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Practice as Theory: learning from food activism and performative protest

The chapter draws on two food-activism movements, the transnational Food Not Bombs network and UK-based Nottingham Vegan Campaigns, to examine how activists' navigation of tensions between theory and practice can inform animal geography.

I suggest that engaging with activists – and particularly participating in projects where complex political issues are articulated in practice – provides valuable insights about how to politicize theories that have proven popular in 'third wave' animal geography, such as posthumanism and nonrepresentational theory (Urbanik, 2013; Buller, 2014). I argue, more specifically, that taking the work of activists seriously as theory is useful in balancing the need for concrete action demanded by critical animal studies (Best, 2009; Weisberg, 2009; Dell'Aversano, 2010), with the de-centring of the human called for by animal geographies and 'mainstream' animal studies more broadly (Wilson et al, 2011; Lorimer, 2013). A focus on activism is thus useful in generating dialogue between theoretical perspectives that are often opposed to one another and, in so doing, can help to inform a more critical animal geography, due to the insights these perspectives can bring to one another when placed in conversation.

Food Not Bombs has already been written about extensively elsewhere (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009; Heynen, 2010; Sbicca, 2013), as well as within self-reflexive analyses from activists involved (Crass, 1995; McHenry, 2012), so will be used here as a contextual framework for discussing the tradition that shapes Nottingham Vegan Campaigns. Due to my involvement with the UK-based movement, for the second case-study I will draw on auto-ethnographic experiences (taking a lead from Mason, 2013), to reflect on tensions between political ideals and logistics within these campaigns and how these protests can be seen as negotiating the action demanded by CAS with the challenge to human exceptionalism posed by animal geographies. I reflect in particular on my own experiences of developing tactics to combat power-relations between activists and other parties involved in the events; of using food to open space for dialogue with diverse publics; and of the affective environment generated by the protests.

Critical Animal Studies and Posthumanism

Before exploring *how* activism can create dialogue between critical animal studies (CAS) and posthumanism, it is necessary to ask *why* it is valuable to create this dialogue. Though animal activism cannot be treated as synonymous with CAS as an academic field, they share important affinities. What characterises CAS is its central concern with contesting existing human-animal relations – which are framed as exploitative – and its demand for concrete action (Best, 2009; see White this volume). The field, moreover, emerged from a 'radical animal liberation' tradition and maintains a firm link between theory and praxis, coupled with a commitment to an 'abolitionist perspective' that rejects practices seen to benefit humans at the expense of animals (Pedersen, 2011: 66-67).

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CAS has been criticised, however, for having a totalising stance towards human engagements with animals, which positions 'the animal' as a pure category that should not be interfered with by humans and denies the complexity of human-animal relations (Haraway, 2008: 299). In focusing on animals CAS has also been accused of reinforcing the same exceptionalist logic that underpins human privilege, by grounding: 'its appeals for animal rights on the comparable existence of essential human characteristics … in non-humans – extending the franchise to certain privileged others' (Lorimer, 2013: 12). While, as touched on below, these arguments elide the more nuanced arguments made by CAS,[1] they nonetheless foreground how power-relations within existing political frameworks can lead to inadvertent anthropocentrism.

Posthumanism, in contrast, actively challenges human exceptionalism but has been accused of depoliticizing animal studies, through displacing political frameworks that could contest exploitation (Adams, 2006; Weisberg, 2009). Posthumanist approaches have productively unsettled human privilege by focusing on how the social emerges through complex networks of interaction between human and non-human entities (inspired by thinkers such as Latour, 2005). 'The human', moreover, can only exist through its relation with other actors, in line with Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action (or the notion that entities do not ontologically pre-exist one another, but emerge as distinct entities through their relations). These theories have thus proven useful in informing animal geography, by not only challenging the ontological status of the human as separate from 'nature', but – as Wilson (2009) argues – posing an important epistemological challenge to knowledge-frameworks that privilege the human.

From this perspective, arguments such as those criticised by Lynn – which frame animals as 'resources that lay beyond the boundaries of moral community' (1998: 281) – are untenable; 'the human' cannot be separated out as a distinct category, worthy of special treatment, in order to justify exploitative relationships with other entities. Instead, 'cosmopolitical' approaches to politics are advocated (Stengers, 2010, 2011), which don't begin with fixed categories (such as human and animal) that predetermine who has agency, privilege or the right to speak, and instead take the 'risk' of experimenting with new political configurations (Bird Rose, 2012; Buller, 2014). Related theoretical work such as nonrepresentational theory (Thrift, 2008; Anderson and Harrison, 2010), similarly, stresses the agency of all non-human entities – from stones to insects – (Bennett, 2010), and highlights the difficulties in speaking for or representing the non-human without installing hierarchical relationships that perpetuate human privilege (Roe, 2010).

These theories thus provide insight into the co-constitutive processes through which animals are categorized as commodities – and humans as consumers of these commodities – within the agricultural-industrial complex. Understanding these identities as relational, rather than essential, actively disrupts the inevitability of these categorizations and opens space for new forms of political engagement. In making this argument, however, they also problematize more radical political frameworks that distinguish between different categories of actors, in

order to defend the rights of these actors. While human exceptionalism is challenged, therefore, animals are also prevented from being set apart as a special category worthy of protection, and – from a CAS perspective – this has precluded a more practical understanding of how to intervene in exploitative practices.

Although the 'relational turn' in geography has proven valuable for unsettling human privilege (Buller, 2014: 314), therefore, it has also been treated cautiously by geographers who are attuned to the power-relations embedded within these relationships. The problem, when 'relating' is uncritically celebrated, is that this fails to guard against colonizing relationships between 'humans' and 'nature', especially when these concepts themselves are destabilized (Lorimer, 2013: 11). For this reason geographers have argued it is vital that: 'The ethical potential that proximity and conjoining bring must be held in productive tension with acknowledgements of animals' spatial and subjective requirements' (Collard, 2014: 162). Whilst avoiding essentialist characterisations of non-human life, therefore, the *critical* use of categories that stress the 'autonomy and alterity' of nonhumans can still be useful in guarding against exploitation, as illustrated by Collard's recuperation of the concept of 'wildness': 'The point is not to imply that wildlife can only exist "out there", away from humans, but rather that it might require a degree of freedom that controlled (or even forced) proximity with humans does not permit' (Collard, 2014: 114).

To take these arguments further, the active contestation of animal exploitation (provided by CAS) should also not be dismissed lightly. Even though distinguishing animals as a special category might reinforce essentialist values, the problem is that this categorisation has already occurred via our intra-actions with animals within the agricultural-industrial complex, where they emerge as commodities (Ufkes, 1998; Shukin, 2009). Although posthumanism is useful in de-naturalising hierarchical relations and highlighting *how* animal-commodity and human-consumer categories are actively produced through relationships forged within the agricultural-industrial complex, these processes also require material disruption. In other words, as these categories are created through intra-action, existing human-animal relations require active contestation in order to unsettle the epistemological positioning of animals as 'exploitable'.

Hints for how to reconcile CAS's demands for concrete action with posthumanism's decentring of the human, without perpetuating essentialist notions of the animal, can be found in Buller's argument that the potential for a radical politics to emerge from animal geography lies in: 'the political expression and mobilization of this emergent relational ontology' (2014: 314). In other words, the task is to find a means of politicizing approaches that stress relationality and putting them to practical work. It is in addressing this task that dialogue between posthumanism and CAS is particularly useful, and focusing on activism is a valuable means of opening this conversation.

Posthuman Politics and Activist Praxis

Though often loosely referred to as 'anarchist' (Crass, 1995), a more precise characterisation of the food-activist groups at stake here would be as autonomous social movements (Pickerill

and Chatterton 2006). What is significant about this understanding of 'autonomy' is that it dovetails with debates in animal studies. Traditions of autonomy within activism are distinct from the term's use in reference to liberal-individualism (where people are seen as possessive individuals with the 'right' to do what they want) instead referring to collective practices that are autonomous from capitalism (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), stressing the need for responsibility between members of these communities and necessity of continuous reflection on how individual actions impact upon others. The difficulty is in realising these principles in practice, as this involves crafting alternatives that do not draw on pre-existing political frameworks (such as representational democracy, party or vanguardist politics), as these structures are seen as grounded in liberal-humanist traditions that perpetuate the privilege of certain social groups (Juris, 2005; Nunes, 2005).

Whilst posthumanist theory and autonomous praxis might seem like unlikely bedfellows, in light of tensions between radical geography and nonrepresentational theory (Somdahl-Sands, 2013), what is being grappled with by both is the need to challenge both normative conceptions of the subject as the locus for politics and normative political and ethical values (that result in social and epistemological hierarchies). Indeed these shared affinities have caused new social movements to be a source of inspiration for Stengers (2011) and (to a lesser extent) Haraway (2008: 3). For autonomous activism the difficulty is in developing alternatives to capitalism that do not reproduce the social and cultural hierarchies (such as problematic gender, race and class relations) of the system being challenged, but still maintain space for concrete action. Similarly, the problem for posthumanism is in developing a politics to confront contexts in which an anthropocentric ethics is no longer viable (where liberal-humanism and related concepts such as 'rights' have been problematized), but concrete action is still needed (Braidotti, 2013).

The difficulties in crafting such a politics are brought into focus when considering the task faced by animal rights activists, who are confronted with specific problems in realising nonrepresentational politics. Within autonomous praxis, certain mechanisms (such as consensus decision-making) have been developed to maximise participation by creating space for marginalised individuals to have a voice rather than just trying to represent their interests, even if these processes are complicated to implement (Robinson and Tormey, 2007). This is more problematic to realize when the parties that need to be involved are not human, so demands cannot be dialogically formulated in the manner that has been integral to direct-democracy.

Although a growing body of research is exploring non-verbal means of engaging with animals in order to co-produce knowledge (Greenhough and Roe, 2011; Despret, 2013; Latimer and Miele, 2013), as pointed out in recent debates about the value of Haraway to cultural geography (Roe, 2010; Wilson et al, 2011), work still needs to be done in exploring how to accomplish this when direct engagement is impossible. This problem is compounded in situations (such as the US and UK urban contexts in which the activists examined here are working), where certain types of animals have been systematically rendered invisible as the spaces in which livestock are sold and slaughtered have been removed from the city throughout the later 19th and early 20th centuries (Philo, 1995). Both Food Not Bombs and

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Nottingham Vegan Campaigns, therefore, are faced with the difficult task of making these relations visible, without falling back onto representational political frameworks.

Food Not Bombs

Food Not Bombs is a transnational movement that shares free vegetarian food in city centre locations. The food produced by Food Not Bombs is 'gleaned' from industrial bins filled with discarded products from supermarkets and these edible foods are then prepared and shared with local homeless populations (Sbicca, 2013). These events synthesise food-sharing with performative protest, drawing together a series of political issues relating to corporate waste, the economic and social exclusion of certain populations from the city, food poverty, and the excesses of the agricultural-industrial complex. The significance of food-sharing is – in Clark's words – because 'as a site of resource allocation, food tends to recapitulate power relations' (2004: 22). For Food Not Bombs sharing food that supermarkets treat as 'waste', with populations who suffer food poverty, is designed to highlight the contradictions of consumer capitalism, where excess food is produced but people are still left hungry (Sbicca, 2013). By sharing food in city centre locations, these contradictions can be highlighted in commercial spaces where they are ordinarily naturalised. The protests, therefore, use food as a lens through which to articulate how a range of socio-political issues coalesce around questions of food production and consumption.

In U.S. contexts food-sharing foregrounds a series of social exclusions engendered by neo-liberal economic policy, which has removed 'social safety nets and programs that reduce poverty' (Sbicca, 2013: 4) and led to legislation that discourages homeless populations from inhabiting public space (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009: 620). These trends reinforce commercial rhythms by removing people whose presence could de-naturalise the everyday practices of consumer capitalism (Heynen, 2010: 1229-30). Such policies are what Food Not Bombs contest, with the protests foregrounding food-poverty whilst simultaneously inviting marginalised populations to reclaim public space and 'participate in the work and the making of the city and the right to urban life (which is to say the right to be part of the city – to be present, to *be*)' (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009: 616; italics in original). The role of the protests is thus to make issues that are usually hidden visible (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009; Heynen, 2010).

It is not just the exclusion of homeless populations that is made-visible, however, as the food is created from ingredients that have been expelled from commercial spaces, in order to highlight waste. Thus, even though the food is vegetarian or vegan, gleaning is in explicit resistance to the 'yuppie health food' conceptions of veganism that have been recuperated as ethical lifestylism (Clark, 2004: 26). In line with DiVito Wilson (2013), instead of describing groups such as Food Not Bombs as 'alternative food networks' it is therefore important to position them as radical-autonomous projects to distinguish them from highly-classed food practices that have often been cited as alternatives to 'Global Food' (the examples Carolan (2011) gives being heritage seed banks, organic farming co-operatives and backyard chicken coops).

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These tactics, however, also illustrate dangers associated with the desire to represent particular issues or populations, as foregrounded by both posthumanism and nonrepresentational theory as well as by autonomous praxis (such as Haraway's arguments that the desire to represent can lead to inadvertent political ventriloquism, 1992, 2011; or the danger of informal hierarchies that has been a preoccupation of activists, Nunes, 2005). In the case of Food Not Bombs, this has sometimes manifested itself as hierarchical relations between activists and homeless people; when food sharing was banned in Orlando for instance, activists were keen to maintain the protests and face arrests, whereas more vulnerable homeless populations were not able to take this risk (Sbicca, 2013: 9). There is also the, broader, danger of food sharing becoming a political statement, which serves an anti-capitalist activist agenda, and interpellate hungry people into activist performances (Heynen, 2010: 1228). The protests thus run the constant danger of slipping back into representational modes of politics, which reinforce rather than challenge social inequalities.

In line with Chatterton and Pickerill's emphasis on the reflexive nature of autonomous politics (2010), however, these dangers are acknowledged by activists who deploy several tactics to attenuate these problems. Firstly, they invite people they are sharing food with to participate in every aspect of the protests (from gleaning to cooking) (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009). Secondly, they explicitly frame their actions as 'sharing' food rather than 'distributing' it, in an attempt to challenge inequalities between activists and those consuming the food (Heynen, 2010: 1228). Activists therefore try to make the protests participatory and create space for the other parties involved to actively make a difference in shaping public space (rather than simply following the activists' lead). In Chatterton and Pickerill's terms this is invariably a 'messy' process, but in contesting commercial rhythms by co-producing 'geographies of explicitly mutual aid' (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009: 626), the protests can be seen as cosmopolitics in action. This is because, in publicly and visibly sharing food, activists open themselves up to the 'risk' of having their actions and preconceptions shaped by the diverse publics who engage in the protests with them.

Despite being characterised by some of the tensions faced by autonomous activism more broadly, therefore, Food Not Bombs still provides valuable insights for moving beyond representational politics, whilst still maintaining a commitment to concrete, interventional action. The protests explicitly intervene in the everyday practices that occur within urban space by using food as the nexus for intersecting forms of exploitation. They do this by constructing a new geography of urban space that is premised on an alternative logic, which directly contests the commercial forces that shape these sites and reintroduces actors that have systematically been rendered invisible by these forces (from homeless populations to discarded food). Crucially, though, these performances do not rely on activists representing these issues, but co-produce alternative food geographies with actors who are ordinarily excluded from these spaces.

For the purpose of animal geography, further work needs to be done to elucidate the role of veganism and vegetarianism within food activism. Resonating with the centrality of veganism within CAS, where it is seen as concrete means of challenging exploitation, the rejection of animal products is one of the three principles of Food Not Bombs (along with consensus

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decision-making and non-violence; Crass, 1995: 4). The role of food requires further exploration, however, in light of criticisms levelled at vegan praxis both within activism and posthumanist theory.

Vegan Praxis

Research on ethical vegetarianism has foregrounded its value as a disruptive practice, which departs from normative food-consumption practices in the global north (Dietz et al, 1995; Fox and Ward, 2008; Kwan and Roth, 2011). Veganism in particular has been associated with radical politics, as a marker of anarchist identity (Clark, 2004 Portwood-Stacer, 2012). These findings resonate with activists' own positioning of veganism as a situated response to the animal exploitation that intersects with other exploitative social relations (Giraud, 2013b). In activist reflection on Food Not Bombs, for instance, the role of veganism is described as 'a political act against the meat and dairy industries and to promote ecological sustainability, equal distribution of food and resources throughout the world, human health and animal liberation' (Crass, 1995: 6).

These arguments, however, overlook the contentious role of veganism within activist praxis. Clark, for example, points out that veganism 'reveals ideological fissures within [anarcho-] punk culture', due to its normative status, leading to individuals 'flaunt[ing] meat-eating as a way of challenging punk orthodoxy' (2004: 23). As I have outlined elsewhere, it is also the locus for debates within autonomous activism where it is seen as something that has become unquestionable, with the potential to inadvertently exclude certain social groups who are unfamiliar both with the practice and the political rationale underpinning it (Giraud, 2013b). Such concerns intersect with framings of veganism that appear within 'mainstream' animal studies, such as Haraway's concerns about it becoming a totalising norm that forecloses context-specific relations with animals (2008: 80), or in cultural geography, such as Guthman's suggestion it is highly classed (2008).

Paying closer attention to how veganism is actually articulated in food protests provides an alternative perspective, however, as in these contexts it is enacted less as a totalising imperative and more what Kheel characterises as an 'invitational approach' to engagement with animal rights (2004: 335). By sharing food with the public, people are invited to engage in practices that are antithetical to those promoted by the agricultural-industrial complex and to engage in dialogue with activists about these foods. These practices, therefore, could be understood as a form of prefigurative politics – that uses concrete action as a basis for exploring alternative ways of living – rather than the imposition of activist norms and values.

Nottingham Vegan Campaigns

Nottingham Vegan Campaigns emerged after activists, formerly involved with bi-annual protests against McDonald's, began to incorporate food give-aways into their protests. These events were held on an irregular basis from spring 2008 onwards, but throughout 2010 we organised monthly protests that culminated in a multi-target protest, which consisted of five food stalls and five activist literature stalls that were spread across the city (Veggies, 2014a;

see fig. 1). A focus on these protests is useful in indicating how practices advocated by CAS (such as veganism) could complement the de-centring of the human that has been central to recent work in animal geography. Or, from a different perspective, how insights from activist praxis could politicize posthumanism and related theories and (to go back to Buller's argument) find 'political expression' for an 'emergent relational ontology' (2014: 314). Before exploring how these protests can inform theoretical work, however, it is useful to establish their context.

Figure 1

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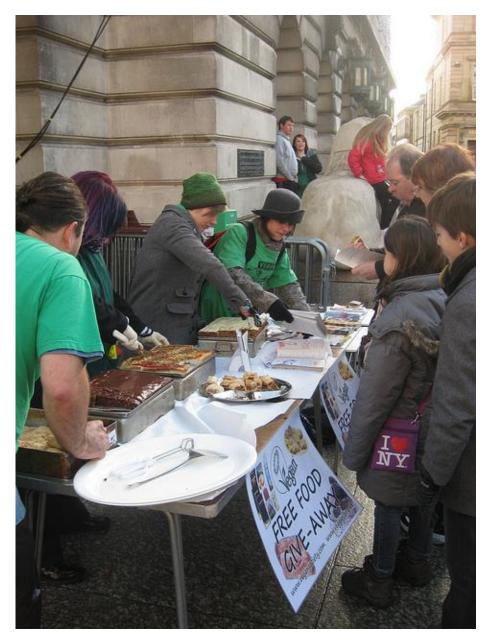
Food give-aways are a central part of grassroots vegan advocacy practices in the UK (Vegan Society, 2012; Veggies, 2014b), with numerous local groups and the Vegan Society themselves supplying resources to aid local initiatives (indeed we received a small grant from the society to fund Nottingham events). This background of outreach, however, could be seen as problematic in undermining some of the key tenets of autonomous praxis, as set out by Nunes's argument: 'Nothing is what democracy looks like […] By deciding on an ideal model of what it should be like, all we are doing is creating a transcendent image that hovers above actual practices' (2005: 310-11). If veganism becomes what a politically radical diet 'looks like', therefore, it is in danger of being incompatible with autonomous ideals, as well as being the sort of 'totalizing' value that is criticised by posthumanism.

The Campaigns' associations with outreach, however, should not overshadow the influence of autonomous activism on the protests. Nottingham Vegan Campaigns was initiated by members of long-standing Nottingham catering collective, Veggies, whose campaigning history informed the protests' tactics and scope. Since their launch in 1984 Veggies have had a long history of involvement in grassroots protest (with *Peace News* describing them as 'the field kitchen of the UK activist movement'; Smith, 2009). Most significantly, Veggies had a key role in UK anti-McDonald campaigning during the late 1980s/early 90s, which culminated in the 'McLibel' trial (1994-7) where two activists were sued for their role in distributing a 'fact sheet' critical of the corporation. Veggies were also threatened with legal action for distributing their own pamphlet, but slightly altered its wording and continue to distribute it today (Vidal, 1997; Wolfson, 1999; Giraud, 2008).

Veggies' *What's Wrong With McDonald's* pamphlet (n.d.), used McDonald's to argue that global food corporations foster exploitative social relations that implicate food-workers, animals and consumers. They argue that these corporations create new food geographies by transforming urban space on a local level (competing with local business, de-skilling and depressing wages in the catering industry, generating increased levels of waste) and impacting on sites in the majority world that supply its products (from workers producing happy meal toys, to labourers working in ranches on ex-rainforest land).[2] From the outset Veggies sought to make these political arguments more accessible; indeed the collective originated from a playful symbolic critique of McDonald's, whereupon members: 'from Nottingham's animal rights group had the idea of presenting the manager of a local McDonalds with a huge veggie burger to represent an ethical alternative' (Veggies, 2014c). The collective then established their own veggie burger van near McDonald's (1985-2000), to act as a direct counter-point to McDonald's food (Smith, 2011). In 2008 Nottingham Vegan Campaigns revived this idea by incorporating food give-aways into existing 'days of action' against McDonald's that were led by local animal rights groups and it was at this point that I became involved in the actions, going on to co-facilitate all of the 2010 protests. Prior to 2008 the anti-McDonald's days mainly consisted of distributing pamphlets, so we originally saw cooking veggie-burgers and distributing soya shakes as a playful way of attracting more attention. The success of these tactics in facilitating dialogue with the public, however, led to us organising give-aways on a more regular basis.

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On one level the food give-aways dovetailed with the interventional tactics of Food Not Bombs, as sharing food in city centre locations was a response to exclusions occurring at a local level in Nottingham. The multi-target protest of December 2010, for instance, was a specific challenge to Nottingham council's decision to prevent charitable or community groups using the Council House (a large, central, local-government venue in Nottingham) and the prohibitive charges levied at using the city's market square for more formal events (although commercial organisations were still able to use both).[3] Like Food Not Bombs, therefore, Nottingham Vegan Campaigns sought to challenge the exclusion of local people from public space by sharing food outside the Council House and in the centre of the market square, amidst a commercial Christmas market (see fig. 2).

Figure 2

As with Food Not Bombs, however, certain logistical problems led to these protests having an uneasy relation with the systems they were contesting. While Food Not Bombs have been

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criticised for relying on waste from the system they are condemning (Sbicca, 2013: 9), Nottingham Vegan Campaigns could be seen as strengthening neoliberal logic. Instead of gleaning, the Nottingham protests used food donated from local independent businesses and cooperatives, running the danger of promoting localism and/or veganism as an 'ethical' alternative. This approach could, therefore, be seen as problematically elitist and even as engendering hierarchical relations between activists and publics under the guise of 'bringing good food to others' (Guthman, 2008: 433). In the UK this was a particular problem due to similarities with political rhetoric by the right-wing Conservative government, whose 'Big Society' agenda (also launched in 2010) advocates rolling back the state and placing social responsibility on individuals, resonating with broader concerns about radical community initiatives compensating for neoliberal policy (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014).

We developed several tactics to counter these problems. One of the central initiatives was facilitating skill-share workshops, and inviting members of the public to join us in preparing food. Even this, however, ran the danger of didacticism in light of highly classed cultural discourse surrounding healthy eating in the UK (Warin, 2011; Piper, 2013). Like Food Not Bombs we framed these workshops as sharing skills (rather than teaching them) to counter this danger, and ran the workshops for free in autonomous spaces. Even this approach had its drawbacks though, in making it difficult to involve non-activist audiences; whilst the protests themselves generated engagement with members of the public, few people were willing to actually enter activist space and participate in the skill-shares themselves. Throughout 2010, therefore, we were constantly forced to adapt our tactics in the face of difficulties, but – rather than seeing this as problematic – it is indicative of the 'messy' approach to politics that is integral to autonomous praxis (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). The constant need to reflect on tactics, is actually what prevents certain practices congealing into what radical food politics should 'look like' (Nunes, 2005). Following Harris (2009), it is also important not to pessimistically read neoliberal logic into alternative food projects and, instead, explore 'different readings' of these initiatives to see how they can 'open discursive spaces outside the perceived dominance of neoliberalism' (2009: 3).

In the context of the food give-aways, the performative sharing of food is what provides scope for this type of 'different reading'. Though give-aways share similarities with single-issue outreach, their realisation – as performative resistance to existing uses of public space – enables vegan politics to be articulated in a more radical manner. Veganism's role in these protests is not simply the promotion of an alternative diet, but enacted as part of an explicit contestation of corporate power. In an *Indymedia* article about a food-giveaway in 2010, for instance, I stressed these different elements of the protest:

> …despite superficially (and characteristically cynically) trying to re-brand themselves as an 'ethical', 'green' company – the same problems remain in relation to workers' rights, litter, unhealthy food, exploitative marketing aimed at children, animal welfare, and the general steamrollering of anyone who tries to get in their way! [...] The most important part of the day was the amount of people who approached us and wanted to have long and serious discussions about the reasons behind the protest. It was particularly refreshing to

> have groups of teenagers approach us and want to talk at length about the importance of considering how what you eat relates to so many other issues. ('eva g', 2010)

Aside from my (somewhat hyperbolic) criticism of McDonald's I felt it was important to emphasise the two aspects of the protests we found especially valuable: The way they drew together different forms of exploitation – resonating with Clark's aforementioned argument that 'as a site of resource allocation, food tends to recapitulate power relations' (2004: 22) – and how they opened space for dialogue about these overlapping forms of exploitation.

It is here that the role of veganism, as an *enacted* practice, became particularly important. By cooking and serving vegan food as a direct counter-point to McDonald's products, people were encouraged to sample these alternatives and engage directly with us. The fact that the food was vegan was especially significant, as it played an important role in inviting critical questions from the public about what we were doing and facilitating dialogue about existing human-animal relations.

Enacted in this way veganism does not have to function as an abolitionist imperative (even if many activists *personally* believe that animals should not be used for food), but instead can be used to unsettle categorisations of humans-as-consumers and animals-as-commodities that are ordinarily reinforced by fast food restaurants. In this instance, cooking and serving vegan alternatives outside McDonald's directly disrupts the purchase of Big Macs, intervening in the particular set of relations that naturalise these categories on an everyday basis. The protests thus address Pedersen's argument (coming from a CAS perspective) that posthumanism should not just 'rethink' but '*remake*' human-animal relations (2011: 74; italics in original). This goes back to the importance of challenging existing consumption practices on both a theoretical *and* a material level in order to disrupt the commodity-consumer relation and the categorisation of humans (as privileged subjects) and animals (as exploitable objects) that is engendered by it. In opening dialogue about these categories – and intervening in practices that reinforce them – the protests, therefore, seem to bear out Pedersen's argument that veganism can be 'one among other transformative moves' (75), which can facilitate this 'remaking' of relations.

From the perspective of nonrepresentational theory, Roe's work indicates further possible intersections between food give-aways and animal geographies. Roe contends that even simple acts, such as consuming a fast food burger, necessitate specific affective environments (a complex assemblage of actors is involved in creating the burger's taste and promoting it as an appealing item of food, for instance). She suggests, conversely, that it is possible to transform these consumption practices by creating an 'affective ethic that continues to materially connect the burger to the birth, killing, cutting-up and processing of an animal's body' (2010: 262). Roe herself focuses on how this has occurred within the assemblages of relations involved in meat production, due to animal sentiency emerging as an actor that shapes the production process. Her example explores how this sentiency manifests itself in the quality of meat; because stressed animals produced meat with higher pH level, improvements in welfare were seen as essential (Roe, 2010: 275). Such transformations are deeply problematic from a CAS perspective, though, being due to commercial rather than

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political imperatives, with agency only manifested with the animal's death (in the 'poor meat' it produces).

The question that is informative in developing dialogue between these nonrepresentational arguments and CAS is whether it is possible for *activists* to make the 'affective connections' Roe outlines, and challenge existing human-animal relations without reinstalling representational rights frameworks. It is in this light that food give-aways are particularly informative. Roe herself suggests the performative preparation and cooking of food, in local food festivals for instance, can 'present, discuss, [and] elaborate novel engagements with food through tacit, sensual, affective experiences' (2013: 3). She goes on to argue that, when such events actively involve would-be consumers in these performances, they can offer 'provocative, visceral encounters with food' that disrupt normative consumption practices through creating new relations with food-production. Her argument is that, despite the temporary nature of these engagements: 'one-off 'events' that mix the familiar with the strange and wacky, can be effective at punctuating the everyday and in so doing become the stuff of memories, informing without didacticism' (2013: 4).

These arguments resonate with existing theorizations of autonomous food politics, such as Sbicca's claim that, in 'making-visible' a set of relations pertaining to food consumption, and involving the public in enacting alternatives, Food Not Bombs attempts to 'mend metabolic rifts' that exist between urban-dwellers and food production processes that are ordinarily rendered invisible (2013: 5). The performative serving of vegan food by Nottingham Vegan Campaigns can, likewise, be seen as a way of making the connections Roe describes, through altering people's bodily engagements with the spaces around McDonald's. The cooking and serving of veggie burgers in unexpected locations, encourages people to actively smell, taste and consume alternatives whilst simultaneously 'punctuating' the everyday spaces in which McDonald's burgers are normally consumed. In this way the protests do not simply create dialogue about the consumer-consumed relationship, or temporarily intervene in this relationship by replacing veggie burgers for Big Macs, but alter the affective dynamic of the commercial locations in which these relations are enacted and reinforced on an everyday basis.

Conclusion

The de-centring of the human called for by posthumanism and nonrepresentational theory, which has proven so valuable for animal geographies, can be productively reconciled with CAS's call for concrete action by deriving conceptual insights from activism. Developing this conversation is important in overcoming both self-defeating essentialism and representational discourse, whilst actively contesting animal exploitation. It is also important in light of the need for both a conceptual and material challenge to existing human-animal intra-actions, to disrupt the categorization of animals-as-commodities and humans-as-consumers. Autonomous activism is a fertile source of insight, as it combines a desire to craft a concrete politics with a move away from representational practices. Its 'messiness' and constant self-reflexivity makes realizing this politics complex, but is also what makes it cosmopolitical and

Giraud E (2015) 'Practice as Theory.' In: R Collard and K Gillespie (eds). *Critical Animal Geographies*. New York and London: Routledge.

demonstrative of how the politics advocated by posthumanism and nonrepresentational theory could be – in Buller's terms – 'operationalized'.

In relation to food-activism, both Food Not Bombs and Nottingham Vegan Campaigns demonstrate how existing social relations, which render certain actors 'exploitable' can be contested within specific sites that naturalize and reproduce these relations on an everyday level. They also, however, demonstrate difficulties in realizing this politics and the need for constant reflection and adaption of tactics. In relation to food more specifically, despite the positioning of veganism as the established way of challenging the agricultural-industrial complex (a stance shared by CAS) which, seemingly, runs counter to autonomous values and posthumanist theory, its *enaction* in food give-aways demonstrates its more nuanced value. In these contexts it does three things to (in Pedersen's terms) re-make human-animal relations: as a non-normative diet in the UK it opens space for dialogue about why activists are promoting it; in the serving of burgers, existing consumption practices are intervened in; and in the cooking and preparation of food affective relations are developed that re-connect animal bodies with the spaces in which they are consumed. Food give-aways, therefore, illustrate how complex and concrete contestations of animal exploitation can occur in practice, making this praxis informative for developing dialogue between posthumanism, nonrepresentational approaches and CAS.

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[1] See Pedersen, 2011; Giraud, 2013a for a more sustained defence of CAS.

[2] There is obviously extensive debate surrounding the broader resonance of these claims; more specifically, McDonald's contested these arguments within the 'McLibel' trial. For nuanced analysis of the relations fostered by food corporations see Goodman and Watts (2005).

[3] These issues emerged via internal email list discussions between activists who were attempting to organise an event at the Council House, but were told that community events were no longer allowed in the building due to 'wear and tear', which prompted another activist to forward an email he had received about a commercial event that was taking place in the same location. When inquiring about the market square we were told it would cost £1000 (with additional fees for marquee hire, electricity and for any stalls we set up ourselves) and we could also only use specified contractors.

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