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Fostering Feminist Politics of Veganism: On 'the Political' in Donna Haraway's Approach to Food, Eating and Animals

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Donna Haraway's approach to 'the political' in her book *When Species Meet*. The paper proposes an alternative to previous readings of Haraway's work on food, eating and animals, which have interpreted Haraway's argument as a stance against veganism or as a depoliticised approach to animal exploitation. Drawing on Margret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick's analysis of Haraway's work in relation to political theory and Chantal Mouffe's agonistic approach to the political, this paper instead argues that Haraway's contribution is neither particularly set against veganism nor is it depoliticised. The paper argues that Haraway's work can rather be made sense of in relation to an agonistic approach to the political that fosters a space for disagreement and ongoing reflection of the constitutive outsides of agreements on food and animal political issues.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper rethinks the ways in which Donna Haraway's comments about veganism and vegan feminisms have been read in feminist scholarship concerning food, eating, and, more broadly, animal politics. I suggest an interpretation that differs from previous readings of her work, both sympathetic and critical. I mainly focus on an analysis of Haraway's concluding chapter in *When Species Meet* (2008) 'Parting Bites: Nourishing Indigestion.' I suggest that even though comments related to veganism emerge here and there across her later work, 'Parting Bites' both includes Haraway's comments about veganism and animal rights positions – which are theoretical approaches to veganism – and enables contextualisation of these accounts within Haraway's broader thinking, in this case and most importantly, to the understanding of *the political* in her discussion about food and eating.

While exploitation of nonhuman animals has been questioned and plant-based foods eaten for centuries in various parts of the world (Deckha 2012), it was the UK Vegan Society, founded in 1944, that first coined the term *veganism* (Giraud 2021, 3). Although this common definition of veganism is a broader 'philosophy and a way of living' that attempts to 'exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose' (The Vegan Society 2022), Haraway's comments about veganism have been put to work in particular in scholarship on food and eating. There, Haraway's thinking has been utilised in arguments for a 'non-moralizing' approach that avoids 'food rules' or 'prescriptions' of how others should eat, while contrasting her approach to vegan and critical animal studies perspectives (see e.g. Bruckner 2018, 134–7). In addition, discussing 'eating the ocean and eating it well' Elspeth Probyn (2016, 158, 127) proclaims that Haraway inspires a 'feminist method focused on interconnecting and mapping out a myriad of interrelations' that calls for accountability, 'to always be on the lookout for the responsibilities we have to the many facets of the more-than-human.' For Probyn, this, however, seems to be in contradiction with 'the choice to proclaim oneself vegan,' which 'often seems to act as an opting out of the structural complexities of food provisioning, production, and consumption' (Probyn 2016, 3).

In addition, Kathy Rudy has suggested that 'Haraway sees our relationship to food … as historically and culturally constructed in ways that are very messy' and that Haraway 'decries the vegan "heroic fantasy of ending all suffering or not causing suffering," and asks us instead to "remain at risk and in solidarity in instrumental relationships that one does not disavow"' (Rudy 2012, 32). In other words, in work on food and eating that exhibits a critical approach to veganism, Haraway has been claimed to inspire an alternative, vegan-critical approach that accounts for complex relationalities in the food chain and, more broadly, in human–animal relations. This reading of Haraway is then contrasted with a vegan perspective that in these works appears as simpler, 'moralizing,' and even fantastical. Notably, in these works, the terms 'vegan' or 'veganism' themselves often remain vague. They are, for example, mentioned only in passing without a definition or theoretical discussion of the philosophical questions that critical animal studies thinkers have raised as justification for contesting animal agriculture, eating animal flesh or the use of other animal products (for a broader discussion of these arguments, see e.g. Giraud 2021).

In contrast to these sympathetic readings of Haraway that use her work to justify their critique of veganism by referring to the 'complexities' in the food system, critical animal studies scholar Eva Giraud (2019) has criticised Haraway and others for focusing on complex relationalities as such. From Giraud's perspective, it is crucial to

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take notice and action with the constitutive exclusions that frame the process where particular ways of being and particular relations become materialised (2019, 175). Rather than pointing out that complex relations exist, the key in her perspective is in 'working to disrupt the relations through which oppressive realities were *materialized*' (2019, 175, emphasis in original). In contrast to this activist perspective, Haraway has been claimed to be 'in danger of a too-comfortable quietism' (Tyler 2018, 114). Likewise, other critics of Haraway call for attention to *changing* the current relations in Western animal agriculture, rather than to their complexity per se. For example, Zipporah Weisberg argues that Haraway's *When Species Meet* 'falls far short of any real challenge to the most problematic aspects of humanism' but rather offers 'ideological cover for such violent practices as animal experimentation, genetic engineering, dog breeding and training, killing animals for food and hunting' (Weisberg 2009, 23). In a similar manner, Carol Adams argues that in her *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), the arguments of which are further developed in *When Species Meet*, 'Haraway protects the dominance that ontologizes animals as edible just as the sheepdogs she celebrates protect the ontologized "livestock"' (Adams 2006, 126). From these perspectives, Haraway's thought is claimed to present 'a serious threat' to the possibility of developing 'a truly *critical* Animal Studies' as well as to 'the cause of animal liberation' (Weisberg 2009, 23, emphasis in original).

Moreover, Weisberg argues that 'Haraway's work has become paradigmatic of a largely depoliticized approach within animal studies' (2009, 59). In addition to interpreting her arguments as depoliticised, Haraway has been read as connecting politics, and in particular vegan politics, to dogmatism. In a reading of Haraway's discussion about debates related to food and hunting in the concluding chapter of *When Species Meet*, 'Parting Bites,' Giraud claims that Haraway 'infers that the most problematic aspect of such debates is dogmatism itself' and that 'commitment to a decisive political or ethical stance is necessarily dogmatic.' She also suggests that in *When Species Meet*, it is in particular veganism that for Haraway appears as 'something that undermines reflection about the ethical complexities of eating' (2021, 50).

Irrespective of their sympathetic or critical perspective, all these readings seem to identify Haraway's approach to food, eating and animal relations as *positioned against veganism*. In addition, the critical readings suggest that Haraway's approach is *depoliticised* rather than political in the sense that her work helps to affirm the status quo of industrial animal food production, or that she *opposes strong social justice positions* and especially veganism. In this paper, I offer an alternative reading by suggesting that it is important to differentiate between Haraway's own political stance – in the case of 'Parting Bites,' her narration of her own personal food choices – from the way in which she somewhat implicitly constructs 'the political' in her discussions about food, eating and animals. I argue that rather than reading Haraway as supporting an argument specifically against veganism, a more justified interpretation of her work could consider her approach to the political as one of her central contributions to feminist scholarship on food, eating and animal politics. In other words, I claim that her text is neither depoliticised nor specifically positioned against veganism; instead, her argumentation can more feasibly be interpreted as a particular approach to 'the political.'

Following Margret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick, who link Haraway and radical democratic theory that regards disagreement as the central aspect of the political, I read Haraway as investing in 'the productive power of dissensus,' while understanding the *political* for Haraway as 'a contested site of continuous reinterrogation and dissent' (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 82). While I am inspired by their reading of

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the political in Haraway's work and sympathetic to their analysis of Lyotard's and Haraway's potential affinities in that context,[1] here, I have, in contrast, chosen radical democratic theorist Chantal Mouffe's work on agonism as my companion. This is because Mouffe's work more closely aligns with feminist analyses of power structures, which are also inbuilt in Haraway's work.

By interpreting Haraway with Mouffe's agonism, I argue that Haraway's approach is not against veganism. Instead, it concerns the importance of fostering a political space for debating food and animal questions that strives for awareness of the power relations that form the constitutive outsides of political agreements and stays open for continuous critique, rethinking and disagreement.

ON CONTEXTUALITY AND COMPLEXITY – ACCOUNTING FOR COLONIALISM AND ANIMAL AGENCY

It is crucial to note that Haraway acknowledges that 'vegetarianism, veganism, and opposition to sentient animal experimentation can be powerful feminist positions'; she does not merely agree that they would be the only feasible feminist positions (2008, 80). In addition, in *When Species Meet*, she makes a very particular interpretation of veganism, equalling it to a so-called abolitionist animal rights position:

> Try as we might to distance ourselves, there is no way of living that is not also a way for someone, not just something, else dying differentially. Vegans come as close as anyone, and their work to avoid eating or wearing any animal products would consign most domestic animals to the status of curated heritage collections or to just plain extermination as kinds and as individuals. (Haraway 2008, 80)

According to this particular animal rights theory, domestic animals should not be bred for exploitation, killing and eating and, therefore, in such a future, these animals would no longer exist, which Haraway, rather controversially, names 'extermination.'[2] It is important to note that there are several different animal rights positions that support veganism. Some critical animal studies approaches, in particular the so-called abolitionist ones, regard separation rather than relationality as the preferred option in human–animal relations, because animal '"entanglement" with us usually means more dependence, more oppression, and more exposure to human-induced violence' (Pedersen 2019, 8). For educational scientist Helena Pedersen, the most feasible option in the current conditions of large-scale animal exploitation would be *withdrawal* from human–animal relations, because she suspects that otherwise considering nonhuman animals as existing *for us*, for human use, would not cease (Pedersen 2019, 8).

1 See their chapters "Knowledges" and "Politics" in their book *Beyond the Cyborg* (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013).

2 Ecofeminist Greta Gaard calls this a misrepresentation of veganism (2017, 123). See Francione and Charlton (2015) on the abolitionist approach; for more detailed discussion of the so-called abolitionist and alternative animal rights and vegan positions, see, e.g., Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011); Giraud (2021); Pedersen (2019); Taylor (2017). Here it is not possible to discuss this point comprehensively, but it is also important to note that Haraway's word choice 'curated heritage collections' is not simply about criticising veganism but stems from her approach to *labour*, which she sees in some contexts as potentially profitable also for other animals, rather than necessarily exploitative, and through which she reads many practises, such as dog training or farming, which critical animal studies scholars would regard as exploitation.

In contrast, Canadian critical animal studies theorists Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011) regard it as important for an animal rights theory to account for situations where nonhuman animals have close relations with people. They have chosen citizenship theory in order to conceptualise how to approach these relations politically. Critical animal studies scholar Eva Meijer (2019) has, in turn, developed Donaldson and Kymlicka's approach to account for animals as agential beings that have an ability to participate in democratic deliberative processes, that is, be part of political negotiations. Vegan politics from these scholars' perspective, in other words, calls for a democratic society where animals are not food or objects for consumption but partners with whom humans would have to negotiate when making decisions that affect their lives.

In regarding animals as agential partners with whom we can negotiate, Haraway's thought comes close to Meijer's approach in particular. Like Meijer, Haraway starts from the importance of theorising relationality. For Haraway, relationality is an ontological condition, as she puts it in her much-cited lines:

> I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such … I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with* many. (2008, 3–4, emphasis in original)

In Haraway's case, relationality as an ontological condition seems to mean that we cannot simply choose to not be in relation, which is maybe the most drastic difference from the so-called abolitionist animal rights position. Therefore, *how to enact relationality* is central to Haraway's ethical and political thinking. Her approach to relationality is based on the idea of getting on together within power-laden, non-innocent relations, which entails responding to others and recognising their response, including nonhuman animals (Haraway 2008; Haraway 2016). Haraway shares that she was inspired by anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose's thoughts on recuperation (Rose 2004; Haraway 2013, 173, note 2). Recuperation for Rose is specifically a decolonial process that deals with the legacies of colonialism for people and environments. Rose strongly proposes – in the context of pondering an ethical perspective on decolonisation – an 'ethic of connection', conceptualising the human condition as relation, 'living with and for others' (Rose 2004, 12–14). Haraway's emphasis on the importance of relationality can be understood as similar to Rose's where 'one is always *situated* as a moral agent' and 'acting in relation' (Rose 2004, 14, emphasis added).[3]

Haraway's approach differs from the mentioned critical animal studies work in her emphasis on the *non-innocence* of relationality, exemplified by the argument above that no way of living exists that does not entail someone else dying; this also applies to vegans (2008, 80). To illustrate the different readings of Haraway, food scholar Heide Bruckner finds Haraway's thought, alongside Val Plumwood's, intriguing because they 'avoid *food rules* or *approaches which prescribe* how others should eat or behave' (2018, 137, emphasis added). Bruckner utilises her own experience of killing gophers on an organic vegetable farm, and the fact that 'many other animals … die

3 Rose's approach is inspired by Emmanuel Levinas, while Haraway discredits Levinas for leaving animals 'on the other side of the Great Divide' between humans and animals (2008, 311 note 28). While being inspired by Levinas, Rose also attends critically to his anthropocentric approach (see, in particular, Rose's *Wild Dog Dreaming*, Chapter 3, "Bobby's Face, My Love" (Rose 2011, 29–41), and Chapter 9, "Ruined Faces" (Rose 2011, 97–107).

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during farming, like worms, beetles, or insects' as a basis for her approach to food (2018, 47). Even though Bruckner recognises that 'the scale, mode and practices of trapping gophers may not seem comparable to raising and killing farm animals for meat,' she notes that '[h]owever, in almost all forms of agriculture, some animals do die' (2018, 47), thus giving an example of why even vegans cannot eat without killing. For Bruckner, this point then works as the foundation for her welfare ethical and 'non-moralizing' (2018, 26, 134–7) approach.

Bruckner's thought is in this respect aligned with what critical animal studies and media scholar Eva Giraud describes as 'critical responses to vegetarian ecofeminism [that] often conclude with assertions that no position is truly innocent and without violence' (2019, 163). Giraud and other critical animal studies scholars criticise such conclusions, because merely concluding that no practise is innocent, allows exploitation to continue. Bruckner's reading of Haraway indeed leads to preferring that a child 'makes her own eating decisions, based on the taste she develops through a variety of experiences,' while arguing against 'moralization' as an effective strategy to change people's food habits (2018, 170). In contrast to interpreting her argument as against 'moralization,' I read Haraway's statements about non-innocence instead as pointing towards *heightened responsibility*, which she calls response-ability, in the face of hard choices in specific, complex situations. As Haraway explains, 'there is no way of living that is not also a way for someone, not just something, else dying differentially' (2008, 80).

For Haraway, eating is connected to ecological and colonial multispecies contexts, and I interpret the crux of her argument as concerning the difficulties and challenges in finding the most ethical response to a particular situation when facing this complexity. Taking up coloniality as a condition within which multispecies relationality needs to be approached is another point where her work differs from that of the mentioned critical animal studies.[4] For Haraway, who is based in the United States in one of the settler states, '[t]he crucial question is how to face settler heritage differently, to participate in decolonizing generational practices' (Haraway 2014, 247).

In 'Parting Bites,' Haraway offers her readers three concluding remarks, or 'bites.' These 'bites' raise different aspects of her approach to food, eating and animals. The first bite, or point, consists of Haraway's discussion of Australia-based artist Patricia Piccinini's work, including installations, drawings and sculptures. Following her common narrative writing style, which draws on science fiction and other art,[5]

4 Kymlicka and Donaldson (2015) have discussed Indigenous hunting practises, but first and foremost from an animal rights perspective, striving for a general animal rights theory to which Indigenous animal relations could be accommodated, rather than taking the critique of colonialism as a starting point for animal relations approaches. See also Belcourt (2020) for a critique of Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011) for not taking into account decolonial struggles in their theoretical approach concerning animal citizenship.

5 To bring art, in this case Piccinini's 'sf-like progeny' (2008, 287), into the discussion on multispecies relations can be traced back to Haraway's 1980s work (e.g. Haraway 1989). Haraway has, during the decades since her first major works, given significant importance to storytelling, on the one hand, as a practise that is inextricably intertwined with science and the ways in which facts are storied. On the other hand, storytelling for her is a crucial aspect of enabling transformation in the world: 'the means and processes of collective movement must be imagined and acted out in new geometries. That is why I find the reading and writing strategies of SF (speculative fiction, science fiction, science fantasy, speculative feminism) so useful for feminist theorizing.' (Haraway 1991, 238 note 3; about the importance of storytelling and, in particular, science fiction in Haraway's work, see also Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 112–36). It is important to note that storytelling can also be interpreted as Haraway's method of theoretical discussion. In 'Parting Bites,' she forms her own arguments by both telling stories related to her own experiences, and analysing those told by others.

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Haraway brings Piccinini into an account of colonial histories of food, eating and multispecies relationality.

> Piccinini remembers Australia's and Aotearoa New Zealand's naturalcultural history of introduced species, human and nonhuman alike, with modern examples such as the South and Central American cane toad, shipped from Hawaii to northern Queensland in 1935 to munch repressively on the cane beetle that eats the sugar cane that gobbles up laboring people, who need the money from sugar to feed their children. (2008, 288)

Haraway, in other words, reads colonial histories as multispecies histories, where eating is a question of both ecological and colonial relations. Her approach to colonialism is inspired, among others', by Helen Verran's (1998) and Rose's (2004) work in Australia concerning land struggles and environmental destruction brought about by colonial and extractivist projects (Haraway 2008, 387n6; Haraway 2013). The focus on Piccinini's 'remembering' of these multispecies, colonial histories, in the above quotation can be understood as an aspect of the intersubjectivity of being responsible in the present, which entails 'moral engagement between past and present' that acknowledges violent histories. Remembering is then part of decolonial struggles that simultaneously question the histories written by colonialists.[6]

Haraway, in other words, emphasises the remembering of multispecies colonial histories, which is central to the response-ability in the present. She connects these histories to eating: multispecies encounters and the introduction of new species or the inadvertent travel of these species (with people) have sometimes had surprising, and at times deadly, consequences. Haraway simultaneously attempts to show the deadly and lively complexities of colonial and capitalist endeavours not only to people but to multispecies constellations; she reads eating as a multispecies question related to people's livelihoods as well as to the life and death of nonhuman animals and the transformations of ecological systems. From this perspective, it is crucial that Piccinini:

> remembers the exterminist consequences of well-intentioned introductions of companion species – in this example, for the unintended meal, that is, the endemic amphibians gobbled up by voracious, prolific, mobile cane toads. She knows that the African buffel grass planted for European cattle in the white settler colony outcompetes the native grasses on which the hairy-nosed wombats depend and that the threatened wombats contend for food and habitat with cattle, sheep, and rabbits. (2008, 288)

In this sense, in contrast to the focus of critique in critical animal studies, Haraway's approach to eating is not centred on the question of whether people eat and kill other animals. Instead, through Piccinini's work, she reads eating as a multispecies endeavour embedded in colonial histories where other animals are also actors. An important part of her thinking is the view that multispecies relationality may produce unexpected results, and that categorisations and generalisations such as 'introduced'

6 Rose (2004, 2–3, 12–3). About the importance of questioning the capitalist future-oriented time focused on short-term profits, in contrast to Indigenous understandings of time, and in order to account for the slow violence of extractivism, colonialism and environmental destruction in the Australian context (and in Peru), see Fitz-Henry (2020). For a critique of the silenced but omnipresent racialised – white – possessive logic of land in Australia, see Moreton-Robinson (2015).

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species should not work as a routine basis for justification of, for example, killing these animals. This is because it is contextually specific how relationality works; in this sense, her accounts entail an analysis of power that is neither hierarchical nor one-dimensional:

> Think of the kookaburras, displaced from their own former ranges, eating introduced pest snails and slugs alongside European starlings. Piccinini knows, in short, that introducing species (from another watershed, another continent, or another imagination) is often a world-destroying cut, as well as sometimes an opening to healing or even to new kinds of flourishing. (Haraway 2008, 288)

In other words, contextuality and complexity are inextricably intertwined: because the cases where food and eating are enmeshed in colonial histories and multispecies relations are complex, the power relations involved need to be analysed and any solutions to problems proposed carefully *within particular contexts*. An acknowledgement of the legacies and injustices brought by colonial, multispecies histories and sensitivity to the specifics of each context in terms of different dimensions of power affecting those involved, is important for decolonial food and animal politics in the present.[7] In my interpretation, the focus on contextuality, which includes accounting for both colonial relations and animal agencies, is crucial in Haraway's approach to the political.

ON MORALITY, COMPLEXITY, AND CRITIQUE OF THE TELOS OF CONSENSUS

In the second 'bite,' Haraway continues the theme of complexity by recalling a discussion at dinner at her to-be workplace, the University of California at Santa Cruz, in 1980, when she had given her job talk. During the dinner, her companions did not, however, discuss her talk but a recent birth celebration where some of them had participated, where a meal of the placenta had been shared. Accounts varied about this placenta-eating practise, including '[t]hose who cited an ancient matriarchy or some indigenous oneness with nature as warrant for eating afterbirth material,' who 'got repressive looks from those attentive to the primitivizing moves of well-intentioned descendants of white settler colonies' (2008, 293–4). At the table was also a 'radical feminist vegan' whose perspective allowed eating the placenta, because vegans 'sought meals from life and not from death' (2008, 294).

What was important in this discussion for Haraway was the refusal of the discussants to 'assimilate to each other' while they were exploring the various ethical, political, health-related and other aspects related to the sharing of the placenta meal (2008, 294). Haraway's third bite provides another perspective on debates that are not settled. It concerns hunting practises and consists of the story of a departmental party where a whole feral pig was roasted by an American 'consummate hunter, cook, host, and environmentalist' (2008, 296). Offering a whole roasted pig was experienced as out

7 For an example of a careful analysis of how hope for both people and the conservation of crows entails sensitivity to how conservation politics materialise as part of colonial histories, see van Dooren (2019), Chapter "Provisioning Crows: Cultivating Ecologies of Hope." For other analyses that aim to take into account colonial contexts when theorising animal advocacy, food politics and veganism, see e.g. Deckha (2012, 2020), Kim (2015), Struthers Montford and Taylor (2020).

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of line by some participants, including those according to whom '[t]he department should adopt a vegan practice' (2008, 298).

A key to Haraway's food political thinking is her account of the end result of this encounter, the polite silencing of disagreements and confrontations, which was in deep contrast to the lively discussion of eating the placenta. In the case of the departmental dinner:

> We all avoided conflict. Sliced deli meats seemed tolerable, if barely, and no real collective engagement on the ways of life and death at stake took place. Obligatory "good manners" foreclosed cosmopolitics,[8] with its kind of polite meetings. I think that was a great loss, much worse than ongoing acid indigestion, because the different approaches could not all be assimilated, even while they all made truth claims that could not be evaded. (2008, 299)

In my interpretation, this focus on the importance of disagreement and confrontation, i.e. preferring 'ongoing acid indigestion' to the silencing of disagreements, is the crux of interpreting Haraway's food and animal politics. Even though killing is justified in Haraway's approach, it is not a question devoid of moral significance. Killing involves choices that can be justified while 'knowing there will never be sufficient reason,' which emphasises the difficulty of the choices (2008, 81). Haraway's proposal for the commandment 'Thou shalt not make killable' (2008, 80) in my reading is an attempt to articulate the simultaneous need to make justifications for each killing in a specific context (such as euthanasia of a suffering animal), and to avoid generalised, fleeting justifications (such as justifying the killing of animals by categorising them as 'vermin'). This is far from an approach that proposes gathering various food experiences or that merely notices the existence of 'complexity' and uses it to justify any behaviour.

In Haraway's work, I read a *situated* approach to morality as an alternative to *general moral rules*. In her discussion of the necessity of killing, Haraway illustrates her point with two of J. M. Coetzee's works, *Disgrace* and *The Lives of Animals*. Through these works, exemplified by a volunteer animal caretaker's 'daily service of love [which is] to escort large numbers of abandoned dogs and cats to the solace of death' because no better alternative exists in that context, she argues for a situated perspective rather than general rules: 'How do the relentlessly face-to-face, historically situated, language-defeating suffering and moral dilemmas of *Disgrace* meet the searingly generic, category-sated moral demands of *The Lives of Animals*?' (2008, 81)

What stands out in Haraway's work, including in the food discussion in 'Parting Bites,' is the difficulty of responding when all parties have made 'truth claims that could not be evaded' and when one feels 'them all pulling at my innards' (2008, 299). This incompatibility, or impossibility of a rational agreement in a specific situation, is what Haraway calls a 'cosmopolitical' crisis; this can also result from all the parties having well-developed reasons for their position, and very different commitments, which are incompatible with each other (2008, 298). For Haraway, 'cosmopolitical questions arise when people respond to seriously different, felt and known, finite truths and must cohabit well without a final peace' (2008, 299).

8 Note that Haraway uses the term 'cosmopolitics' after Isabelle Stengers (2005) and other feminist science studies scholars; importantly, the notion of cosmopolitics in feminist science studies is not used in the sense of a call for 'establishment of a "cosmopolitan democracy" and a "cosmopolitan citizenship" resulting from the universalization of the Western interpretation of democratic values and the implementation of the Western version of understanding of human rights.' (Mouffe 2005, 15; Mouffe offers a critical analysis of such a version of cosmopolitics).

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Haraway's critique of dogmatism is, in my view, neither a critique of veganism or animal rights positions *per se*, nor about promoting free choices or opposing 'moralism.' One indication of this is the statement: 'If one knows hunting is theologically right or wrong, or that animal rights positions are dogmatically correct or incorrect, then there is no cosmopolitical engagement' (2008, 299). Haraway is not making an argument against firm social rights positions as, for example, Eva Giraud (2021, 50) has suggested. Being for some lives and not others is a commitment and a decision that may well be based on a firm social rights position, and if the quotation is interpreted in relation to the citation above, Haraway rather calls for *engagement* with others despite the incompatibility of the positions, rather than criticising specific political practises or positions (either hunting or animal rights-based veganism) as such. Haraway's comments can be made sense as accounts of *the political*. In this sense, what emerges is not a depoliticised argument that acknowledges complex relations and uses this complexity to justify any animal exploitation at all. Haraway simultaneously denies relativism, where anything goes, and focuses on disputes where rational argumentation, from her perspective, does not lead to resolving the disagreement. This is exemplified in the following quotation describing the different political positions held by a behavioural biologist and animal advocate (Bekoff) and a hunter and environmentalist (Lease) (2008, 296, 299):

> That I feel them both in my gut is not relativism, I insist, but the kind of pain that simultaneously true and unharmonizable things cause … Bekoff and Lease do not embody contradictions. Rather, they embody finite, demanding, affective, and cognitive claims on me and the world, both sets of which require action and respect without resolution. (Haraway 2008, 300)

In other words, Haraway does not first and foremost argue against a particular political position, for example, veganism, but suggests that sometimes the demands based on different political perspectives and commitments can appear both rational and incompatible, or 'unharmonizable.' Instead of depoliticising animal relations or animal exploitation, her text provides an alternative to the assumptions, in particular deliberative democratic approaches, where rational argumentation is assumed to be able to solve contradictions and pave the way for a stable consensus.[9]

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe's critique of both John Rawls' and Jürgen Habermas' deliberative democratic approaches helps in understanding what is at stake in Haraway's arguments. When discussing different models for democracy, Mouffe criticises Rawls and Habermas for positing the possibility of 'rational argumentation where power has been eliminated and where legitimacy is grounded on pure rationality' (2000, 101). Mouffe attends critically both to deliberative democracy and to those who envision democracy as an ethical enterprise and use, among others, Heidegger as their source of inspiration, arguing that

9 Meijer bases her thought on deliberative democracy but criticises in particular Habermas' approach for its focus on rationality and rational communication, which excludes nonhuman animals from the sphere of politics (2019, 222–4). Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011) seem to accept, like Rawls and Habermas, that deliberative rationality is central to democratic agency, but, in the context of claiming citizenship for (some) nonhuman animals, they propose that 'capacity for political agency is neither necessary nor sufficient for citizenship' (2011, 57). Kymlicka and Donaldson (see also 2015) work within an understanding of the political that assumes a telos of consensus, striving for a general approach that would be feasible across different cultural and historical contexts.

> what is missing in all of them … is a proper reflection on the moment of "decision" which characterises the field of politics. This has serious consequences, since it is precisely those decisions – which are always taken in an undecidable terrain – which structure hegemonic relations. They entail an element of force and violence that can never be eliminated and cannot be adequately apprehended through the sole language of ethics or morality. (2000, 130)

In Haraway's work, the stress on the notion of response-ability becomes understandable precisely through the difficulty, or at times even impossibility of reaching consensus, to find one morality or one set of practises that fits all. This is precisely what Mouffe would call the dimension of 'the political,' a 'dimension of antagonism which can take many different forms and can emerge in diverse social relations, a dimension that can never be eradicated' (Mouffe 2016, no page numbers, see also Mouffe 2013, 2). Importantly, Mouffe has made a distinction between a more hostile antagonism (proposed by political theorist and nazi ideologist Carl Schmitt), and her notion of agonism, which refers to disputes between adversaries, or 'friendly enemies,' who share a symbolic space, which they, however, want to organise differently (2000, 13). As Haraway questions Schmitt's approach to 'enemies' as well as science studies scholar Bruno Latour's 'trials of strength' (2016, 42–43), it is feasible to understand Haraway's focus on incompatibility in *When Species Meet* through the notion of agonism rather than antagonism. In addition, the adversaries Haraway mentions in her numerous examples are most often scholars, activists and/or artists who have a decolonial, ecological or animal advocacy perspective. For Haraway, the demand for response and the related responsibility, in this sense, becomes understandable as a call to foster the political, in particular, within adversaries. Following this understanding of the political, response always involves a decision; everyone has to be 'for some ways of living and dying and not others' (Haraway 2016, 41). For Haraway, rational arguments, or greater good calculations, while important and necessary (2008, 81, 87, 89) do not diminish the need to take responsibility for these decisions as *political*.

Haraway both utilises Derrida's (e.g. 1991) proposal that the conceptual machinery that divides humans and animals needs to be critically analysed, and attempts to respect vegan feminist Carol Adams' 'crucial truths' and her critique of ontologising 'livestock' by this naming (Haraway 2008, 391 note 21; see also Adams 2006, 126). Haraway puts these inspirations to work – in the context of hunting – by questioning the legitimacy of concepts such as 'introduced species' or xenophobic idioms such as 'invaders' to justify killing (2008, 297). Such conceptual manoeuvres *make beings killable*, and precisely such *generalised justifications* become problematic in her framework, which demands contextually sensitive analysis and constant learning of nonhuman animal worlds and the ways in which they are intertwined with people's interests amidst the power relations produced by colonial pasts and presents. Even though Haraway expresses her support for a hunter in "Parting Bites," and even though her work has been used for criticising veganism, as I pointed out in the beginning of this paper, I do not read her comments about veganism or hunting as Haraway's key contributions to discussions about food, eating and animal politics. Rather, through these examples, her text foregrounds her approach to the political, which fosters the acknowledgement of disagreement and contestation, rather than believing in the telos of consensus.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have argued in this paper that Haraway's approach to food and eating is neither depoliticised nor particularly against veganism, as implied by both her sympathetic and critical readers. I suggest that Haraway's contribution is misunderstood if she is only read as a proponent or opponent of some specific practises related to food and eating. Rather, reading her argument in connection to agonistic political theory, and as offering an account of the political that centres incompatibility and contestation, rather than the prospect of forming consensus, provides a more justified approach to her thinking. From this perspective, her main contributions to feminist discussions about food are not her accepting comments about, for example, hunting as such. For Haraway as a feminist scholar, as for Mouffe in her discussion of democracy, acknowledgement of power is crucial. For both, though less so for Haraway, as she does not explicitly frame her discussion within political theory, power and the political are deeply intertwined. Haraway's preference for 'ongoing acid indigestion' in contrast to silencing disagreements (2008, 299), as well as her resistance to positions that appeal to general rules, is about *fostering the very sphere of the political* in situations where '[t]here is no way to eat and not to kill, no way to eat and not to become with other mortal beings to whom we are accountable, no way to pretend innocence and transcendence or a final peace' (2008, 295). Mouffe expresses a similar point in the following way:

> We have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion. The ideas that power could be dissolved through a rational debate and that legitimacy could be based on pure rationality are illusions. (Mouffe 2000, 104).

Mouffe's account helps in seeing the problems in the assumptions of the telos of consensus. Haraway's argument is valuable in that it calls for attention to specifically those situations that are sufficiently complex to involve incompatible interests. Consequently, reaching a consensus that takes into account the interests of all parties involved may not be possible. This might also be the case when calling for vigilance in acknowledging the power at stake when a decision is made or an agreement formed. In terms of veganism, this is important, for example, for acknowledging the disputes among different types of veganisms.

Several years after the publication of *When Species Meet*, Haraway talked about her transformed understanding of veganism, admitting that 'I was really not getting it!' and that 'I now have a profound respect for veganism as a kind of witness, as a kind of No, a kind of loud *No!* as well as an affirmative politics' (Haraway in Franklin 2017, 56). I have elsewhere disagreed with Haraway's account of veganism as a loud *No!* as it seems to assume veganism as *a single* perspective (Irni in press; see also Tyler 2018, 112–3). Importantly, present-day theoretical perspectives that support veganism consist of immensely variable practises and political perspectives. They range from white and middle class, health-related lifestyles and self-care approaches to Black veganism, which critically interrogates the intertwining of race and animality; from dialogical approaches that promote building relations with nonhuman animals by carefully listening to their needs and wishes and anticapitalist activisms that strive for intersectional awareness and question both plant-based capitalism and the structural position of nonhuman animals as 'killable' within biocapitalism, to approaches that

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aim to dismantle all human relations with nonhuman animals, as these relations are necessarily understood as fraught with animal exploitation (see e.g. Donovan 2006; Giraud 2013, 112; Giraud 2021; Harper 2010; Meijer 2019; Pedersen 2019; Polish 2016).

Interestingly, despite this variety of vegan practises and politics, the assumption that veganism is one position seems to persist. Haraway's own account of veganism as a loud *No!* and her earlier interpretation of veganism as a perspective that would dismantle all relations with domestic animals (the so-called abolitionist approach) effectively construct veganism as one approach rather than a sphere of thought with its own political disagreements. Taking into account formulations of contextual veganism that do not propose veganism as a general, universal rule of conduct (e.g. Taylor 2017), and other variations in the practises and politics of veganisms, I suggest that people who strive for vegan politics may also end up with 'the kind of pain that simultaneously true and unharmonizable things cause' (Haraway 2008, 300).[10] This application of Haraway's account of the political differs significantly from the utilisation of her thought for easy dismissals of veganism or disdain of 'moralization' (e.g. Bruckner 2018; Probyn 2016; Rudy 2012). In these previous – in my interpretation, problematic – utilisations of Haraway's texts, rather than in Haraway's thought per se, the problems involved in all available options 'are often simply *acknowledged* and seen as an instance of the noninnocence of any form of relation' (Giraud 2019, 117).

I agree with Eva Giraud's critique of the mere acknowledgement of 'noninnocence,' or the easy dismissal of vegan politics (instead of active *engagement with* the exploitation at hand), which can indeed leave existing hierarchies and exploitative practises intact (Giraud 2019, 117). However, I am interested in situations where the unharmonisable things remain for the time being unharmonisable, and the painful pull in different directions does not cease. I interpret this as the situation that entails what Haraway later called 'staying with the trouble' (2016), living with 'acid indigestion' (2008, 299). To be clear, to regard Haraway's approach to the political as useful does not demand agreement with her takes on hunting, animal testing or other animal political issues. What she captures well, however, is the pull by different non-innocent options that, in their distinct ways, may all cause pain and/or death, and the difficulty of acting in such conditions, from which stems her notion of response-ability. For example, from Haraway's perspective, no general rule or discursive manoeuvre will in itself solve moral dilemmas that can concern, for example, whether to protect particular endangered or 'native' species from extinction by killing other species. Therefore, 'Derrida got it right: 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"' (Haraway 2008, 297). 'Making killable,' such as by calling some species 'vermin,' would eradicate responsibility for these choices related to killing, i.e. avoid the acknowledgement that in conditions that involve, for example, contradictory interests of different species, there may never be fully justifiable reasons for one's actions no matter how one chooses to act.

For assessing and engaging with precisely the situations where, because of the complexity of the case, one must 'cast oneself with some ways of life and not others' (2008, 295), I find Haraway's theorisation useful. To acknowledge the unsettledness, the possibility that any decision to act may foreclose other lives entails a constant vigilance concerning power relations. This acknowledgement of the unsettledness

10 For an attempt to explicate what such unharmonisable issues can mean within vegan practises, illustrated by a discussion of veganism and cat food, see Irni (in press).

could lead, instead of dismissing concerns that differ from one's own, to what Claire Jean Kim (2015, 20) has called 'an ethics of mutual avowal,' or 'an opening, a recognition, a turning toward' other justice struggles. Even though Haraway's own discussion about decolonial struggles is limited, this understanding of the political encourages ongoing, respectful engagement between different animal advocacy, social, and decolonial movements.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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