the "social world of pet owners"), was formulated much later than the beginning of research and analysis. At the beginning nothing indicated that the subject of observation would be pet owners and their entanglement in interactions with other subjects (the social world), also institutional, and that the main object of the analysis would be the basic action of this social world i.e taking care of animals and many other actions accompanying and aiding this care, actions defining the boundaries of social world and its legitimization and public debates.

The research began during classes with students, ("Qualitative Methods", Sociology, year 3, Lodz University, Poland). Because the aim of those classes was to teach students the use of particular qualitative research techniques and methods of qualitative analysis of data, I was seeking an object of research which would be easily accessible to all participants of my classes. At some point it came to my mind that such easily accessible *objects of observation would be pets and their owners*, as more than fifty percent of Poles own pets and almost everyone has some contact with them.<sup>ii</sup> Students accepted my proposal (some of them enthusiastically, some with reserve) and thus the preliminary choice of an object of research was made, in order to practice applying research and analytical techniques.

Having acquainted themselves with appropriate readings concerning techniques of qualitative research and after discussion and practice during classes, the students began field research. At first, they were given a very general assignment of observing the behavior of pets in their own households. From the first records and reports it turned out that interactions with human members of a household were deciding for animal behavior. One must remember that data analysis was being made during group discussions in which students together with lecturer inspired each other and generated new categories and hypotheses. *The categories of "interactions of pet owners and their pets" and "communication of pet owners with their pets" were generated during group work. The interaction of researchers is a good tool to generate the conceptual ideas.* If we deal with the process of communication between animals and humans, I thought then, we ought to take a closer look at this phenomena and analyze who communicates with whom, in what way and what this communication concerns. After a few observations it turned out that the communication with animals was of a "family character" and that animals are treated similarly to other members of a family. This was indicated by certain actions of pet owners which were identical to their actions towards other family members.

If it is true that animals are treated as family members, and we had doubts about that, when does it happen? Under what circumstances? In what interactional contexts does this phenomenon occur? Which conditions are causal and which intervening? Which decide the occurrence of this phenomena? In order to answer those questions we started detailed observation, free and narrative interviews on the topic: How does it happen that animals appear in our households? What happens to them during the process of their growing up and maturation? Gradual analysis of the materials showed that we were dealing with the *phenomenon of socialization of animals to the conditions of family life*. Next, the concept of "forced socialization" was formed, for all educational actions involved a verbally attested interpretation of pet

owners only. Nonetheless, such an interpretation provided conditions for socialization actions, including ascribing identity to an animal, and even its contextual generation and maintenance in various contexts. These were the statements based on observation of actions of individual members of a family owning a pet/pets, mainly caring actions, closely resembling those of parents looking after their children. The role most frequently ascribed to animals was *the role of a child*. Therefore, we investigated the process of animal socialization, the conditions for initiation of this process, further stages of this process and conditions for successful end i.e. full inclusion of an animal in the family life. An integrative theoretical diagram had been created, showing the dynamics of the socialization process, its multidimensional conditions and contexts of actions (see drawing 1 which is a final version, in the process of our research many concepts were missing, for ex. the social world). It seemed then, that the main topic of research was: *the socialization of pets in Polish family* (see picture 1 at the end of the paper).

However, analysis of different phenomena of so called category of “*anthropomorphization of animals*” were developing simultaneously. In the early stages of research a matrix of perceptions of pets had been created. Initially, it comprised two opposing qualities, namely “anthropomorphization” and “animalization”. It turned out that animals are perceived in accordance with two contradictory perspectives. Sometimes they are used alternately by the same person for the same animal and/or to different animals, or for animals owned by different people (see table 1).

Table 1. Matrix of perceptions of pets.

	<b>Typically animal features (“Animality” – Animalistic Perspective)</b>	<b>Typically human features (Anthropomorphic Perspective)</b>
<b>Universal features</b>	Animalistic-universal perspective. “All animals, including <u>pets</u> , behave in a certain, standardized way; it is characteristic of them, for they are merely animals, <u>they have no human features.</u> ”	<u>Universalizing anthropomorphization.</u> “ <u>All animals, including pets, feel, suffer, think similarly to humans.</u> ”
<b>Particular features</b>	Animalistic-particular perspective. “ <u>My (our) pet is exceptional, mainly thanks to contact with me (with us); but it is only an animal, it has no human features.</u> ”	<u>Particular anthropomorphization.</u> “ <u>My (our i.e our family’s) pet is exceptional, mainly thanks to contact with me (with us) it behaves like a human.</u> ” Personification of animals, naming them.

Frequently, owners perceived their own pets from the “particular anthropomorphization” perspective and other people’s pets from the “animalistic-universal” perspective. However, *to view pets from a perspective of ‘particular anthropomorphization’ eventually proved to be a necessary condition for ending the process of the socialization of pets to the conditions of family life*. Two categories were therefore merged in this hypothesis: the “perspective of particular anthropomorphization” and the “socialization of pets”. The hypothesis ought to be further grounded by checking other conditions of occurrence and relations of phenomena described by it, i.e. by carrying out a *comparative analysis*. It was decided that other research methods would be used as well in order to reconstruct various dimensions of anthropomorphization, for instance the dimension of non-verbal communication (research techniques of visual sociology), or the dimension of common knowledge accessible to everyone in the form of public opinion (the

technique of the interview questionnaire, the survey method). A triangulation of methods allowed full application of the method of constant comparison in the analysis of data in order to extract all “layers of data”, saturate categories and ground hypotheses.

*However, at some point, the matrix of perceptions of pets proved to be used in a broader, public and not only private (family and socializing) context.* It turned out that the matrix and perspectives defined by it set certain positions in various kinds of arguments about pets, and even about treating animals in general. The anthropomorphic perspective is being applied towards wild animals as well. For instance, rangers in the Polish Tatra Mountains do not shoot bears approaching people dangerously close but, as one of the rangers anthropomorphizingly stated, they “undertake educational actions in order to scare the bears away”.

The “Matrix of perception” is based on the language of descriptions of the world, and the language provides categories of interpretation of this word. The language builds a certain perspective of viewing the world. This statement, as well as observations of usage of the matrix in various social contexts provided us with an impulse *to use the concept of the “social world” here.*

Let us present this concept, in short, in order to show its utility in the context of our research. The social world includes groups participating in certain kinds of *activities*, sharing resources of many kinds in order to reach their aims and creating common ideologies relating to their activities (Strauss 1993: 212; see also Clarke 1991; Kacperczyk 2004). Social worlds are not distinctly isolated entities or ‘social structures’. They are a distinctive form of collective action (Strauss 1993: 223). The boundaries and membership of the social world are not clearly defined as in the case of some social groups, for ex. professional group or a family. One can leave a social world or join it at any time. Individuals may, obviously, live in many different social worlds for, in the modern world; they may participate in many channels of communication. Therefore, they may act simultaneously in the academic world, the world of business, fashion, medicine, the theatre, pet owners, the world of environmental protection and even in more loosely knit worlds of special interest, for ex. in the world of sport, stamp collectors or fans of a certain soap opera. Every social world is therefore a cultural area, which is established neither by its territory nor by formal group participation but by the *boundaries of effective communication*. This system of communication also creates a characteristic language, or jargon. Here is the sample of words and expressions concerning the world we investigated: “an animal is not a thing”, “speciesism”, animal liberation, “dog-lovers”, “cat-lovers”, “animal emergency service”, “mass murder of animals”, sentimental anthropomorphization, breeding nickname, etc. This language also contains many emotive and diminutive forms expressing particular meanings and attitudes of owners towards particular animals: kitty, kitty-kitty, kitten, pussy, pussy-cat or doggy, puppy, pup etc. (see Dlugosz – Kurczabowa 2003: 242, 398). It is a certain universe of discourse that shows what distinguishes a given world from other worlds and which creates a symbolic barrier and the boundary of a social world. This language is also full of moral meanings, i.e. some “interpretative orientations” and frequently full of what we call “neutralization techniques” (Lowe 2002: 107; Sykes, Matza 1979). In every social world there exist certain norms, values, hierarchies of prestige, characteristic ways of carrier and common outlooks upon life - *Weltanschauung* (Strauss 1993: 269 -273).

The social world, especially the one recently created, has to justify its existence. *Legitimization* is one of the features of the social world and it is related to: the

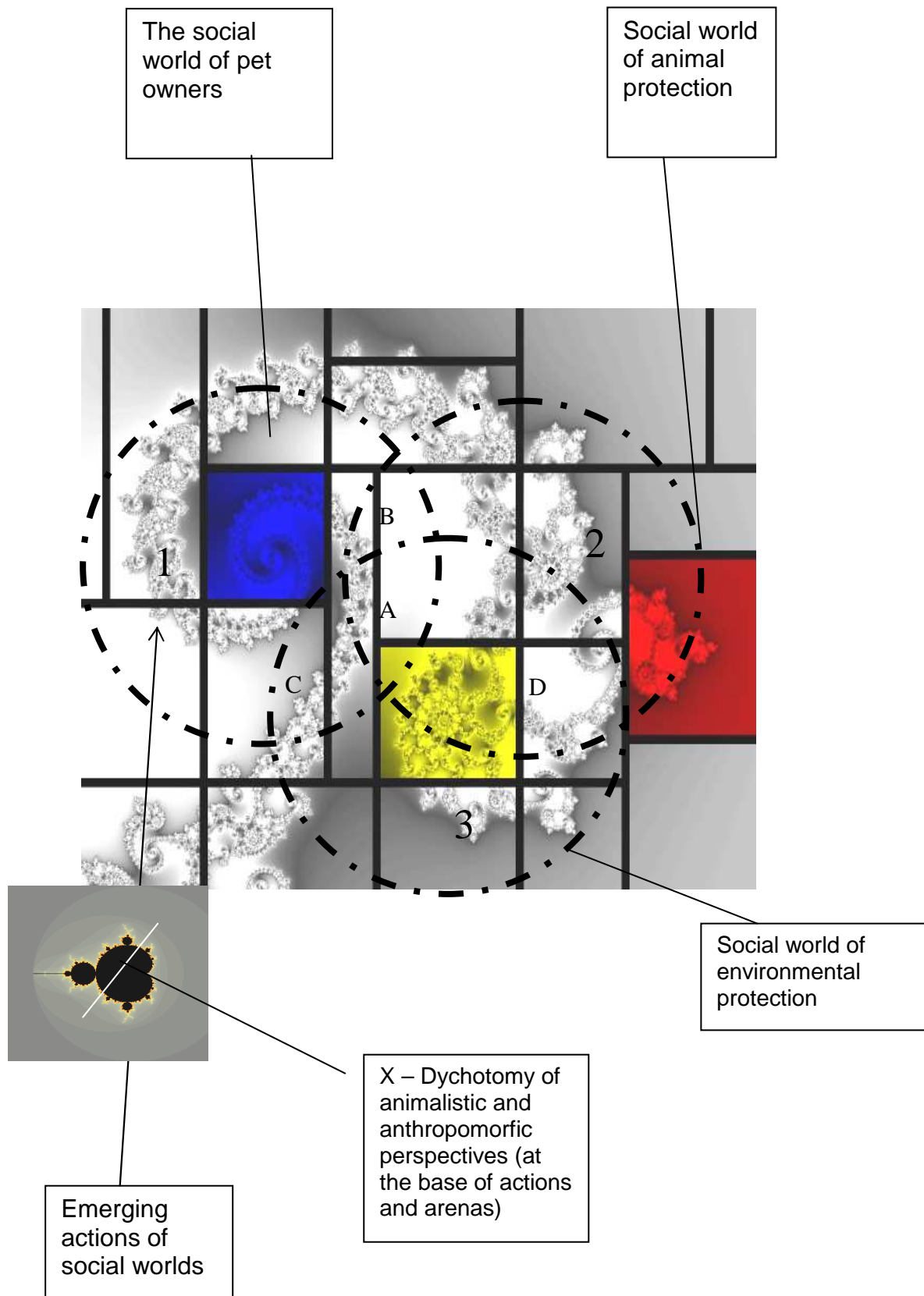
demand for society's attribution of value to a given social world or its part, distancing from other worlds or their parts, building certain theories to emphasize authenticity of a social world, setting standards of actions and their evaluation, defining boundaries of the social world or changing them (Strauss 1993: 217; see also Strauss 1982).

The social world provides individuals participating in it with a certain cognitive perspective by means of which they define situations. This perspective is an ordered way of perceiving the world which comprises features of various objects, events, or human nature taken for granted. It is a matrix by means of which individuals perceive the world (Shibutani 1994: 269). This scheme provides individuals with a moral and cultural basis for their actions in a given social world as well as in society. Judgments of events or actions of other people derive from these very perspectives just as selectivity of perception is conditioned by the perspective of a social world. The Animal Protection Society's activity will be perceived differently by a professional ethicist or theologian than it would be perceived by a member of this organization.

In every social world there are some divisive issues. They are discussed, negotiated, fought against, forced and manipulated by representatives of emerging sub-worlds (Strauss 1978: 124). The common ground of this discussion is called an "arena". An arena is of a political character, not necessarily referring to actions of strictly political institutions. Not all arenas are made public and we do not always get to know about their inner arguments through the mass media. Arenas exist inside organizations, inside sub-worlds and on the borders of different social worlds and sub-worlds. Some discussions concern issues of boundaries and problems with the legitimization of worlds. Struggles for prominence, influence, power and resources are also common (Strauss 1982:189; see also Clarke 1991; Kacperczyk 2004).

In the social world of pet owners there are also some divisive issues and an arena. The matrix of perceptions of pets is used in those arguments and it generally refers to issues in which the dichotomy "anthropomorphization-animalization" positions the debates. However, on the border of this world (and beyond it) there are similar disputes over the same issues. Those discussions take place in the media, parliament, city councils, between various organizations aiding animals, local governments, etc. (see picture 2 at the end of the paper). The social world of pet owners is covered with a certain "coat", which provides categories of world description, arguments for legitimization of particular views and, at the same time, sub-worlds and other social worlds. This coat is a "social world of animal protection" and "social world of environmental protection". Although there are some ideological and jurisdiction disputes between them, all the above-mentioned social worlds cross each other's paths, for their actions have common elements (among others it is animal protection).

Picture 3. Overlapping of social worlds





Those disputes concern the above-mentioned dichotomy of animalism-anthropomorphism, the matrix of perception of animals as well as the main perspective of this matrix in the social world of pet owners, i.e. particular anthropomorphization (see table 1). It especially concerns the phenomenon of legitimization and one of its forms, i.e. “theorizing”. Theorizing allows groups to define the boundaries of the social world in a socially accepted way. Scientific arguments are used here, for ex. ethological, psychological, zoological or ethical. Frequently, some scientists become theoreticians – authorities of particular social worlds.

It was decided that we should see what the problem of dynamics of relations between the perspectives of anthropomorphism and animalism looks like in the works of Konrad Lorenz - an outstanding expert in the fields of zoological science and ethology. He was a pet owner himself and he wrote a very popular diary entitled *Man meets dog* (2002). He was a one of its main figures and an authority legitimizing this *theoretician of the social world of pet owners*, world. His profession as well as his scientific views described in his books and scientific analyses should predetermine him to perceive animals from an animalistic perspective. However, after thorough analysis of the diary, it turned out that K. Lorenz in his frequent interactions with pets (not only dogs) perceived them from an anthropomorphic perspective, especially from the perspective of “particular anthropomorphization”. A peculiar struggle is visible in his diary, between the animalistic perspective, characteristic of the biological sciences, and the anthropomorphic perspective, characteristic of pet owners, especially in private and family contexts. A discourse, an inner conversation as G.H Mead would see it, takes place in this diary. A conversation in which the “I” of a scientist struggles against the “Me” of an ordinary man interacting with pets. *It is an arena at, somehow, an individual level*. An argument typical of the social world of pet owners takes place in the individual’s mind. Two opposing perspectives are engaged, reflecting two aspects of personality: that of an expert and that of a pet owner. And this is what turns out to be a *discovery*, namely that the concept of arena pertains to an individual’s inner life, that the arena (debates over certain issues) are not only public arguments of groups, experts and mass media, but also arguments at a level of mind and individual justification (legitimization) of one’s choices and decisions. Specific perception of animals is closely connected with specific treatment of them, which may frequently be connected with moral choices.

Therefore, the concept of the social world became, at some point, the main category of our research and analyses. It is an umbrella category, integrating but also dynamic, allowing us to grasp many aspects of the perpetually fluctuating reality of interactions between animals and humans (see picture 3). At this point, this category merged the following subcategories (most significant in our research) and their qualities: the matrix of perceptions of pets, “particular anthropomorphization” “forced socialization of pets”, communication between pets and humans, the bond between pets and humans.<sup>iii</sup>

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Eventually it was decided that a methodological triangulation would be done by means of an opinion poll with a research questionnaire, in order to see how common (in a quantitative sense) is the practice of anthropomorphization of animals and with the aid of what means (of which owners are conscious) it is achieved, whether we really have to do with the practices of socialization of animals (educational practices) and eventually whether variables of social class influence the treatment and



perception of animals. The research was carried out in the Lodz area between December 2002 and March 2003 on a sample of 457 people. The questions had been formulated after two years of intense, qualitative field research and they were based on categories generated during it. After carrying out research, it turned out that the perspective of particular anthropomorphization is indeed the most frequent one, almost regardless of social class variables. Communication in the social world is mainly direct, between different owners. It has been proved, that socialization practices are used to introduce an animal to everyday family life. The results of quantitative research have shown that participation in the social world of pet owners is not connected with participation in any formal organizations or in the world of mass communication. One participates in the social world of pet owners by directly taking care of an animal, by introducing it to family life and treating it like a child rather than by social work outside one's home. It is compatible with Polish values and mode of life.

The relation between the age of people questioned and their answers was minimal. City dwellers perceive animals according to anthropomorphic categories (they talk and give presents to them) more often than pet owners living in the country, who more commonly use animalistic perspective. However, the difference is slight. Another variable, slightly influencing the difference in answers was 'participation in religious practices'. Frequent participation in religious practices generally weakens the tendency to anthropomorphize animals (one rarely ascribes emotions or gives presents to them) and diminishes the owner's ties to his/her own animal. The variable of education of respondents and their parents turned out to have a small (although significant) influence on differentiation of opinions and behavior, for, the majority of our respondents had secondary education. Based on the present results one can say that the higher the education of respondents, the lower their tendency towards anthropomorphizing animals (feeling emotions). However, not in all aspects. Similarly, education negatively influences opinion on the possibility of creating bonds between a human and an animal, and on the strength of this bond. It can be partly explained by the lower tendency towards owning animals in respondents having higher education and, as a consequence, lack of experience in communication with animals as well as by the influence of their respondents' parents. The higher the parents' education, the lower their children's tendency towards anthropomorphizing pets.

Such were the results of a quantitative research project, which broadened our knowledge about the social world of pet owners, providing us with a quantitative context of certain behavior and opinions and grounding certain hypotheses.

It was ascertained that the bond between family members and pets is formed at owners' homes in "family environment". It was ascertained on the basis of interviews, participant observation and quantitative research. But the question arose: How is this bond exactly formed? How is it constructed on an interactional level? Much data had already been collected on this topic from interviews, but these were usually merely accounts of interactions and were, thus, superficial, imprecise and pertaining mostly to the conscious dimension of interactions and opinions about those interactions. Information was also gathered about the importance of spatial closeness in forming bonds with animals, about touching animals, sleeping with animals in one bed, kissing animals, etc. Comparative groups were also used in order to check the importance of spatial closeness in forming bonds (the situation of a pet owner living in the country was compared to that of an owner living in the city). Although empirical data concerning direct physical contact (by what non-verbal means it is constructed) was missing, accidental observation of everyday life allowed the researchers to intuit.

It was presumed that many aspects of interactions are unconscious, for ex. involuntary, unreflective yet meaningful gestures. Therefore, the researcher decided to use a technique of visual sociology i.e. photography in order to scrutinize this problem. For him, it meant a triangulation of data and a triangulation of a method of research (Konecki 2000: 85-86).

Some of the owners were asked, then, to provide the (already made previously) pictures of their pets in various situations. Moreover, they were asked to write (on at least one page) answers to two questions: 1. Why do I take pictures of pets?, 2. What do I do with those pictures after taking them? Then, a formal analysis of the photographs was carried out in order to find what behavioral, material and social means were used in the presentation of pets in photographs intended for private use. It turned out that these photographs present the relations between owners, their families and animals in the frame of particular anthropomorphization. This frame is built with the aid of behavioral means (non-verbal communication) such as embracing, glancing, gazing at each other, kissing, staying in owners' private space, etc. An animal adopts the position and the role of a child. It is being spoilt as a child, it has access to its owner's private places such as bed, kitchen, desk, book collection, etc. In the pictures animals are frequently held in an embrace and cuddled in accordance with the same behavioral pattern that is used towards children. Formal analysis of photographs allowed us to reach the non-verbal dimension on which *the bond with an animal* is formed. This, in turn, drew our attention to the *corporal dimension* in forming social bonds and self, providing a stimulus for strictly theoretical deliberations on the problem of symbolic interaction and constructing self. However, those theoretical deliberations had always been connected with empirical research and its conclusions. Only after analysis of those, were certain generalizations made.

Answers to two questions about taking pictures of animals confirmed our supposition on the existence of a frame of "particular anthropomorphization" in perceptions of pets and their visual representations in photographs. The use of photographs indicated an urge to "stop time" i.e. moments in which a pet looked and behaved in a certain way, its owner being conscious of the fact that it would live shorter than himself. The temporal dimension was the main dimension in which the motives of taking pictures and use of pictures were established (Konecki 2004).

It seems, therefore, that the hypothesis that the anthropomorphization of pets prevails is further grounded. The most crucial assertion here is that *the frame of anthropomorphization is built not only by means of verbal language but also by means of so called "corporality" i.e. relations between "bodies", the most frequently observable result of which is non-verbal communication*. As a consequence, the bond here is formed with the aid of the same non-verbal means. The ultimate assertion of this fact was possible due to the methodological triangulation and data triangulation carried out with the aid of research means applied in visual sociology.

The above-mentioned conclusions and hypotheses ought to be merged with our main category, namely the "social world of pet owners" (it is a part of theoretical coding and the point is to build and merge hypotheses). It turns out that the interactional level of conditions for creating this particular social world pertains also (or, perhaps, above all) to non verbal communication and corporality, which in this case is vital to establishing relations between pets and their owners. If the frame of particular anthropomorphization, interactions and bonds between animals and their owners is built with the aid of non-verbal communication then we put forward a hypothesis that *the creation of a social world of pet owners also takes place by means of non-verbal communication and body movement*. The main activity i.e.

animal protection is surrounded by accompanying activities for ex. play, excursions, strolls, living and eating together, sharing one bed, visiting a vet, participation in pet shows, etc. Accompanying activities are full of non-verbal communication (gazing, glancing at something. in order to show the direction and kind of undertaken activities, stroking to give approval, combing as an expression of care, slaps as an expression of disapproval, etc.) for in order to do them, one needs to communicate with an animal in some way. The core of this world i.e. the owners' protective activities and a close relationship with their pets would not be able to exist without non-verbal communication and taking the role of other by body movement observation and body feeling; *thus the existence of the already described social world would be impossible. We consider this conclusion one of the most crucial ones we arrived at in the course of research.*<sup>iv</sup>

Is it some sort of a scientific discovery? The author of the above-mentioned hypotheses is not absolutely positive about that. Still, he is convinced that for the construction and maintenance of some social worlds, the non-verbal dimension as well as corporality is inevitable. It is a discovery of theoretical character. One thing is certain in this natural history of research presented, namely that at the beginning of the analysis of empirical data, the author did not predict the point of theoretical deliberations he has reached now. Analysis of the role of non-verbal communication and corporality in the creation of a social world was certainly not what he aimed at.

## Conclusions

What has been surely confirmed in the description of the above-mentioned research is the potential of a context of discovery (serendipity) undoubtedly embedded in the methodology of grounded theory. Serendipity is not really a godsend or an inborn talent. It is a skill we may learn by applying certain research techniques and procedures of analysis. This 'skill' is applicable only in action and is of procedural character. The process of making a discovery takes a certain amount of time during which one has to make various decisions and perform a multitude of actions. The discovery itself may be a one time act, but what precedes it is a process of laborious research carried out in accordance with a certain methodology. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon we describe is a process. Thus we may call it at the end a "context of discovering".

## Discussion

Context of discovery is an immanent quality of the methodology of grounded theory and often it is constituted by serendipitous findings. It does not mean that if one uses other methodologies it is not possible in social sciences. *In ethnographic research*, for instance, the potential for discovering new phenomena and hypotheses is also large, although it leads to different results than the methodology of grounded theory. In ethnography, the context of discovery is rather to lead to a deeper and better understanding of phenomena, of which people are usually conscious. Those discoveries are usually of substantive character. In ethnographic research we sometimes observe unpredictable interactional episodes, events which can define the basic way of understanding a given substantive area.

An ethnographic report, then, is a kind of story (one of many stories) supporting conclusions of a research. This story is supposed to lead to a better understanding of a given substantive area and to allow one to see how a researcher concluded on the

basis of the empirical data he had collected (Fine, Deegan 1996). A creative approach to mistakes he makes during a field research is crucial here.

Fine and Deegan differentiate among three kinds of contexts of discovering (in their text called serendipity) in ethnography:

1. temporal serendipity – ability to find new sources of data i.e being in the right place at the right time in order to observe some events, crucial for further observation and analysis. Some of those events become points focusing the attention of a reader of a research report;
2. serendipity relations – finding proper informants (also experts and informants from a given observed area) and being in good relations with them is extremely important for making discoveries. These relations are often established accidentally. They themselves may be worthy of analysis, as a kind of empirical data;
3. analytical serendipity – it is connected with merging qualitative data with already existing theories or forming proposals to modify them. Then a researcher may discover some basic metaphor or narrative strategy, which allows him to conceptualize a problem.

The context of discovery in ethnographic research includes planned insight into the examined area, which is, at the same time, connected with unplanned, accidental occurrences (Fine, Deegan 1996).

Robert Merton asserts that “under certain conditions, a research finding gives rise to social theory” (Merton 1968: 157). He thinks that by means of scrutinizing empirical data, as well as by accident, one can discover new hypotheses, even the ones which we had not assumed. This situation pertains to a research experiment, in which we observe a fact which is:

- **unanticipated** – empirical research aimed at checking one hypothesis creates an accidental by-product - an unexpected observation connected with theories which had not been taken into consideration at the beginning of research (Merton, 1982: 171);
- anomalous, i.e. not matching the already existing theories and/or established facts;
- **strategic for research** – has to be crucial, in some way, for the existing theory (Merton *ibidem*: 158 – 162, see also Merton, Barber 2004).

Merton presents an example of his research on the social organization of a suburban workmen’s housing estate. It was noticed that a large number of occupants belonged to different organizations and social associations. It pertained to parents as well as small children and infants. This discovery stood in contrast with common knowledge. Moreover, the questioned parents claimed that in the estate there were lots of adolescents who could be hired as babysitters. The researchers had checked this information and it turned out that in reality only a small number of adolescents resided in the estate (3,7 % aged 15-19). The researchers were trying to explain this discrepancy between perception of reality and reality itself (facts) by existing theories, ex. Marxist theory, which says that living conditions determine consciousness, Durkheim’s theory of “collective images” as the one not necessarily reflecting reality and Sheriff’s thesis saying that social factors create the framework of selective perception. Eventually the concept of the social unity of a group was used and it turned out that certain perception was a function of confidence people placed in each other when they took hiring a babysitter into consideration (this trust was significant among people living in there). It was a function of a social unity of a group (*ibidem*: 160-162).

It is clearly visible in Merton's concept, that serendipity, the way he sees it, is merely a by-product of the main aim of his research. In empirical research we verify the already formulated hypotheses. Moreover, referring the unexpected observation of some facts to the already existing theories is very important for Merton. The point here is to use the already existing theories which could explain a given surprising phenomenon or to broaden the already existing theory rather than to discover new theories. In a theoretical sense, nothing new has been discovered here. A certain, unexpected theory has been explained at the most. As regards the surroundings in which discoveries of surprising character are made, according to Merton they are institutionalized (*institutionalized serendipity*), i.e. the researchers have contact with each other and inspire each other. Thus we may say that there is a certain '*serendipity pattern*'. According to Merton an 'accident' playing a part in a discovery and the ability to notice this accident's significance have their roots in a social structure rather than in what is commonly considered to be an accident or a stroke of luck (Merton, Barber 2004; see also Merton 1968a: 4,7).

*In the methodology of grounded theory* the situation is quite different. Two aspects immanent in this methodology, namely 1. *substantive serendipity*, and 2. *theoretical serendipity* indicate it. The first one is of substantive character, which means that as in ethnography, the empirical field research provides observations of accidents, happenings and incidents about which the researcher did not know before and which may become crucial for further analyses and theoretical constructions. The second aspect (*theoretical serendipity*) pertains to the unexpected possibilities of inventing and merging categories and creating new hypotheses and theoretical constructions. Obviously those two kinds of contexts of discovery are frequently connected with each other, for what is being discovered theoretically is very often (not always, though) what has already been discovered in a substantive sense. We have to remember that the "newness" here pertains mainly to the theoretical serendipity, for usually we know about the existence of certain phenomena on account of substantive observations made before. However, only a theoretical analysis allowed us to appreciate those observations, to become surprised and, as a result, to make a theoretical discovery. We make a theoretical analysis on the basis of empirical data. In the course of research and the analysis accompanying it, we try not to include the already existing theories as Merton or ethnographers would do. It might lead to forcing the direction of analysis by the concepts which are not connected with the researched field and which are not derived from empirical data generated in it. When we use the already existing theories (i.e. theories formulated in other research contexts or in a deductive way) to analyze empirical data, we may very easily distort the context of categories and hypotheses we generate *in situ*. It does not mean that the already existing theories are unimportant to the process of analysis. On the contrary, they are vital for it. However, the categories taken from the already existing theories should fit the data we have gathered and explain the phenomena analyzed by us. Usually, it is only at the end of research and theoretical analyses that we fully refer to other theories in order to see how they relate to our main hypothetical construction and to make a final revision or confirmation of our theoretical conclusions.

The surroundings in which the context of discovering takes place do not necessarily have to be of institutional character, as R. Merton claimed. Moreover, it is very difficult to find a uniform serendipity pattern here. If we find the pattern it will be the *context of justification*, not *context of discovery* (Reichenbach 1938: 5 – 7). The context of justification is to show the way of achieving the theorem according to strict

scientific rules, however it does not show factual actions/interactions in the real and complicated situation of discovery. Frequently, it takes place in a social world in which a researcher participates (for ex. social world of photography, art, sociology, ethnography or on the border of those worlds, etc.) or which he currently analyzes. Actions which take place in a certain social world (worlds) may become an inspiration for his discoveries. Contacts and interactions with other participants of this world (worlds) cause the phenomenon of facilitation, mutual inspiration, adding knowledge, perceiving of one's knowledge from different perspectives and eventually making a scientific discovery.

Interaction with data is very dynamic because of coding procedures. The open coding of data could be done in every moment when the researcher decides. The open coding could be very inspirational concerning inventing new categories and putting new questions and new theoretical sampling. Interacting all the time with data during the course of research gives the possibility to find something new, it is not like in the thoroughly planned and conceptualized research.

Moreover, research and analyses by means of methodology of grounded theory are usually of group character, i.e. many researchers analyze the previously gathered empirical data together, coding the data, exchanging theoretical and methodological notes, discussing them, often arguing, etc. Group dynamics is a natural context for analysts' work. It seems that the "context of discovery" is produced more in an interactional dimension than in an institutional one. That is why we think that the term which would describe the above-mentioned phenomenon (pertaining to the so-called surroundings in which a discovery takes place) in a more appropriate way, should be the category of "interactional serendipity", which, after we have taken the temporal (procedural) dimension of research and analysis into consideration, is the "*interactional context of discovering*".

## Endnotes

- i In this paper every action aimed at describing the examined phenomenon is called observation. Therefore, various research techniques may be used in order to observe, for ex. free interview, narrative interview, group interview, participant observation, etc.
- ii The loose subject of a research and analysis is a common practice in grounded theory approach at the beginning of a research (see McCallin 2004: 26; Nathaniel 2004: 43).
- iii Similar decision happen often in grounded theory approach to analyze empirical data: "The core variable is identified when it emerged as the one to which all others related." (Nathaniel *ibidem*: 45).
- iv One ought to assert that the hypothesis about creation of some social worlds by means of non-verbal communication raises a question: in what other social worlds is non-verbal communication so important for their construction and maintenance? In what social worlds is basic activity full of non-verbal communication, which constitutes its essence? These are the questions which may give rise to further research and creating formal theory.

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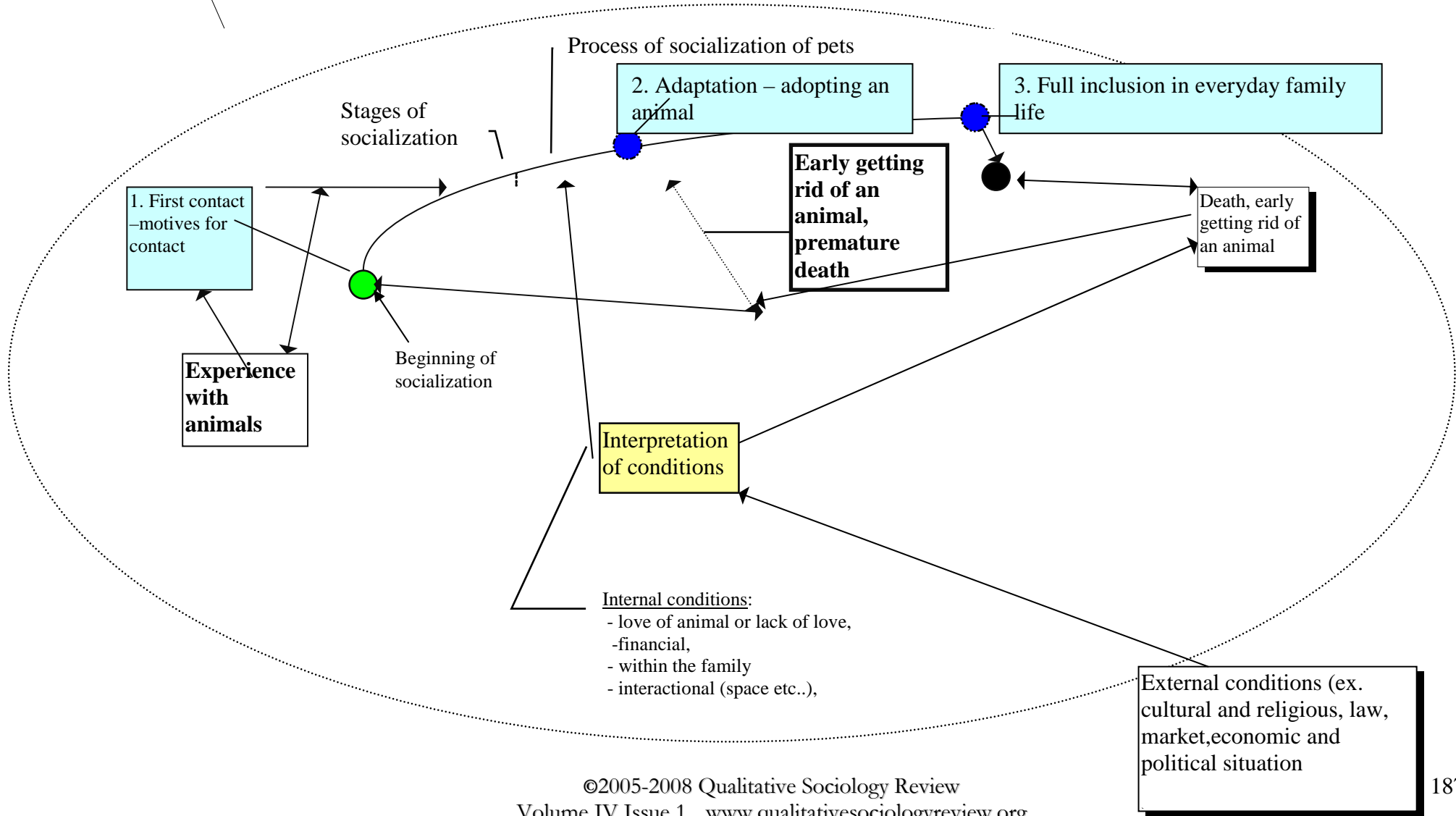
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**Picture 1.**  
**Socialization of animals - integrative diagram**

Social world, anthropomorphic/animalistic perspective; Verbal and non-verbal language--> **Family** <--- Patterns of communication, structures family structure



Picture 2. **The Social World of Animal Protection – relations and arguments- (Arena -  $\alpha$ ).**  
 Legitimization SW (passing law, opinion polls- CBOS, introduction of the new language of perception of animals, education).

