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## ‘Beasts of Burden’: Productive Tensions between Haraway and Radical Animal Rights Activism

Eva Giraud

**Abstract** *Coming from a critical animal studies perspective, this essay develops an urgent challenge to what Zipporah Weisberg describes as the ‘largely depoliticized approach within animal studies’ (2009: 5), with a focus on the work of Donna Haraway. Drawing on grassroots activist literature and practice, the essay analyses some productive tensions between animal rights perspectives and the work of Haraway, which centre on their different strategies for challenging the symbolic and material role of animals within biocapitalism. This approach reinstates the value of activist praxis to animal studies, arguing that it has the capacity to unsettle the positioning of animals as biocapital more successfully than Haraway’s own ethical project. Due to being at the heart of debates between Haraway and theorists from within critical animal studies, vegan activism illustrates an animal rights practice that can work to undermine the structures that render animals ‘legitimately’ exploitable: despite Haraway’s arguments to the contrary. The work of activists involved in the Hori-zone, a temporary eco-village established as a protest camp near the 2005 G8 summit at Gleneagles, is used to explore how veganism can be used as a micro-sociological tactic to challenge the exploitation that pervades everyday life.*

This essay brings a locally specific UK activist perspective to bear on arguments in Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet* (2008); its title being in homage to the grassroots pamphlet *Beasts of Burden* (2004), which opens this conversation. However, whilst the perspective presented here might derive from a local context, it provides tools to challenge much broader trends within the field of animal studies in which Haraway’s work is highly influential. The purpose of this essay is therefore not to analyse local activism, but derive illustrative examples from it: bringing it into conversation with contemporary theoretical debates about human-animal relations, with the aim of combating the conservative, often anthropocentric, norms and values congealing within animal studies. Since the consumption of animals is a key point of discussion both within Haraway’s work and in debates surrounding her ethics, as well as a focal point for grassroots animal rights movements, vegan activism provides a focus for exploring such consumption. This approach opens

discussions on whether activist praxis provides alternative ways of thinking through human-animal relations, which neither appeal to the rights discourse that Haraway has been critical of throughout the past two decades (Haraway 1992; 1997; 2003; 2008; 2010; 2011), nor betray the covert anthropocentrism that Haraway's work has been accused of containing (Adams 2006; Weisberg 2009; Dell'Aversano 2010; Pedersen 2011).

Distinct from vegetarianism's eschewal of animal flesh, veganism is the abstention from all animal products. However, the two movements cannot be distinguished by a difference in dietary degree alone, as veganism – to cite an early Vegan Society definition – is not limited to diet: it challenges 'all other uses involving exploitation of animal life by man . . . including food, commodities, work, hunting, [and] vivisection' (Cross 1951). Although both have long been practised on a dietary level by certain religions (Preece, 2008: 54–74), the focus here will be on the adaptation of these practices for ethical and political – as opposed to spiritual – motivations. Although they have historical precedents, vegetarianism consolidated as a widespread, secular political movement in Western contexts during the mid-19th century and veganism in the mid-20th century (Kheel 2004a).

Research on vegetarianism as a social movement has emphasised a correlation between the diet and non-traditional values, ranging from animal welfare objections to health reasons (Dietz *et al.* 1995; Fox and Ward 2008). Significantly, Samantha Kwan and Louise Marie Roth's study on subcultural politics (2011) indicates the potential for the practice to have a more sharply defined political function or as a form of resistance to patriarchal and capitalist social relations: due to rejecting the mechanisms of objectification and exploitation that are perceived as underpinning the system (an argument developed in more depth below). This association with cultural resistance has been identified as particularly relevant to veganism. Because veganism encompasses aspects of an individual's lifestyle well beyond diet, its political value has been asserted in relation to eco-feminism (Kheel 2004b; Adams and Donovan 1995), anti-consumerist subcultural resistance (Portwood-Stacer 2012; Haenfler 2004) and anti-capitalist protest more broadly (as in *Beasts of Burden*).

Although its role in protest is the focus of this essay, and while debates in relation to eco-feminism are too complex to discuss in depth here (see Twine 2010a for a useful overview), it is nonetheless important to touch on Marti Kheel's point that such debates tend to centre precisely on the fear of veganism becoming 'a universal dietary norm'. Her counter-argument is that veganism should not be established as normative but used 'to dislodge the conceptual substructures that support the practice of meat eating' (2004b: 328–29). For Kheel, this potential to de-naturalise animal consumption is valuable in combating the use of 'nature' to legitimise particularly exploitative forms of consumption, such as predation in the wild 'justifying' large-scale industrial farming (2004b: 336). The danger of dissolving the nature/culture boundary – which Haraway moves towards in her critique of rights discourse – is therefore in encouraging this use of 'nature' to legitimise problematic practices. Drawing on these arguments, this essay explores the use of veganism as a form of activist praxis that unsettles the normative position of meat consumption. This approach offers a means of moving beyond Haraway's critique of

animal rights, by presenting vegan activist praxis as a complex and concrete challenge to the naturalisation of contexts in which human and animal exploitation intersect under capitalism.

The process of reading Haraway against activist praxis takes place in several stages: first framing the debate in relation to broader criticisms levelled against Haraway – and animal studies in general – from within critical animal studies emphasises the urgency of addressing the depoliticising trends that theorists such as Steve Best (2009) have identified. This frame provides a platform for exploring some of the productive overlaps that exist between Haraway and activist literature, particularly around the role of animals in what she terms ‘biocapitalism’, or the derivation of surplus value from every aspect of life; a process gaining new conceptual resonance with the emergence of genomics (Twine 2010b) and the commodification of affective aspects of social life itself (Lewis 2010). The (equally productive) tensions that exist between Haraway and activist perspectives is also analysed in relation to a core ethical mantra of *When Species Meet*: ‘thou shalt not make killable’, or the idea that killing per se should not be condemned, instead it is the metaphysical categorisation of animals as ‘killable’ that is problematic (2008: 80). Turning this principle against *When Species Meet* reveals how Haraway’s work perpetuates the categorisation of certain animals as ‘killable’ in a way that secures the structures of biocapital, even as she criticises the excesses of this system. This approach also demonstrates latent anthropocentrism within her work, with her defence of these practices involving labelling any critiques of her case studies as themselves reliant on conceptions of ‘inviolable animal rights’ (2008: 87), which are grounded in anthropocentric notions of what ‘rights’ are (a paradox explained below). To move beyond this reductive debate (which boils down to who is being the most anthropocentric!), the potential of practices Haraway suspects – such as veganism – to unsettle the role of animals within the structures of biocapital is analysed. Drawing on the role of vegan campaigners in the 2005 anti-G8 protests near Gleneagles, Scotland, enables an exploration of whether the critique of biocapital developed by both Haraway and grassroots literature can be enacted in practice without either projecting human(ist) rights onto animals or naturalising asymmetrical human-animal relations.

### **Critical animal studies and Haraway**

Criticisms of Haraway must be situated in relation to concerns articulated within critical animal studies because her work typifies how ‘the profound ethical, social, political and environmental issues of animal exploitation are buried in dense theoretical webs, ... politically-charged issues are depoliticized; and theory is divorced from practice, resistance and struggle’ (Best 2009: 11). According to Steve Best, it is necessary to develop a more critical approach, which draws on activist practice, to reveal the anthropocentrism at work within these theoretical contexts.

In line with this argument, Carol Adams (2006) Zipporah Weisberg (2009) and Carmen Dell’Aversano (2010) critique Haraway’s promise to de-centre the human, and argue that she actually reinforces the structures legitimising exploitation. Although she asks some vital ethical questions about practices

such as meat-consumption, pure-bred animal breeding and laboratory research, Haraway's ultimate sanctioning of these practises legitimises the asymmetrical relations produced by them without fully addressing why – if this asymmetry is directly caused by these contexts – they can still be framed as spaces with promise for realising less anthropocentric relations with animals.

The question for Adams in particular, is why and how are these practices framed as acceptable within an ethics designed to de-centre the human? The answer lies in the way that Haraway challenges human privilege; in *When Species Meet*, her critique of anthropocentrism is tied up with a more focused critique of humanism: arguing that the former 'flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism' (2008: 18). Rights language is framed as problematic because it is predicated on humanist conceptions of what these rights constitute and, as N. Katherine Hayles points out, humanism has been criticised from feminist, post-colonialist and anti-capitalist viewpoints (amongst others) because the humanist subject has been 'historically constructed as a white European male, presuming a universality that has worked to suppress and disenfranchise women's [and other social groups'] voices' (1999: 4). In relation to animal rights, this is a particular problem due to humanism constituting 'a reduction of value and agency to the "human" a curiously centred and bounded category that has elevated itself by contrast to the "animal" and drawn upon ideas of animality to essentialize human difference' (Twine 2010b: 176). The projection of humanist 'rights' onto animals therefore, is rendered anthropocentric and anthropomorphising, which Tony Brown suggests in his review of *When Species Meet*: 'What worse way than to try and make everything "not about 'man'" by personifying all that is "not man"?' (2009: 751). It is this problematic that cements Haraway's simultaneous rejection of the human/animal distinction and her demand for new ethical structures that are not grounded in this dichotomy. This dual concern leads Wolfe to label Haraway's work 'posthumanist posthumanism' (2010: 124–25), as opposed to the 'humanist posthumanism' of Regan and Singer (who challenge the human/animal divide, but only through advocating the rights of animals), or 'posthumanist humanism' of Žižek and Rorty (who critique key tenets of liberal humanism but leave the human/animal distinction intact).

However, this critique of humanism is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, Haraway uses it to challenge the cultural norms and values that govern practices such as animal research, training and breeding, for which the human/animal distinction can no longer provide unproblematic ethical support. However, she also deploys this critique of humanism to undermine any criticism of the contexts themselves: positioning any critics as 'humanist posthumanists' who undercut their attempts to challenge the human/animal distinction, by clinging onto humanist rights discourse. For instance, in her discussion of animal research she asserts: 'I do not have sufficient reason [to conduct research], only the risk of doing something wicked because it may also be good in the context of mundane reasons' (2008: 76); reason in this context being associated with 'the dualisms and misplaced concreteness of religious and secular humanism' (2008: 89). However, Haraway does not explain what enables mundane decisions to be made, if human exceptionalism is not evoked. As Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi argues (in a correspondence

Haraway reproduces in *When Species Meet*, the laboratory is ‘wholly framed, justified, legitimated and meaningful within the rationalist materials of early modern humanism’ (2008: 86). Haraway’s response is to represent this line of argument as creating a false dichotomy ‘of “inviolable animal rights” versus “human good is more important”’ (2008: 87). Similarly, Adams’ critique of Haraway’s defence of meat-eating is attributed to the former’s ‘love of animals’ (2008: 299). which depoliticises her challenge to both the symbolic and material role of animals in legitimising exploitation (2010: 117, n.iii).

By framing these concerns as grounded in ‘love’ or ‘inviolable rights’, Haraway is able to dismiss criticism, arguing that understanding ‘animal rights positions’ as ‘dogmatically correct or incorrect’ inhibits a genuine interrogation of human-animal relations, by shutting down potential ways of engaging with animals (2008: 299; 2010; 2011). Supporting this strategy, within the broader field of animal studies, criticism of Haraway is often perceived as conservatism on the part of activists. For instance, Wilson *et al.*’s discussion of the value of Haraway’s work to animal studies suggests: ‘in the chapter where she goes from “Thou shall not kill” to “Thou shall not make killable” ... I think she offended a number of animal rights activists’ (2011: 57). This argument is certainly the source of some interesting tensions between Haraway’s work and activist praxis, but characterising activists as offended deflects from the more fundamental critique of Haraway’s work.

The point is that although Haraway might ask vital questions about the contexts she discusses in *When Species Meet*, their intrinsic anthropocentrism is represented as an inevitable part of human-animal relations: with criticism dismissed as shutting down ways of relating. For Pedersen, this inability to unsettle anthropocentric cultural structures is a limitation of Haraway’s theory of companion species, and reflects ‘a form of metonymic desire; a (human) desire to be part of an expanded context and community of life forms [which] much like anthropocentrism, operates in the opposite direction: Rather than disturbing species boundaries, it does a colonial work of reinscribing them’ (2011: 72–73). In contrast, Pedersen argues that the animal rights practices Haraway rejects can play a valuable role in unsettling these structures; for instance, a useful way of revealing this anthropocentrism could be to ‘put the vegan impulse to work with companion species’ (2011: 76).

Building on these arguments, this essay anchors its critique of Haraway in activist praxis, to address both the broader concerns about the conservative (potentially anthropocentric) theoretical tendencies within animal studies, and concerns over the effects of these tendencies on political action. Specifically, it explores how activist praxis addresses the ethical concerns raised by Haraway about ‘rights’ whilst also developing a critique of the anthropocentric practices she defends. As suggested previously, vegan activism has been selected as the essay’s focus for wider theoretical and practical reasons, but is also a means of responding to Pedersen’s more specific arguments about the potential of this practice to unsettle the norms and values of Haraway’s work.

## **Why Haraway?**

If Haraway's work is problematic from a critical animal studies perspective, then why it is necessary to develop a conversation between her and activism? One reason is that – as a local animal rights activist who has helped coordinate campaigns in the city of Nottingham, UK – I have found similarities between our work and Haraway's despite these tensions. Rather than just criticising the act of killing, we focus on exposing the devaluation of both human and animal life, in line with Haraway's critique of how certain actors are rendered 'killable' under biocapitalism. Taking a lead from interventional forms of food activism – notably Food Not Bombs (Heynen 2010) – during the past decade we have enacted performative forms of multi-target protests and 'free food giveaways' in city centre locations, which intervene in public behaviour to unsettle social norms, as opposed to conventional forms of protest (such as information stalls and pamphleteering) that focus on criticising animal suffering in itself. To illustrate one example, rather than handing out animal rights flyers outside McDonald's, we cook and give away our own food outside the restaurant so to actively disrupt consumer practice, which foregrounds how these sites reproduce social structures that position certain actors (be they animals, workers, or even children targeted by advertising) as legitimately exploitable. Specificities of this kind of activism are beyond the scope of this essay (see Giraud 2011; 2010a; 2010b; Sheffield Animal Friends 2010; Veggies 2010a; 2010b), nonetheless it is important to establish that the motivation behind exploring Haraway's value to activism stems from local experiences, where her ideas can highlight a productive set of tactics, amidst the diverse series of practices that are used by grassroots groups.

However, it is essential to interrogate her work not just due to her intersection with activist praxis, but her theoretical influence. Her work brings arguments already existing in radical animal rights circles to different audiences within the wider field of animal studies, notably geography (Wilson *et al.* 2011) and cultural studies (DeKoven and Lundblad 2011). The fundamental challenge her work poses to the human-animal distinction, her analysis of exploitation, and her critique of ethically 'legitimate' killing, have led to renewed interest in these issues. Although valuable to an extent, in line with Adams, Best, Dell'Aversano, Pedersen and Weisberg, there is a danger that the naturalisation of certain categories within her theory (such as 'meat'), neutralises the more fundamental challenge that critical animal studies could provide. It is vital, therefore, to take opportunity of the discursive space created by Haraway, whilst challenging the normative cultural relations supported by her theory.

## **Value added dogs and burdened beasts: Haraway meets radical literature**

Despite accusations of 'humanism' being used to dismiss animal rights perspectives, the critique of humanism enacted by *When Species Meet* is also found within radical animal rights texts. However, there is a crucial distinction between the approaches advocated by these texts. In line with Wolfe's characterisation of Haraway as a 'posthuman posthumanist', she works to develop

an ethics that can be reconciled with the collapse of the human-animal distinction. As Pedersen suggests, there are affinities between these aims and critical animal studies, but the latter approaches this ethical project in a different way: advocating practices such as veganism that Haraway associates with humanist demands for animal rights. What these activist texts argue, however, is that such practices do not have to work within a humanist rights framework but offer an alternative means of unsettling the role of animals within biocapitalism.

To understand how these texts claim this alternative, it is first necessary to explore overlaps between their arguments and Haraway's. She argues that 'we do not get very far with the categories used by animal rights discourses', stating she is 'needy to specify these matters in nonhumanist terms' (2008: 67); an argument actually shared by radical animal rights perspectives. Focusing initially on *Beasts of Burden* (as illustrative of these forms of argument), the pamphlet states:

Rights are a limited recognition granted by the powerful to the less powerful, and as such 'animal rights' implies at least a separation between people and animals, and the definitive superiority of people . . . There is a need to move beyond 'animal rights' as such in order to fight inequality. (2004: 25)

Furthermore, both Haraway and *Beasts of Burden* interrogate the inequalities sustained by rights discourse through analysing the material and symbolic role of animals in securing the structures of biocapitalism. Turning first to Haraway, she calls for us to 'nurture responsibility by plumbing the category of labour more than the category of rights' (2008: 73), and argues that:

If a Marx equivalent were writing *Biocapital*, volume I, today, . . . the analyst would have to examine a tripartite structure: use value, exchange value, and encounter value, without the problematic solace of human exceptionalism. (2008: 46)

This development of 'encounter-value' mirrors the worker's production of surplus value: with the worker's alienation from the products of their labour reflecting the animal's removal from what is produced (or constituted by) its own body. These relationships are naturalised by capitalism and these processes of alienation function as social relations that are beyond question: an unavoidable side-effect of the production of value that feeds back into and reproduces the system's existing structures. Conceptually, encounter value also evokes characteristics that have been cited as pivotal to the analysis of animals within biocapitalism: emphasising the centrality of human-animal relations to the capitalist system (akin to Noske 1997) and the symbolic role of animals in reinforcing power relations (Shukin 2009). For Haraway, encounter-value refers to any human-animal relations producing value: be it material (as with livestock) or affective (as with the use of dogs in prison either to 'terrorize' or 'reform' detainees, in ways that 'produce definite value in lively capital' [2008: 63]). In addition to the value created by animal bodies, the

reification of animals also has a symbolic function: legitimising the positioning of certain forms of life as exploitable. She reiterates this point throughout the text, for instance, foregrounding the parallels between prisoners and animals being drawn in the aforementioned prison dog example, between workers and livestock (265–74), and the way that animality is drawn on to render social groups ‘killable’ (95–132).

Ten years prior to Haraway’s call for *Biocapitalism, Volume 1, Beasts of Burden* also explored the material value produced from animals; sketching out the function of human-animal interaction in this ‘story of lively capital’. For instance, the pamphlet foregrounds the integral role of human-animal relations in primitive accumulation, arguing that ‘not only is capitalism dependent on ruthless primitive accumulation, but primitive accumulation relies upon the animal industry’; citing the profitability of livestock as the driving force behind enclosure (2004: 7). Similarly, the Fordist factory system is understood as having its origins in Chicago’s meat-packing district as ‘the packing houses were the first American industry to create assembly lines, unable to cope with the constant stream of cattle coming in every day, the packinghouse giants hit on a way of streamlining the slaughter process – they invented the conveyor belt’ (2004: 9; see also Shukin 2009: 49–86). Moving onto analysing how – to draw on Tyson E. Lewis’ account of contemporary biocapitalism – the ‘rules of capitalist exploitation have exploded the limits of the factory walls to permeate and define all social relations’ (2010: 224), the pamphlet describes the increasing ‘commodification of life’: focusing on the role of animals as biotechnology, from the patenting of genetically modified animals to the use of genetic modification to increase agricultural productivity (2004: 10; see also Twine 2010b).

The symbolic role of animals in biocapitalism is also addressed, as the pamphlet analyses how animals are used as a symbolic resource for discourses seeking to legitimise exploitation: ‘Once it is taken for granted that animals are mere objects provided for the use of humans the introduction of slavery simply involves assigning to certain groups of humans the status of animals’ (2004: 6; an argument shared by other radical pamphlets such as Dominick 2008: 9). This line of argument could be seen as a form of intersectionality; articulating animal rights issues in relation to other forms of exploitation based on class, gender and race. However, Richard Twine argues that animal rights offer a unique contribution to an intersectional perspective by foregrounding ‘the way in which dualism operates to shape commonalities between varied categories of difference . . . a specific contribution that argues that categories such as gender, class and race are infused with the human-animal distinction’ (2010b: 10). What is useful about this argument is that it foregrounds how ‘relations of power over animals are constitutive and reiterative of dominant symbolic understandings of the “human” and so are better seen as material and semiotic’ (11). In emphasising this symbolic role of animals, these pamphlets therefore couple their material critique of exploitation with an analysis of how the symbolic positioning of animals legitimises the other forms of social marginalisation.

Thus, as suggested earlier, the focus on both the symbolic and material role of animals as biocapital is superficially similar to Haraway’s perspective,

however the activist texts differ in their account of practices they cite as disruptive of these material-semiotic structures.

### **Disrupting the role of ‘animals’**

Unlike Haraway, practices such as veganism are treated as a means of challenging humanist notions of rights by unsettling the structural position of animals within biocapitalism. This disruptive role is not taken for granted, indeed, activist texts frequently enact a critique of animal rights in the UK (and more broadly) that demonstrates a pre-existing awareness of criticisms such as Haraway’s. For instance, *Beasts of Burden* draws attention to the tension within animal rights movements, arguing that:

While it addresses only a single issue, animal liberation does pose fundamental questions about the relationship of humans to the world. This can be a starting point for a fundamental questioning of the way we live our lives; on the other hand animal rights ideology can become a limit which prevents a wider critique of society. We need to go beyond this ideology without abandoning what is subversive within what it represents. (2004: 23)

However, these criticisms are careful not to dismiss the movement entirely and reiterate its value even as they are critical of elements of it. The pamphlet goes on to foreground that there is an awareness of the intersection of animal rights with other issues:

We can all recognise these problems [with animal rights], and it suits the views of many anarchists and communists to pretend that all animal liberation activities take place in this reactionary framework. This is not the case. Notably the movement against McDonald’s is an actually existing international struggle that takes on work conditions, the critique of the spectacular commodity and ecological issues as well as animal exploitation, and has even managed to involve meat eaters. (2004: 24)

Following a similar line of argument, Joseph Smith’s preface to *Animal Liberation and Social Revolution* argues that ‘veganism in isolation defeats the purpose for which it is intended’ because it has potential to be a philosophical outlook that deconstructs social relations giving rise to other forms of oppression. ‘The vegan must go beyond a monist understanding of non-human oppression and understand its roots in human relations’ (Dominick 2008: 10). Like Haraway, this argument suggests the category of the animal is politically problematic, as: ‘In order to maintain an us-them dichotomy between human and “animal” (as though we are not animals ourselves!), we cannot be allowed to hear basic arguments in favor of transcending this false sense of duality’ (Dominick 2008: 12–13). The construction of this category is then linked to other forms of exploitation and cited as lying at the root of self/other dichotomies that perpetuate and legitimise capitalist relations; dichotomies manifested in everyday activities where:

we are alienated from the results of our most basic actions. When we purchase a food product at the grocery store, we can read the ingredients list and usually tell whether animals are murdered and/or tortured in the production process. But what do we learn of the people who made that product? Were the women paid less than the men? Were blacks subjugated by whites on the factory floor? Was a union or collectivization effort among employees crushed? Were a hundred slaughtered on a picket line for demanding minimum wage? (Dominick 2008: 13)

The separation between human and animal and the rendering of the animal as subaltern (thus 'legitimately' killable), is thus articulated as part of a matrix of oppressive relations, with the entire structure needing to be challenged in order for fundamental social change to be achieved. In Dominick's terms: 'The ability to ignore any oppressions is the ability to ignore other oppression/s' (2008: 14).

This poses a challenge to Haraway's general characterisation of animal rights, because while she pin-points difficulties with activism and concepts of rights, she does not explore the subversive potential of animal rights perspectives for doing what she argues remains unfinished in Marx: namely undoing 'the categories of the natural and the social' (2008: 46). Yet it is exactly the denaturalisation of these categories that is articulated by these pamphlets. For example, *Beasts of Burden* foregrounds the inseparability of animal and human rights issues, suggesting that: 'It is ludicrous, as occasionally happens, for McDonald's workers to be denounced as "scum" when their exploitation is as central to the company's profits as the dead cows in the buns' (2004: 24). Challenging the construction of these categories does not lend itself to the naturalisation of exploitative relations in the way that Kheel fears (and as is reflected in Haraway's work), due to articulating the connection between exploitation and animalisation: with veganism offering a challenge to this process, if enacted as part of an intersectional political perspective. The importance of an intersectional critique of biocapital is also reflected by a tradition of published diatribes coming from within the animal rights community. For instance, *Animal Liberation: Devastate to Liberate or Devastatingly Liberal?* (2009) criticises the UK animal rights movement for being predominantly middle class and failing to interrelate animal rights and class issues:

Whenever one problem is separated from all the other problems a solution really is impossible since they are all linked and because, once isolated and specialised, a movement is weakened . . . Simply by concentrating on one of class society's repugnant features (the abuse of animals) and ignoring the relationship of that to the whole of society and all of the relationships within society, is exactly what those in power demand of their opposition.

With veganism as illustrative of this tendency, the author argues that:

The idea of a cruelty free product is a carefully crafted illusion. No such thing can exist – all commodities are cruel . . . The predominance

of middle class people who make up the animal rights movement ignore this because they tend not to have to suffer half as much in society themselves. (2009)

The problem is that if veganism is treated as an end in itself, it fails to grasp the relations of biocapital that Haraway is so keen to foreground. The pamphlets are careful not to dismiss veganism entirely though, maintaining that as long as it is not purely grounded in an appeal to the inviolable rights of the animal it can work to unsettle the structures that give rise to humanist conceptions of rights, which follows Smith's argument: 'as a philosophy veganism stands in defiance to ideologies touching the core of Western thought' (in Dominick 2008: 2). For theorists such as Dominick and the author of *Beasts of Burden*, veganism in philosophical terms is a necessary component to anarchist theory and praxis: playing a key role in challenging the humanist rationale behind forms of oppression based on class, gender, ethnicity and age, in line with Twine's characterisation of it as unsettling the dualisms that position social actors as exploitable.

Therefore, these texts are highly critical of attempts to disconnect practices such as veganism from their intersection with other social issues, foregrounding how they should instead be used to unsettle the relations of biocapital by removing animals from their structural position as 'killable', both materially and symbolically. At this point, therefore, it is necessary to understand why Haraway is critical of this approach, turning to her argument 'thou shalt not make killable': a concept designed to perform a similar disruptive function.

### **Making killable**

Haraway suggests protecting animals by claiming 'thou shalt not kill', falls into the trap of projecting human rights onto animals and this tactic should be replaced with the mantra 'thou shalt not make killable'. The latter involves deconstructing categories that sanction certain actors 'legitimately' killable by other (human) actors; for this reason the production of the category 'animal' is deemed 'criminal' (2008: 80). Reiterating this argument throughout the text, she states in her discussion of laboratory research: 'Neither "the greater human good trumps animal pain" camp nor the "sentient animals are always ends in themselves so cannot be used that way" camp sees that the claim to have Sufficient Reasons is a dangerous fantasy rooted in the dualisms and misplaced concreteness of religious and secular humanism' (2008: 89). Emphasised again in chapter four in relation to animal research, she argues 'no category ... makes killing innocent' (2008: 106); in chapter eight in reference to dog training she describes how 'Human exceptionalism blinds us' from the co-shaping influence of non-human actors (2008: 218); and in the concluding chapter's discussion of hunting cements her position: 'There is no rational or natural dividing line that will settle the life-and-death relations between human and nonhuman animals; such lines are alibis if they are imagined to settle the matter "technically"' (2008: 297).

What both Adams and Weisberg foreground, however, is that Haraway frequently appeals to essentialising categories, particularly in her discussion

of meat-eating. For Adams even the term 'meat' equates to the category of 'killable' that Haraway condemns, and for this reason she argues that: 'Haraway protects the dominance that ontologises animals as edible just as the sheepdogs she celebrates protect the ontologised "livestock"' (2006: 126). Adam's critique was in relation to the *Companion Species Manifesto* and thus is not wholly applicable to *When Species Meet* where Haraway does attempt in the chapter 'Chicken' to explore the intersections between human and animal exploitation that occur when animals become biocapital, describing how 'the hyperexploited labouring bodies of both chickens and humans are joined in a terrifying global industry by the early twenty-first century' (2008: 272). In general though, her mode of argument is problematic as in order to circumvent the problem of essentialising animals as 'meat' or 'livestock', Haraway speaks *for* the animal protagonist, 'Chicken Little', and portrays her as happy with the fundamentals of this arrangement (if not its contemporary manifestation):

Contrary to her pesky friends in the transnational animal rights movement, our Opportunistic Bird is not against surrendering a pound of flesh in exchange for pecking rights in the natural-cultural contractual arrangements that domesticated both bipedal hominids and winged gallinaceous avians. (2008: 267)

Putting aside the deliberate puns, literary allusions and playfulness, the personification of the chicken serves to ground human exceptionalism. Even though Haraway strongly argues for improved conditions for chickens, as 'something is seriously foul in current versions of multispecies global contact theory' (2008: 267), this approach still supports the concept that chickens are killable (and willingly so). Moreover, by speaking for 'Chicken Little', Haraway is doing precisely what she criticises in earlier texts, such as 'The Promises of Monsters', which condemn any form of political ventriloquism because of the way it silences non-human actors through projecting the (well-intentioned) desires of the speaker onto them (1992: 312).

As well as undermining these earlier arguments, 'Chicken' perpetuates the problems Adams identifies in the *Companion Species Manifesto*; instead of unsettling metaphysical categories such as 'livestock', 'meat' and even 'animal' the chapter reinforces them. This problem is even identified by positive reviews of the text: '*When Species Meet* only briefly considers the practices of killing and eating nonhumans that exemplify exceptionalist instrumentalism. Rather than confront this "huge and complicated" topic head on, Haraway skirts around it by recollecting the views and practices of some academic colleagues' (Wilson 2009: 151). In portraying the animal as legitimately consumable, it is – by extension – rendered killable; thus in sustaining the category of livestock neither its material nor symbolic role in perpetuating the relations of capital is fully challenged.

Haraway is not wholly dismissive of veganism, stating: 'I do not disagree that vegetarianism, veganism, and opposition to sentient animal experimentation can be powerful feminist positions', but she then argues such perspectives are in danger of becoming normative: 'I do disagree that they are Feminist Doxa' (2008: 80). However, the level of debate around these issues,

both within theoretical texts – including Haraway’s own – and in activist practice, suggests veganism, at most, provides an alternative perspective. As *Beasts of Burden* makes explicit, many of ‘those who define themselves as anarchists or communists . . . either dismiss animal liberation altogether or personally sympathise but don’t see how it relates to their broader political stance’ (2004: 1). Likewise, Dominick foregrounds that ‘most people who call themselves anarchists have not embraced animal liberation and its corresponding lifestyle – veganism’ (2008: 3). From a US perspective, Adams’ preface to the tenth anniversary edition of the *Sexual Politics of Meat* details her long struggle to gain acknowledgement that ‘we have to stop fragmenting activism; we cannot polarize human and animal suffering since they are interrelated’ (2006: 16). In this sense, it is only through abstracting animal rights or vegan perspectives from their cultural context that they can be portrayed as normative; a problematic move in light of Haraway’s condemnation of any form of politics that ignores the material-semiotic context in which it operates, as argued in the opening page of *When Species Meet*: ‘we learn to be worldly from grappling with, rather than generalizing from, the ordinary’ (2008: 3). It is for this reason that it is necessary to focus on activist practice itself, to explore how – to echo Kheel – veganism can unsettle social norms rather than becoming normative in itself. Furthermore, this focus addresses criticisms from within critical animal studies that Haraway’s arguments inhibit political action, by indicating potential for a vegan politics that can produce a more sustained critique of biocapital.

### **Reading Haraway against activist contexts**

Taking a cursory view of UK activism, it is possible to see why Haraway is concerned about veganism becoming an essentialising norm. Specifically, activist forms of autonomous, anti-capitalist protest that developed in Britain (and elsewhere) throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Autonomous Geographies Collective n.d.) that are rooted in anarchist traditions, but have a number of distinct features of their own, which have been developed to support non-hierarchical social relations (Harding 2012). In the UK, veganism has a relatively unique position as an accepted part of activist practice, for instance the catering at prominent international events such as the temporary eco-village (or Hori-zone), established as a protest site during the 2005 anti-G8 protests in Gleneagles, Scotland (Morgenmuffel 2005), and the UK Climate Camps that ran between 2006–2010 in locations across the UK (Climate Camp n.d.) were all-vegan. The majority of the UK’s autonomous social centres, essentially the hubs of radical social movements, are also vegan or vegetarian (UK Social Centres Network 2008). Vegan catering collectives have had a prominent role in radical social movements since the mid-1980s – with groups such as Nottingham’s Veggies Catering Campaign playing a pivotal role in the McLibel trial and subsequent protests (Wolfson 1999: 4), and Brighton’s Anarchist Teapot Collective playing a key role in the squatting movement (Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006) – such groups also helping to coordinate the catering at the G8 and Climate Camps. Other examples include counter-cultural movements such as Temporary Autonomous Arts, which house vegan cafés in the temporary arts spaces (Temporary Autonomous Arts 2011), and the DIY

punk scene, which has a strong vegan element dating back to 1980s anarcho-punk bands such as Crass (Rimbaud 1994). Indeed, veganism is a well-established feature of UK activism in a way that it is not necessarily so in other global contexts.

However, mapping out shared traits of activist practice is precisely the bird's eye view that Haraway condemns at the outset of *When Species Meet*, since it fails to grasp the specific semiotic significance and material realisation of veganism in these contexts. To focus on the first example, the Hori-zone, the complex decision to serve vegan food forced the caterers to make a series of decisions about the food that can only be grasped by focusing on the micro-sociological level, where mundane details were discussed in order to realise the activists' economic, environmental and horizontal principles.

For instance, permaculture activist Starhawk discusses the construction of compost toilets and how this was not simply an imposition of environmentalist values, but worked instead to unsettle existing social norms:

Because we've built compost toilets, we have to actually think about what happens to our shit, and who is going to deal with it. 'We're spoiled normally,' a young woman says. 'We don't usually have to think about any of this'. 'It's anarchism in practice,' I tell them. 'Being self-responsible at a very, very basic level'. In that moment, watching the realisation dawn on them that water has to go somewhere, and shit has to be dealt with somehow, I feel that all the work and stress has been worth it. (2005: 194)

These 'mundane' practices, for Starhawk, became central to unsettling the taken-for-granted relations that are masked in everyday life. It is in this light that the work of the kitchens needs to be understood, as a member of the Anarchist Teapot describes: 'the kitchens weren't just about infrastructure or logistics; they were an integral part of our politics. If we're serious about self-organisation and autonomy, washing spuds is as good a place to start as any' (Anarchist Teapot 2005: 163). For instance, in line with their critique of capitalism and in light of financial constraints on the caterers – the food could not be free – food prices were nonetheless kept as low as possible: '50p for breakfast, £1 for a simple meal and £1.50 for a fuller meal, while not turning anyone away who couldn't afford this' (2005: 62). In addition, 'what to do with any potential surplus would be discussed on site before everyone left and shared out as fairly as possible (without anyone making private profit – this was pretty much assumed anyway)' (2005: 62–63). Therefore, the financial logic of the catering groups was in line with the ethos of rejecting hierarchical social relations in the same manner that the activists rejected other forms of hierarchy. Similarly, for environmental reasons it was decided that all food should be sourced from Scotland (with vegetables from local farmers and bread from a Glaswegian bakery).

These decisions seem utterly mundane and separate from the overarching anti-capitalist aims of the mobilisations, but only through grappling with the details can alternative social values be realised in practice. Indeed, these details are what Eloïse Harding describes as central to the 'prefigurative politics' that characterises these movements, which 'according to Nunes, is

“summarised in the motto ‘be the change you want to see’” [Nunes, 2007: 8]. In practice, this means creating spaces in which horizontal principles can be explored and demonstrated in terms of their impact on the living of life’ (Harding, 2012: 8). Apparently incongruous decisions about money or toilets provide a foundation for exploring how basic amenities can be provided in autonomous contexts. Despite still having to operate in relation to overarching structures of capital, these sites act as a testing ground for non-hierarchical social practices. As Harding argues, activist *culture* has a significant role in challenging the relations of capital within such contexts: ‘the cultural dimension brings the analysis of hierarchy from the level of official hierarchies and formal political structures down to the level of everyday relations of domination’ (2012: 176); this means that ‘Everyday life, far from being a distraction from “serious” political resistance, constitutes an essential terrain on which struggles are enacted’ (178). Similarly, Plows argues that everyday activist practices such as veganism can form a ‘critical position’ with which to interrogate existing social norms, and thus be useful strategies for activists, both in de-naturalising normative social relations and in forging links between activist groups with different foci (2002: 293). In her terms, as part of activist culture, such practices do not have to be understood as norms being imposed but as sustaining a transformational social project; this culture is necessary to de-naturalise mainstream culture, acting as ‘the mulch in which the seeds of radical protest are germinated and nurtured’ (2002: 138).

As part of a cultural matrix of resistance, veganism can be understood not as activist doxa, but a practical means of challenging domination in everyday life, which echoes Kheel’s argument that veganism should not be an imposed norm, but a practice that works to denaturalise meat consumption. As with the pamphlets’ critique of animal rights activists, who treat veganism in isolation as enough to challenge exploitation, there are also self-reflexive debates within the activist community about the role of veganism in practical contexts, particularly between activists and those advocating freeganism, where the consumption of non-vegan food is permitted if it is being discarded by commercial food outlets (for an illustrative example see MsMarmite Lover 2010; Pogo Café 2010). However, paradoxically, these heated debates illustrate veganism’s ability to unsettle (rather than create) cultural norms, by illustrating the constant (re-)evaluation of practices best suited to developing horizontal politics, in a manner that situates the consumption of animal products in relation to biocapital.

This articulation of veganism within a broader cultural critique of biocapitalism, is essential in enabling it to unsettle exploitative social relations. For instance, the Climate Camps that followed the Hori-zone argued: ‘we are encouraged to consume now and think later. Companies spend millions of pounds discussing the harsh realities of this lifestyle. Animals are hidden from sight in horrific conditions. Veganism is a real way to renounce this system’ (Climate Camp 2007). Whilst this attempts to situate veganism as unsettling (rather than imposing) normative values, it falls into the trap foregrounded by Dominick of treating veganism as enough in itself to depart from exploitation and failing to connect it to the relations of biocapital. In this context, veganism is divorced from the radical political project that it is associated with in the work of the anti-capitalist activists in the Hori-zone. In the

numerous critiques that have been written about the dissociation of the Climate Camps from their radical roots (Saunders 2010; Pusey and Russell 2010), a key criticism is that practices such as veganism have shifted from being a critical position to simply being 'ethical-lifestylism' attached to a 'moral hierarchy' ('Camper' 2010: 9). It is due to this disassociation that theorists like Haraway can frame veganism as restricting freedom of choice, as this positioning of veganism as an 'ethical alternative' situates meat consumption as normative: depoliticising it by focusing on its material effects, rather than its symbolic role as sustaining hierarchical social relations.

However, this is a departure from the grassroots activist praxis embodied by the activist pamphlets discussed previously, and the work of activists in the Hori-zone; both of which couple an analysis of biocapitalism with a rejection of rights as an ethical framework. The point, therefore, is not that the values articulated in these contexts (including veganism) should be imposed as new activist norms: this would actually inhibit them from highlighting exploitation in everyday life. Their value is instead in exposing and unsettling hidden hierarchies, by foregrounding the symbolic and material role of animals within biocapitalism, which is where Haraway's arguments fall down: in Weisberg's words, 'companion species not only falls far short of any real challenge to the most problematic aspects of humanism outlined by Haraway, but reveals a disturbing collusion with the very structures of domination she purports to oppose' (2009: 22).

## **Conclusion**

Although Haraway's work is important in openly challenging anthropocentrism in the form of humanist rights discourse that privileges human well-being above all else, her arguments ultimately support the relations of biocapital that reproduce these anthropocentric norms and values. By responding to criticisms of Haraway from within critical animal studies, and developing a conversation between Haraway's work and grassroots activism, this essay has pointed to contexts where activist praxis has developed a more profound challenge to these relations. Veganism in particular, has been cited as providing a perspective that could, potentially, pose a challenge to this anthropocentrism by unsettling the material and symbolic role of animals within biocapitalism. Therefore, rather than being dismissed as shutting down options, or as the product of 'reactionary' rights discourse, such practices need to be explored further: as a site from which a challenge to the anthropocentric tendencies both within animal studies and in culture more broadly, could be articulated.

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