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Critical Veganism: A Posthuman Understanding of 'Becoming With' Others

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**CRITICAL VEGANISM: A POSTHUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF ‘BECOMING
WITH’ OTHERS**

A Master’s Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts, Communication

By

Kensley Dressler

May 2020

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CRITICAL VEGANISM: A POSTHUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF ‘BECOMING WITH’ OTHERS

Communication

Missouri State University, May 2020

Master of Arts

Kensey Dressler

ABSTRACT

This thesis lays the groundwork for a critical vegan orientation to posthuman communication research. Critical veganism attempts to do the least amount of harm to nonhuman beings, a shift that decenters the human in scholarship and focuses on the material realities of nonhuman beings. This orientation helps create a praxis for posthuman research that is in line with a new materialist approach to ontology, is anti-capitalist, and strives to do the least harm. Previous research methods tend to be anthropocentric in nature, thus leaving out nonhuman experiences from communication research. Using both autoethnography and multi-species ethnography as my methods, I apply a critical vegan orientation in ways that reimagine research methods from a posthuman perspective. The first application uses performative autoethnography to explore the inherently political and embodied nature of leaving animals off my plate in Evangelical Christian social contexts. The second application of critical veganism uses both autoethnography and multi-species ethnography to examine photos of cats that my sister and I took along the Camino de Santiago. These photos helped to open up the perspectives of other human pilgrims around us to the nonhuman beings sharing the Camino space. A critical vegan orientation better suits communication scholarship, urging us not only to include nonhuman others in our research, but to continue the conversation about best practices for doing so.

KEYWORDS: critical veganism, posthumanism, animal studies, new materialism, multi-species ethnography, performance

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to Lando, my cat, for helping me become a better communicator with cats and humans alike.

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INTRODUCTION

Within the past decade, veganism has started to attract widescale attention in the West,¹ with vegans in the United States making up about 3% of the population in 2018 (Reinhart, 2018)² and many celebrities and influencers promoting a vegan lifestyle. However, despite veganism's rise in Western popularity, it also remains popular to criticize its legitimacy. Popular criticisms include that “no animals will actually be helped simply by one person ceasing to eat meat” (Rachels, 2017, p. 106)³, and that the causal link between buying animal products and supporting factory farming cannot be true, as it would mean that too many capitalistic economic transactions would be unethical by the same principle (Mills, 2019).

These attacks tend to have a view of veganism as a puritan ethical system, one that requires perfect adherence from its followers (see Fromm, 2010). In Western popular culture, veganism can seem to necessitate perfectionism, as demonstrated by popular vegan YouTuber Rawvana. When Rawvana was caught on Snapchat eating fish, her followers quickly took to social media to “cancel” her, creating many response videos outraged that she would lie to her fans (see Mic the Vegan, 2019). In Rawvana's apology video, she described her long-time health struggles and how, after many attempted vegan solutions, she finally listened to her doctor's recommendation to start including fish and eggs back into her diet.⁴ The controversy surrounding

¹ Of course, veganism has been prevalent in non-Western contexts for hundreds of years, with religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism developing vegan/vegetarian practices within certain strands largely stemming from the doctrine of “ahimsa,” or non-injury (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

² It is difficult to claim by how much that percentage has increased in the past decade, as previous studies are less reliable with smaller sample sizes.

³ It is important to note that James Rachels was vegetarian and a promoter of animal rights. This view was not his own, but rather a problem he addressed.

⁴ Since the time of writing, Rawvana took down her initial response video, titled “This is what is happening.” To watch clips of this initial video, see Mic the Vegan's (2019) summary of the situation.

Rawvana is an example of many such cases within the popular culture vegan community that can leave many vegans terrified of perceived “failure” and many meat-eaters with the idea that in order to consider oneself “vegan,” they have to cut out all animal products immediately— a change that seems daunting to those who may empathize with the cause.

Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria Jr. (1973) argues that ethical systems should “be related directly to the physical world and real human (and nonhuman) situations, not abstract principles...believed to be valid at all times and under all circumstances” (p. 72, parenthesis mine). The present-day popular culture vegan ethic, while concerned with the physical world and both human and nonhuman bodies, can lack the flexibility for humans to apply this ethic in the very real and complex situations that many humans encounter every day. By preferencing the abstract principle of a vegan ethic never to consume animal products, this inflexibility can sometimes inadvertently cause more harm and suffering. In the example of Rawvana, the vegan community’s response to her situation might have dissuaded onlooking meat-eaters who had been toying with the idea of reducing their consumption of animal products.

This problem is not to say that veganism should be written off entirely, however. My critical vegan orientation to posthuman communication scholarship can help to mitigate some of the problems seen in popular culture veganism while simultaneously informing posthuman communication scholarship toward a praxis that can act to break down the human/animal and nature/culture binaries in a way that takes ideas off of the page and into the bodily experience of living beings.

My first chapter outlines the theoretical support for a critical vegan orientation through tracing posthuman scholarship in the field of communication and other disciplines. Communication has long drawn upon the work of philosophy and other branches of the

humanities in order to frame the way we write about what communication is and who communicates. Communication scholars including John Durham Peters (1999), Brisini & Simmons (2016), Collins (2019), and many more have already brought posthuman perspectives to the discipline, asserting that by only looking at human to human communication, we are missing a much larger and colorful part of the discipline. Before the posthuman and new materialist turns in communication scholarship, we may have asked questions concerning how humans communicate *about* animals or *to* animals, but we were not asking how humans communicate *with* nonhuman others (which goes on to encompass even more than nonhuman animals). Scientists, such as quantum physicist Karan Barad (2007), were discovering more and more about how we are fundamentally entangled with other entities, meaning that we “lack an independent, self-contained existence” (p. ix). Because of this interconnectedness, Barad and many others have started to weave the sciences and humanities together to ask these sorts of questions. The interdisciplinary nature of this topic and previous research leads me to demonstrate the need for a critical vegan orientation through both communication scholars and those who do not fall neatly along disciplinary lines.

I explain critical veganism as a reflection upon veganism through a critical lens that strives to achieve the least amount of harm to both human and nonhuman beings. Systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, and classism, are inextricably linked with the oppression of nonhuman animals. Discussion of these systems is not helpful to the beings undergoing oppression unless and until we take action to change their/our bodily experiences. Therefore, critical veganism is not just a theoretical approach, but also a praxis to consider material, physical harm to bodies.

While some may not initially start their journey down the path of critical veganism with a concern for nonhuman bodies, because of the aforementioned interconnectedness, there is justification for critical veganism due to human suffering alone. Climate scientists are very clear about the impact of animal agriculture on global warming. Koneswaran and Nierenberg (2008) report “the farm animal sector is the single largest anthropogenic user of land, contributing to many environmental problems, including global warming and climate change” (p. 587). They go on to describe that animal agriculture is the largest contributor to climate change— more than the entire transportation industry. Since we have not reduced our global consumption of animals since 2008, despite the increased demand for vegan and vegetarian products (MarketWatch, 2019), the problem continues to exacerbate itself. In order for our species to survive the climate crisis, we need to take collective radical change in order to reduce our emissions, so reducing animal consumption seems like a logical way to efficiently reduce our emissions and try to ensure our species’ survival.

My chapter titled “Take, Eat, This is my Body” applies a critical vegan orientation to the simple act of joining for a meal with friends and family, specifically my Evangelical Christian friends and family who are rooted in a dominion mindset toward nonhuman animals. This chapter uses an autoethnographic methodology to compare three separate stories about meals shared with those around me, and how the simple act of leaving something off of my plate is inherently political, whether or not I originally wanted it to be. Sharing a meal is a cultural ritual that comes with different expectations depending on the cultural context (Adams, 2014). Our embodied experience with “economic and cultural forces” shape our “food systems and our experience of them” (Wilkerson, 2017, p. 121), meaning that sitting down for a meal with others can be a powerful embodied act pushing toward social change.

The final chapter, titled “Cats of the Camino,” is a multispecies ethnography of my journey along the Camino de Santiago in northern Portugal and Spain. While I draw upon my three different Camino experiences, I specifically focus on my summer 2019 journey with my younger sister, Noel, when we trekked the Camino Portugués route from Porto, Portugal, to Santiago, Spain. Our goal was to shift our focus to nonhuman pilgrims and to help our fellow human pilgrims start to notice the others along the trail. The Camino journey serves as a metaphor of an individual’s journey of creating a praxis in their own life that would not only create less harm toward nonhuman others but start to purposefully communicate and build relationships with the other beings around us.

This thesis lays the groundwork for a critical vegan orientation in posthumanist communication scholarship. Critical veganism is not simply a subject of discourse; it is, instead, an ethically embodied communication praxis. Communication practices that center critical veganism have the potential to impact social change significantly, particularly as this change relates to dominant environmental-capitalist discourses.

POSTHUMANISM AND COMMUNICATION: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Much of today's communication scholarship centers the human— not a surprising realization considering that humanist philosophy has historically shaped much of the discipline (Brisini & Simmons, 2016). However, beginning with Peters (1999) at the turn of the century, communication scholars have started to scratch the surface of nonhuman communication by decentering the human as the focus of our inquiries. Many communication scholars have tried to pin down theoretically what communication is, who communicates, and how we do it. The field's perspective on this topic has radically changed since the field's inception, when the communication model depicted communication as a one-way process, not something that is reciprocated between communicators (Wahl et. al., 2017). Celeste Conduit (2006) describes communication as relationality, where our relationships with other things are always in flux, and individual things do not exist. She says that this relationship is the “process of the interaction of forces” (p. 6), which sounds similar to physicist Karan Barad's (2007) claim that we “lack an independent, self-contained existence” (p. ix). The similarity between the work of communication scholars and physicists, the humanities and the sciences, further reveals how our work should inform one another's inquiries.

If communication is relating, then humans are constantly relating with nonhuman beings, which opens up the field to posthuman perspectives on communication. Posthumanism is a necessary philosophical turn for the field of communication, and we are already seeing insightful theoretical (Peters, 1999; Chiew, 2014; St. Pierre, 2015), rhetorical (Barrett-Fox, 2016; Smith

Pfister, 2017), performative (Brisini & Simmons, 2016; Wood, 2012; Collins, 2019) , and autoethnographic (Haas, 2016) work operate from a posthumanist lens.

Posthuman inquiries within the discipline of communication currently lay largely in the performative and rhetorical subfields.⁵ In their examination of the 40-year publishing history of *Text and Performance Quarterly*, Simmons and Brisini (2020) delve into prevalent historical trends throughout the journal and end the piece with future directions for performance studies in communication, which they see as two main, yet sometimes competing, branches of critical work and posthumanist work. Situated in the posthumanist performative vein, Gingrich-Philbrook (2016) asserts that “the posthuman question about the status of the animal is a communication theory question” (p. 202). What Gingrich-Philbrook refers to here is that previous philosophical thought has defined the human subject as the opposite of the animal and in contrast to the animal, so when we reconsider the status of the animal, it causes us to reexamine both what it means to be human and how we conceptualize the communication process. In performance scholarship, this theory question translates to finding embodied practices to decenter the human and explore the nonhuman world we continually communicate with and that which communicates without human intervention. Similarly, Gray (2010) explores the nature/culture binary and what it may look like when we start to break that binary down. Using a backpacking metaphor, Gray poses:

Today’s progressive politics... seems like a group hike where we haven’t done a very good job of sharing much space in each other’s packs. If we did, we might find that we carry some pretty common burdens. We might find that there is more in common between us than really different. More in common, say, between: wilderness preservation and eco-justice, African Americans and GLBT rights, Latina/o, the working poor, peace activists, women’s rights, and so forth. All I know is that if the radical capitalists and the radical religious fundamentalists can see past the contradictions in their positions to create a coalition that so forms the dominant power that reigned supreme... then the rest

⁵ Of course, there are exceptions, with other subdisciplines of communication starting to expand into posthuman scholarship as well. For example, see Henry’s (2009) article on conducting (anti)humanist performance reviews, which bridges organizational communication and rhetoric.

of us can see past our individual interests to the larger concerns that unite us. Don't we have to? (p. 219)

Gray demonstrates that these two future directions for performance studies in communication—critical work and posthumanist work—do not have to be in competition with one another, and at their core, are interconnected. Breaking down animal/human and nature/culture binaries through posthuman scholarship can lead to ecojustice for other disempowered groups facing suffering from systems of oppression.

While undercurrents of posthuman inquiries started in performance studies, similar undercurrents started appearing in rhetoric as well. However, in the rhetorical subfield, early posthumanist inquiry began as more transhumanistic inquiries, such as the 2000 special edition of the *Journal of Applied Communication* (2019, “Perspectives”). However, since 2000, the topic has grown significantly in rhetorical analysis, both in discursive analyses (see Dobrin, 2015) and branching out to new materialist perspectives (see Proppen, 2018; Smith Pfister, 2017; and Stormer & McGreavy, 2017). While posthumanism in rhetoric has become more accepted holistically, there still seems to be a deep fissure between scholars who approach the topic discursively, as the discipline has historically viewed communication, and those who are trying to shift rhetoric toward a new materialist ontology.⁶ This latter perspective, sometimes referred to as “material rhetoric,” inquires about ecologies and networks (Edbauer, 2005; Rickert, 2013), things and objects (Barnett, 2010; Marback, 2009), and material media analysis, including “digital materiality” (Stagliano, 2015). For instance, Edbauer (2005) argued that rhetoric could reinterpret Bitzer's (1968) original rhetorical situation as instead a rhetorical “ecology,” as nonhuman forces inherently shape human rhetoric. Bost and Greene (2011) later went even

⁶ There is an argument to be made that at its core, rhetoric has always been an embodied, material practice given both its academic history in elocutionary schools (which later developed into what we know as performance studies) and given its insistence of the rhetor as the method.

further to say that human bodies offer an immanent materialism, and that through these bodies, “affect precedes consciousness” (p. 443). However, while Edbauer and Bost and Greene were still primarily focused on the way that ecologies shape humans, Scot Barnett (2010), building off of philosopher Graham Harman’s Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), departs from this human-centric framing to argue for an “object-oriented” rhetoric which opens rhetoric up to other nonhuman beings.

While posthuman and new materialist inquiries become more prevalent throughout broader communication scholarship, it is helpful to understand what posthumanism is by comparing it with humanism and, more recently, transhumanism. Humanist philosophy shaped much of the scholarship coming out of the twentieth century. Humanists see the subject “as radically free and constituted through self-determination and transparent access to its own consciousness” (Barad, 2007, p. 45). Humanists praise human rationality and work toward human interests. For the humanists, intellection is framed as a strictly human capacity (Barad, 2007, p. 149). Since humanists see humans as the only beings capable of rational thought, and rational thought as a marker of the highest form of being, then the human becomes the center of our focus. This view creates a binary division between humans and animals, as the humanists do not see humans as animals, but rather above animals on the hierarchy. If we are not animals, then, humanism follows that we are separate from nature, thus creating the nature/culture divide. Whether this belief leads people to dominate the earth or to act as stewards, both responses stem from the centering of the human. Our attitudes toward animals were, and sometimes still are, grounded in scholars such as Kant (1998)⁷, who believed that

⁷ For a more in-depth examination of Kant’s understanding of personhood and how it relates to nonhuman others, see Broadie & Pybus (1974). It is important to note that previous understandings of personhood from Kant to Singer have been highly criticized for dehumanizing people with disabilities who may not qualify as “people” under certain definitions (Johnson, 2012).

nonhuman animals were not persons because of their lack of intellect, and therefore that humans can use animals as means unto our own end. Present-day Kantian Christine Korsgaard (2004), has developed upon Kant's initial ideas, claiming that there are some intelligent animals that learn from previous experiences, and these intelligent animals should be granted personhood. However, scientists started to learn more about nonhuman animals that challenged human exceptionalism. We learned that other species use tools (Goodall, 1986), have language (Schusterman & Gisiner, 1988), experience emotion (Bekoff, 2000), and even grieve their loved ones (King, 2013). These scientific discoveries started to work in tandem with an emerging philosophical approach—posthumanism.

Cary Wolfe (2010) argues that the idea of posthumanism can be traced back to two separate genealogies.⁸ First, posthumanism could be traced to Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, where Foucault claims that humanism is its own dogma which has prejudices and assumptions "which are themselves a form of the 'superstition' from which the Enlightenment sought to break free" (Wolfe, 2010, p. xiv). Foucault's response is to write that the concept of "man" came about because of a "fundamental change in knowledge" as a construction of power, which means that we can also deconstruct the concept of the Enlightened, objective, rational "man" to bring the concept to an end (Foucault, 1971, p. 387). The second genealogy of posthumanism can be traced to the 1946-1953 Macy conferences on cybernetics in tandem with systems theory (Wolfe, 2010). Drawing on work from Gregory Bateson, Warren McCulloch, Norbert Wiener, John Von Neumann, and many others, systems

⁸ Much of my understanding of posthumanism stems from the work of Cary Wolfe, as I find that at this time, I have the most in common with his branch of posthumanism. While Wolfe currently resides in the discipline of English, he has previously published in *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (Wolfe, 2014), making his inquiries very similar to those we hope to answer in communication.

theorists removed “human[s] or *Homo Sapiens* from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, or cognition (Wolfe, 2010).

Today, the meaning of posthumanism is hotly contested, but largely acts as a turn away from anthropocentrism to recognize humans as equal with and necessarily interconnected with nonhuman animals, technology, and other beings. Donna Haraway (2008) argues that the process of “becoming with” is how humans relate and communicate with non-human animals.⁹ This process happens when we mutually constitute one another by breaking down society’s “Great Divides.” We break down the divides of nature/culture and human/animal when we realize how interconnected we are with the non-human animals and technology in our lives. Doyle (2011) has since reinforced this point by arguing that nature is culture and humans are animals, which is an essential realization to attempt not only to restore our relationships with other beings, but also to mitigate massive global hyperobjects¹⁰ such as global warming (Morton, 2013).¹¹

I hold to Cary Wolfe’s understanding of posthumanism described above, but other recent posthumanists would greatly contest his understanding. One such group are the “transhumanists” of the cyborg strand of posthumanism. Joel Garreau (2005) describes transhumanism as an evolution toward humans becoming “post-humans” through using technology to evolve far beyond our present-day capacities, both intellectually, physically, and emotionally. However,

⁹ I am including Donna Haraway as a posthumanist despite Haraway referring to herself as a transhumanist, explained shortly. Despite this distinction, Haraway’s scholarship seems to fit best from a posthuman perspective, and many posthumanists have been greatly impacted by her work. Haraway’s work seems to fit less neatly with transhumanist thought as it stands today, which is why I do not consider her a transhumanist.

¹⁰ By “hyperobject,” Morton (2013) means something that is “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (p. 1). Hyperobjects are *viscous*—“they ‘stick’ to beings that are involved with them,” they are *nonlocal*—“any ‘local manifestation’ of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject,” and they “exhibit their effects *interobjectively*”—“they can be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects” (Morton, 2013, p. 1). One can only see a part of a hyperobject at any one moment in time, making them larger than what we can fully perceive.

¹¹ One of the most pressing hyperobjects of our time is that of global warming. Morton (2013) specifically uses the phrase “global warming” instead of “climate change” because he argues that the phrase “climate change” does not adequately convey the ecological trauma that is happening, but rather functions as an excuse for many not to take action. For the same reasons, I choose to use the phrase “global warming” throughout this research as well.

this aim for humans to exceed our current limitations to become a sort of literal “uber-mensch” still draws its philosophical underpinnings in humanist thought. Transhumanism reinforces the human/animal dichotomy by trying to escape grappling with our nature as animals, but rather wanting humans to transcend materiality; therefore, transhumanism “can be seen as an intensification of humanism,” and the polar opposite of Cary Wolfe, John Durham Peters, and others’ understanding of posthumanism (Wolfe, 2010, p. xv). Furthermore, embodied praxes of transhumanism have been critiqued as hyper-masculine (Keeling, 2012), as some praxes, such as athletes in the sports industry, use transhumanist practices and imagery to promote an idealistic strong, aggressive, and dominant man operationalized for purposes of war. It seems that not only does transhumanism take scholarship back to humanist undercurrents, but it may also have the tendency to reflect some of the same human problematic systems as well.¹²

While related to Wolfe and Peters, Haraway’s strand of posthumanism is still deeply held by many scholars. While I have deep respect for Donna Haraway and her influence on the field, her understand of how posthumanism manifests in our lived experience creates two limitations of posthumanism,¹³ both in how she responds to working non-human animals and to animal suffering.

The first limitation of Haraway’s strand of posthumanist scholarship is how she addresses working non-human animals. Haraway (2008) focuses on the way humans are interconnected with nonhuman animals through work. She appeals to Marxist ideology to say that dogs add

¹² To clarify, when many think of transhumanism, they think of things such as people being able to use prosthetic legs and other bodily modifications which truly can improve humans’ material experiences for the better. I am in no way against these sorts of modifications, but rather think that they are better explored under a posthumanist framework rather than a transhumanist one.

¹³ Haraway’s work has influenced my thought greatly, but few other posthumanist writers have breached these two topics since. It seems as if Haraway brings up some tough question about the nature of humans’ relationships with nonhuman animals, provides her answers to these questions, and few others have directly wrestled with these answers since. I think that by looking through a critical vegan lens, we can find better answers to these questions.

value to our economy, and by doing so, we value them in return as biocapital. We buy them expensive dog food, we use them to help rehabilitate prisoners, and we even prescribe them Prozac when needed. However, this understanding of working nonhuman animals does not necessitate their consent. It is wonderful that some animals are starting to be valued in a capitalist society, but these working animals cannot consent to their jobs as workers. Since we cannot verbally communicate with other animals, humans do not have a system in place that would allow for nonhuman animals to consent to providing labor, and rarely do we even try to consider what that nonhuman animal would prefer to do. We have laws in place saying that children are not able to provide consent, adults who are under the influence of substances are not able to provide consent, so it would follow that a being could not give consent when we cannot know that we are correctly interpreting that being's communication. Nonconsensual labor is not equal exchange, but rather rooted in uneven power disparities that need to be addressed. This argument stems from the philosophical underpinning of how we traditionally justified animal agriculture: if there is an equal exchange, then animal agriculture is justified. If the farmer provides lifelong food, shelter, and security for the nonhuman animal, then the farmer is justified to kill the animal for meat or some other commodity at the end of the animal's life (Foer, 2018). However, even if one adopts that framework as ethically sound, under the current system of factory farming where nonhuman animals are living in horribly inhumane conditions with little regard to their quality of life (Foer, 2018), this philosophy still does not hold up in our present age. This power disparity is further demonstrated though one of Haraway's (2008) own examples— the sheepdog. While sheepdogs may cost a farmer significant sums of money, therefore being treated well as an economic commodity, we do a disservice by not looking to the sheep in this example. One animal (the farmer) is deciding that another animal (the dog) will

help them use and eventually slaughter a third animal (the sheep). While it is easy to say that the farmer and dog have a symbiotic relationship with mutual benefits, the farmer still decided the capitalist hierarchy of dogs being treated better than sheep. Under a posthuman framework, maybe the farmer is “becoming with” the dog, meeting the dog’s gaze with a posture of curiosity. However, if the farmer is not doing the same for the sheep, then there is still an unjust system of speciesism at play.

The second limitation of Haraway’s posthumanism is rooted in how she allows for animal suffering and provide a rationale as to why animal suffering can be justified. Haraway’s (2008) argument is that shared suffering is required to know nonhuman animals’ pain. She provides the example of a man named Baba Joseph in the young adult novel *A Girl Named Disaster*. Baba Joseph works in a scientific lab in Zimbabwe where he is experimenting on guinea pigs to find a solution for a local sleeping sickness impacting cattle and people (Haraway, 2008, p. 69). Joseph justifies putting swarms of biting flies on the guinea pigs as a part of this testing process by putting his hand in the cage with the guinea pigs. He says, “I do this to learn what the guinea pigs are suffering... It’s wicked to cause pain, but if I share it, God may forgive me” (Haraway, 2008, p. 69). Baba Joseph continues to be an example throughout the chapter as a way in which humans can “become with” the nonhuman animals they use in labs and cause to suffer in other instances. Anyone advocating for better relations between humans and their other animal counterparts has to interact with the problem of evil in this sense— what about the animals that we directly inflict pain upon? This is an area where previous posthumanist scholarship does not provide a satisfying answer. Haraway’s (2008) response to this problem is that we should mitigate suffering where possible and share suffering when it is not possible. Yet, Haraway’s understanding of shared suffering sounds incredibly close to a common theological

explanation for why a good God would allow suffering to happen to good people. Some argue that God suffers in solidarity with God's people, a view expressed by Christian theologian Elizabeth Johnson (2018) when she writes, "... Jesus' brutal death enacts the solidarity of the gracious and merciful God with all who die and especially with victims of injustice, opening hope for resurrection amid the horror" (p. 50).

However, the problem with this viewpoint is that the end result is actually more suffering. Baba Joseph's guinea pigs do not care that Baba Joseph is suffering with them—they simply want to be out of suffering. Sharing in suffering does not solve the problem for the oppressed, but rather simply helps the oppressor to feel better about themselves, as demonstrated when Baba Joseph says, "It's wicked to cause pain, but if I share it, God may forgive me." Baba Joseph is directly appealing to God as the arbitrator of morality in this context. Haraway's current philosophy argues:

suffering + more suffering = solidarity and relationality (and a sense of morality)

I find this equation to be a start to answering the problem, but Stephanie Jenkins goes further in claiming that Haraway's analysis does not create a helpful praxis.

My criticisms of Haraway are similar to Stephanie Jenkins' (2012) critique of these same issues. Jenkins goes on to claim that, "Although these purported posthuman theories reject the ontological dualism between human and animal, hierarchical dichotomies reside within these theories' normative presuppositions... Everyday practices, including what (or who) we eat and wear, mark nonhuman animals as killable, maintaining the last vestiges of humanism" (Jenkins, 2012, p. 1). Jenkins calls for a posthuman praxis that continues to break down the binary between the human and animal in action as well as thought. What would such a praxis look like? Jenkins (2012) proposes a vegan ethic as an appropriate response.

I believe that veganism is a necessary component (although not sufficient, as any set of ethics always will be incomplete) of an affective feminist ethics of nonviolence. When built upon feminist ethics, vegan practice is not a universal obligation or a fantasy of purity but rather a “bodily imperative” (Weiss 1999, p. 129) to respond to another’s suffering and to reject the everyday embodied practices that make certain animate others killable. (p. 1)

That veganism calls for a bodily imperative is necessary, but we need to go deeper into what this “vegan ethic” looks like in order to clarify the average person’s bodily imperative. Due to other human-made structures of oppression, completely cutting out animal products is not always immediately possible for all people. For instance, some people live in food deserts with little access to the produce necessary to live on a vegan diet. Other people may still require some animal products because of a doctor’s recommendation. Many others may simply be daunted by cutting out animal products immediately despite intellectually agreeing with a vegan ethic. Jenkins alludes to these realities by contrasting her view with the common narrative of impossible “vegan purity” (Fromm, 2010), but we are still left wondering what exactly vegan nonviolence looks like.

While Jenkins expanded upon Haraway’s initial understanding of posthumanism in order to address the material realities of suffering that still occurs under Haraway’s rationale, we need clarity about the people who fall in between. How do those who may initially be opposed to veganism start to move toward the bodily imperative Jenkins calls for? She mentions that her view of veganism alone is not sufficient, which is where I see my critical veganism helping to challenge not only the new convert to posthumanism, but the seasoned vegan as well.

A Critical Vegan Orientation

Posthumanism needs a critical vegan understanding to resolve some of its current philosophical limitations. Critical veganism is a nonviolent approach in the tradition of Jenkins

(2012) which tries to do the least amount of harm to nonhuman animals on both individual and societal levels. Critical veganism stands in contrast to what writer and YouTuber Mexie (2019)¹⁴ describes as “vegan™,” which is a privileged, mainly-white version of veganism that only cares for eliminating animal products out of one’s diet and tries to be anti-political.¹⁵ In contrast, critical veganism has three pillars: The first pillar is that veganism is inherently political and thus anti-capitalist. The act of leaving something off of one’s plate or out of one’s shopping cart makes a political statement, whether or not the person chooses to admit that fact. Critical veganism’s second pillar is that veganism practically looks like trying to do the least amount of harm, which can vary from person to person. On one hand, if a person lives in a food desert or does not have extra time to commit to education about safely switching to veganism, then reducing animal consumption practically does less harm than if that person would continue at their normal rate. In this case, the person would be considered a flexitarian, or someone who still occasionally eats meat. On the other hand, just because someone else is eating a fully vegan diet does not mean that they are doing the least amount of harm to nonhuman bodies. Critical veganism challenges the seasoned vegan to explore new and creative ways to advocate for change. The final pillar of critical veganism is that veganism is an embodied act that has to do with the way bodies are treated, giving it a new materialist understanding of being. Critical veganism is not just a discursive term to describe a phenomenon, but a physical way of interacting in the world.

¹⁴ While a successful YouTuber, Mexie also graduated from the University of Toronto with a PhD in Human Geography and Political Ecology where she focused on the intersections between political economy and global environmental governance. Mexie is now an anti-capitalist, vegan activist who uses her academic background to fuel her advocacy.

¹⁵ The vegan™ philosophy also underlies the rising trend of those who call themselves “plant-based” instead of vegan because they want to avoid the inherent political nature of veganism. Many vegan food companies, such as Beyond Meat and Califia Farms, also self-identify as “plant-based” as a strategic marketing choice that sounds less political.

Going more in-depth into the first pillar of critical veganism, this approach is inherently anti-capitalist. Critical veganism sees the interconnectedness of the oppression of human bodies and nonhuman bodies under capitalism. Haraway (2008) I think correctly critiques Marx for his humanist understanding of “labor” as human labor, which is only a part of a broader lively capital. Today, neoliberal international conversations on biodiversity policies focus on trying to quantify the use-value of nature to humans— a “post-natural turn” where the mainstream conversation shifts away from nature as something outside of human life to “protecting the parts of nature that best contribute to human well-being” (Dempsey, 2016, p. 19). Leaders also rank naturecultures (Haraway, 2003) when making environmental decisions, which results in “an instrumental and economic approach to deciding which species matter and which can be more marginal to human concern” (Dempsey, 2016, p. 20). These leaders have to constitute rhetorically a hierarchy of nature as a resource because capitalism pushes for more and more resources to keep growing—one of the contradictions of capitalism (Aune, 2001; Marx, Engels, & Wood, 1998). While critical veganism does not solve the problem of hierarchy (for example, doing the least harm may still involve disinfecting one’s home and killing thousands of bacteria), it does acknowledge that capitalist structures and neoliberal policies are what have caused global warming and the rapid loss in biodiversity (Žižek, 2011), so these systems determining hierarchy of beings clearly are not promoting the least amount of harm. Rather, capitalism and neoliberalism necessarily push human interests (and only the interest for a select number of humans) above the interests of nonhuman beings.

The second pillar holds that critical veganism should “do the least harm.” Instead of Haraway’s (2008) charge to share in nonhuman animal suffering, a critical vegan approach strives to eliminate suffering when at all possible. Through doing so, we work toward coming

into a bodily right relation with non-human beings, which stems from womanist Delores Williams' response to the theology discussed above (Coleman, 2008).¹⁶ While Williams is concerned with black women's relationship with God, Haraway's understanding of posthumanism is rooted in feminist analysis, so we can extend Williams' critique to apply to patriarchal relations between humans and nonhuman animals. Haraway's viewpoint still allows for the exploitation of nonhuman animals' labor, which is systematically related to the way that black women's labor was substituted for that of white men and women in the United States due to a theology of subservience (Coleman, 2008). If the elimination of suffering, an idea that Haraway describes as idealistic, is absolutely not an option (perhaps you cannot afford the vital surgery to preserve your cat's life, or perhaps you were not aware that a company inhumanely used animals to make a product you already bought), then our response should be to take instead responsibility for the creation of that suffering in the world. The suffering will still exist, but we are not trying to trick ourselves into feeling good so that we can continue to create that suffering. Instead, we are feeling the weightiness of the suffering so that we understand its gravity and truly work to eliminate suffering in the future. If there is a way to have solidarity with animals simply by sharing in their suffering to some inherently lesser extent, then there is more room for the suffering to continue and no substantial change to take place. This alternate response to non-human animal suffering does not presuppose that we can ever really feel and understand suffering in the same way that nonhuman animals do, but instead calls us to change our actions, thus changing the system of oppression for the future.

¹⁶ This pillar is a direct response to Haraway's understanding of "sharing suffering" that I previously outline. Shifting to a framework of attempting to do the least harms creates less suffering in the world instead of more suffering. This framework also does not let humans feel eventually justified in causing pain for nonhuman beings, but rather asks us to deeply question the necessity of that pain and its consequences.

The final pillar of critical veganism recognizes that any action along this path is an embodied act. Rather than being separate from nature or nonhuman beings, humans are critically interwoven with them. Merleau-Ponty, as understood by Diana Coole (2010), believes that “one must pursue an ontology that ‘defines being from within and not from without’ where ‘Nature, life, Man’ are understood as manifestations of diverse folds rather than as essentially different categories” (p. 96, citing Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p 220). New materialist ontologies meet this standard, as they do not privilege human bodies. Rather, “all bodies, including those of animals (and perhaps certain machines, too) evince certain capacities for agency” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 20). New materialism pushes people to consider the bodily realities of nonhuman animals in the world, which is inadvertently connected to a critical approach. By leaving meat off of one’s plate, by not supporting companies who treat nonhuman animals as objects, or by protesting for nonhuman animal rights, one is embodying Haraway’s (2008) “becoming with” the other. Conversely, when one eats pork, we call the bite of food on the fork “pork,” but it does not change the fact that it is really a pig’s material body. Terms such as “beef,” “pork,” and “veal” conceal the true material nature of what one is eating— that one’s body takes in another’s body and the bodies merge together. A new materialist embodied perspective draws attention to how a critical vegan approach can be disruptive of community while simultaneously broadening who is included in that community in the first place.

Praxis of a Critical Vegan Journey

The way the critical veganism relates with other relationships between human and nonhuman animals can be further understood through Figure 1. Critical veganism is the in-between journey, so metaphorically, it helps to relate these concepts to the journey of the

Portuguese Camino de Santiago (discussed more in chapter five). Most people who trek this traditionally Catholic pilgrimage start in Porto, Portugal and trek one of various routes toward the holy city of Santiago, Spain. By relating critical veganism to this pilgrimage, I place emphasis on the outcome of actions taken and highlight the different places or paths along the pilgrim's journey toward the same destination. This metaphor allows for more flexibility to do the least harm given one's resources and cultural context.

Porto. Most people start in Porto, which represents the dominion mindset. In Porto, we are taught by society that humans are different and better than animals, thus we live in a humanist framework. This mindset of traditional humanism privileges the human as the center of existence.

Santiago. Once we start to understand that there is no ontological difference between humans and animals, or if we start to respect nonhuman others as our equals, then we start along the journey toward Santiago, or the vegan imaginary based upon Dolan's (2008) performative utopia. This vegan imaginary is not fully possible to reach anytime soon, but envisioning the imaginary helps us guide our daily decisions to become more and more nonviolent. Dolan (2008) gives the example of the feminist movement, claiming that the feminist movement from its inception has always been utopian, but this utopia helps activists envision a better society. Once we envision what that society looks like, we can start to make small steps in that direction.

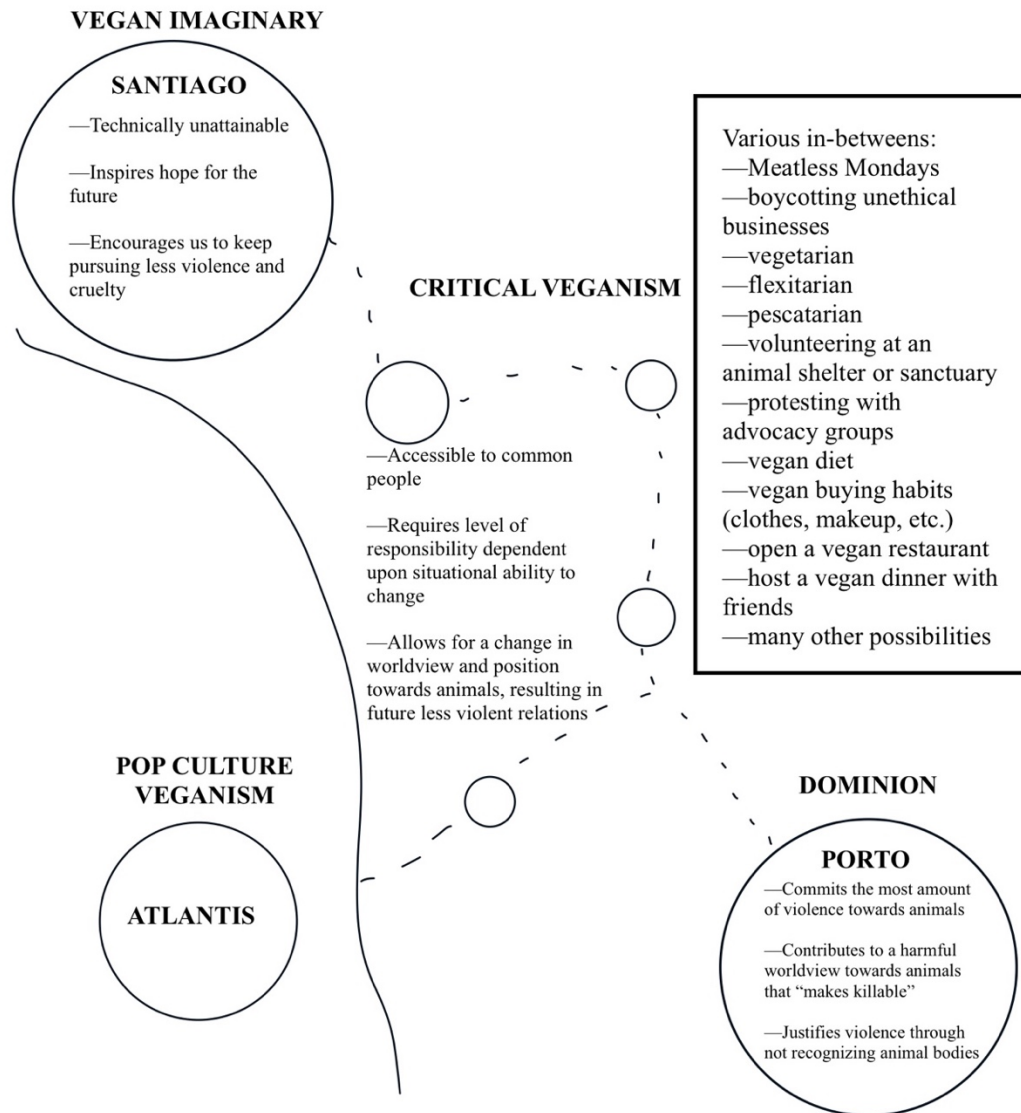


Figure 1. A visual diagram of the Camino metaphor for Critical Veganism.

Critical Veganism. There are various stops between Porto and Santiago, and these stops look different for different people, just like those hiking the trail. If you have enough resources and energy, maybe you can make it all the way to a vegan diet sooner than someone who does not. Maybe your doctor has advised against a fully vegan diet for health concerns, so you decide to organize in your community for push policies to improve the lives of animals harmed by our animal industrial complex (Noske, 1989).

Others may not have as much energy and may have to stop earlier along the path, such as eating meatless Mondays or boycotting businesses that test on animals. There is not one correct path toward Santiago, but rather every pilgrim makes their own path. This journey is critical veganism.

Atlantis. Sometimes, pilgrims can fall off the path by walking toward a different end destination. Instead of walking toward Santiago, some may fall into the trap of journeying toward Atlantis. Atlantis is not a real place, nor is it helpful to journey toward it, as the pilgrim will walk off of the land entirely. Atlantis represents popular culture veganism, or Mexie's (2019) vegan™. This image, created by marketers and influencers to sell a product, is not actually attainable, because if it were, there would be no more product to sell. Atlantis tries to be anti-political, not realizing that veganism is inherently a political, embodied act. If pilgrims wander down this road, Santiago is not in sight.

Veganism And/As Religion

In order to understand better critical veganism and what makes it distinctive, it helps to know more about how veganism both interacts with religion and can function as religion. Most vegans throughout recent human history have chosen to become vegan because of a system of belief that we traditionally think of as religion. The ethical belief of “ahimsa,” founded in Jainism which then spread to strands of Buddhism and Hinduism, is a belief of noninjury (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Ahimsa strives not to cause harm to other beings, and depending on how closely a person holds this belief, it can mean as little as abstaining from eating cows, and many Hindu do, it could mean a vegetarian diet, and it could also go as far as the many specific practices in Jainism which attempt to prevent injury to insects, plants, and microbes. Of

course, there are various other interpretations of ahimsa, but the Jains, who hold the belief as fundamental, strive for this nonviolence because they see any action, word, or thought that harms another being as in turn also hurting the self.

Of course, veganism's history is not only intermingled with Jains, Hindus, and Buddhists, but vegan practices have also stemmed from other religious beliefs. Cohan (2016) argues that veganism is supported by Jewish texts and doctrines and that "a disproportionate number of rabbis have adopted vegetarian or vegan practices" (p. 15). Additionally, Christians throughout the religion's history have countered the Christian's oft-cited dominion passages by distinguishing what may be permissible and what is best for animal welfare (Young, 1998).¹⁷ Some prominent Christian vegetarians include John Wesley, Fred Rogers, Salvation Army founders William and Catherine Booth, and St. Clement of Alexandria (Wayner, 2011). Robinson (2013) adds that many indigenous religions, including her own Mi'kmaq people, have grounding for veganism due to central myths regarding humans and their relationships with nonhuman animals as siblingly and intertwined. Clearly, strands of veganism and vegetarianism underly many broader religious systems and have for hundreds of years.

However, journalist Amelia Tait (2019) notes that more recently in Western cultures, "a once-fringe food fad has been consumed by capitalism," (p. 37) writing of the various businesses in the UK and abroad who see veganism a way to increase profits in an ever-more-competitive food industry. While Tait and others seem to pit this new capitalistic approach to veganism as antithetical to veganism's ethical roots, I argue that this is not the case, as capitalism functions as

¹⁷ See Young (1998) for a hermeneutical analysis of why Christian ethics should support a vegetarian diet given the ills of factory farming and animal testing. For a more present-day look about how Christian ethics should support both feminism and veganism, see Adams (2017).

a religion, thus transitioning pop culture vegans from “veganism and religion” to “veganism as religion.”

Capitalism as a religion may seem odd at first glance, but not according to Eugene McCarraher (2019), who writes:

[C]apitalism is a form of enchantment—perhaps better, a disenchantment, a parody or perversion of our longing for a sacramental way of being in the world. Its animating spirit is money. Its theology, philosophy, and cosmology have been otherwise known as “economics.” Its sacramentals consist of fetishized commodities and technologies—the material culture of production and consumption. Its moral and liturgical codes are contained in management theory and business journalism. Its clerisy is a corporate intelligentsia of economists, executives, managers, and business writers...Its iconography consists of advertising, public relations, marketing, and product design. Its beatific vision of eschatological destiny is the global imperium of capital, a heavenly city of business with incessantly expanding production, trade, and consumption. And its gospel has been that of “Mammonism,” the attribution of ontological power to money and of existential sublimity to its possessors. (p. 22)

Under this understanding of capitalism as a religious system, the capitalist is not always inherently acting for their own greed or gain—rather, sometimes the capitalist’s actions may not benefit themselves personally, but rather strive to achieve the further reproduction of the system itself (Žižek, 2011).

Claiming capitalism as religion can still feel counter to our everyday colloquial use of the word. Yet, when trying to pin down a definition for religion, religious studies scholars run into problems, as “there are no features that are uniquely common to all the traditions we typically call religions” (Martin, 2014, p. 2). Previously attempted definitions seem close with how we would define “culture” and can accidentally include things commonly not viewed as religions or exclude things commonly held as religions.

If capitalism functions as religion, then some forms of veganism, including Western pop culture veganism, do as well. This type of veganism is a subset of Žižek’s (2009) ecology of fear, which he describes as a new replacement for Marx’s description of religion as the opiate of the

masses. Much like religion has historically done, Žižek argues that capitalism now uses an ecology of fear to placate its followers into inaction against the underlying system. This ecology of fear, applied to pop culture veganism, gives an “unquestionable authority, which can impose limits” (Žižek, 2009, p. 439). Žižek gives the example of an executive who claims that their “true self” is not the cut-throat capitalist they portray at work, but rather the loving, family man they are at home. He turns this example on its head by claiming that in a capitalist system, the executive is creating a fiction of their identity to absolve themselves of guilt.

When relating to ecologies of fear underlying popular culture veganism, a prime example is found in the YouTube video “Do All Vegans Think the Same?” In this video, the creators gather five different vegans together to show how they have differing interpretations for what veganism means and how it looks in their personal and social lives (Jubilee, 2019). There are two characters who quickly reveal that they have almost opposite interpretations of veganism. Richard tends to take a hardline ethical stance on whatever the question may be. He sees veganism as a strict ethical stance against oppression. Richard describes how he has taken the “Liberation Pledge,” which means that he refuses to sit at the same table with others who are eating animal products. His rationale for taking this pledge is because he does not want to support industries that oppress animals, and he mentions that he then is able to have conversations with people about why he chooses to sit elsewhere. Richard is ridiculed and mocked in the comments of the video, as he tends to represent the puritan vegan stereotype that hypermasculinity loves to hate—making him the target not only of hypermasculine viewers, but of fellow vegans as well.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, is more flexible about her identity as a vegan. She describes how she will occasionally buy meat products for her family members, as she wants to promote

her diet by being an example instead of forcing it on someone else. We see throughout the video how Elizabeth tries to counter stereotypes about vegans by remaining likable, which is demonstrated by her popularity in the comments section of the video and in other vegans' response videos—Elizabeth is who many “apolitical” vegans want to be seen as. She is harmless, nonthreatening, and keeps her “diet” to herself for the most part.

Both of these two extremes fall into the trap of “veganism as religion” by making veganism about personally upholding a set of beliefs. They fall into Žižek's (2009) idea of an ecology of fear by wanting to personally absolve themselves of individual guilt regarding the oppression of nonhuman animals rather than considering the societal impacts. Richard has a strong personal conviction which we can easily relate to religious fervor. Sometimes, his actions may do more harm than good for actually reducing societal animal consumption. By refusing to eat with others who are consuming animal products, at best, Richard misses out on the opportunity to share how delicious his food may look despite the lack of animal products. He most likely misses out on many conversations with people who are opposed to his belief system, thus confining his main conversations to those who already agree with him enough to eat vegan when they are around him. He holds to his personal beliefs at the expense of being able to share those beliefs with others. On the critical vegan model, he is at risk of, if not already, heading off the path and out toward Atlantis.

Elizabeth similarly prioritizes the personal over the societal. Her biggest concern seems to be being judged by nonvegans as “pushy,” so instead she protects her personal identity and largely does not push. While both she and Richard are personally reducing harm to nonhuman bodies, moving them both out of Porto, or a dominion framework, Elizabeth seems to be stopped along the path. She is not able to expand her impact beyond herself for fear of judgement or

societal rejection. If she would challenge herself to have difficult conversations with family members in a kind and respectful way or examine other forms of systemic oppression of nonhuman beings, she might be able to expand her reach.

In contrast, a critical vegan approach is less about upholding a strict ethical system with hard rules, but rather assessing each situation given the context to best determine how to reduce harm for nonhuman beings. This perspective has a more pragmatic, societal goal of reducing overall harm. Upholding a personal, pious, puritan view of veganism is less important than the material impacts of each action. This view looks different for each person based on their resources available and cultural context. From this perspective, maybe the actions Richard and Elizabeth are taking really are what is best for them in their contexts, and maybe they really do prioritize the societal impacts over personal piety—after all, we only see a short 12 minutes in this video of their broader lived experience. However, given my experience as a vegan in 2019 when this video was produced, there is a third character in the video who I think better represents a critical vegan orientation.

Nikki tends to fall in between both Richard and Elizabeth, and in her responses, we get the sense that she does challenge her friends and family to confront the political on their plates, but that she goes about the topic in a loving way. She describes inviting her family over to her house for meals and doing the cooking herself so they can enjoy being guests. Because of this, she says that her mom, dad, and brother have all actually become vegans themselves, where she would not have imagined they would make that choice before. Nikki credits her loving approach to the subject and the experience of her vegan takes on food her family enjoys as reasons for this shift in perspective.

Nikki seems to embody a critical vegan orientation toward her actions, as she considers how she can make the most impact on other's choices as well. She represents the imperfect vegan subject—one who can be forgiven for her trespasses when they may not always line up with other's puritan-aligned beliefs but is simultaneously held to an impossible standard by her “congregation” of other either vegans or nonvegans. She may not always take the strictest stance like Richard, so she will not always please her vegan congregation, but neither will she always sit passively by, thus upsetting her nonvegan congregation as well. However, the imperfect vegan subject attempts to navigate these alternatives in order to create the least amount of harm societally, a society which includes nonhuman others, and thus takes a critical vegan orientation to each choice. Because of taking the societal into consideration, Nikki's impact reaches outside what she could individually do in an exponential way.

Issues of religion are inherently tied with veganism and how it functions in today. Veganism can not only stem from individual religious beliefs, but can act as a religious belief itself, similarly to how capitalism functions as religion on a broader scale. There is much yet to cover, including the overlap of both capitalism and veganism as religion as more companies see the profits available by making cheaper vegan products to sell at a much higher price point than their animal-product counterparts, yet these interconnections will be saved for future research due to the magnitude of their scope. In this thesis, we will start to examine how a critical vegan orientation toward communication scholarship can start to shape both our research methods and those we choose to include in academic literature.

METHODS

An essential component of the praxis that a critical vegan orientation demands is a focus on material realities. The following two chapters use a multi-methods approach combining performative autoethnography and multispecies ethnography in order to study different aspects of present-day veganism and multi-species relationships through a critical vegan lens. Because critical veganism is made up of material, embodied actions, it follows that my bodily experience helps others better understand the physical reality of what a critical vegan praxis can look like. Additionally, the embodied experience of others through multispecies ethnography provides further area for discussion and contemplation. Multiple methodologies allows for multiple perspectives on critical veganism in order to get a better understanding of what it is and envision what it could be.

Critical vegan orientations toward posthuman communication scholarship are particularly well suited to explore the relationship between humans and nonhuman others through performative autoethnographic inquiry. The chapter “Take, Eat, this is my Body” explores the interconnections of choosing not to eat animal products in a largely Evangelical Christian community and how this performative act directly challenges the animal industrial complex. Performative autoethnography is perfectly situated to explore this topic as, more broadly, autoethnography uses personal experiences to explore cultural practices (Ellis, 2005), demanding the researcher to situate the “self” in position to others in a cultural context (Spry, 2016). The researcher attempts to reflexively “[bring] the affective into shared space with the cognitive” (Pelias, 2013, p. 384), producing an inquiry that is both pedagogical and performative. Similarly, Conquergood (1991) describes performative autoethnography as “[privileging] particular,

participatory, dynamic, intimate, precarious, embodied experience grounded in historical process, contingency, and ideology” (p. 187). If critical veganism is inherently concerned with the material reality of nonhuman bodies, then communication scholarship must find a way to translate these material realities into something that we can feel in our bodies, so that as Jones (2002) describes, we can “put aspects of that culture on and into [our] bodies” (p. 7). I think the posthuman performative ethnographer can think of “cultures” in this sense as more of the rhetorical “ecologies” (Edbauer, 2005) mentioned previously.

While my piece “Take, Eat, this is my Body” is a performative autoethnography about eating (or not eating) food as an inherently political performance, “Cats of the Camino” combines both performative autoethnography with multi-species ethnography. Performative autoethnography pairs well with this piece about backpacking along the Camino de Santiago because backpacking has already been described as a performative act. Gray (2010) relates his personal experience backpacking as an opportunity to “slow down and enjoy freedom from social constrictions and the disciplined body” (p. 203). In the freedom and constraints backpacking provides, a hiker chooses to engage with their body, with others’ bodies, and with the environment in a way that they had not done before (Terry & Vartabedian, 2013). In this way, backpacking is an eminent performance, as the backpacker chooses to use their body as an aesthetic canvas (Terry & Vartabedian, 2013). While backpacking is a personal, embodied experience, it is also a social experience. Traveling, and more specifically backpacking, causes self-change through the narrative performance of traveler with an audience (Noy, 2004). These travelers perform identity through storytelling, “index[ing] both the *referred events* narrated and the *present event* of narration, thus drawing an association between the two that is fundamental” (Noy, 2004, p. 117). Furthermore, a backpacker develops an ever-present spatial relationship

with their pack. The pack itself acts as a culturally situated space, helping to (re)construct the backpackers' identities. The pack embodies abstract ideas, such as carrying capacity or the hiker's ecological footprint, because, "you are limited to what you can carry on your back, making choices carefully based on physical necessity, efficiency, and small comforts. Each of those decisions reveals the muddiness of the so-called divide between culture and nature" (Gray, 2010, p. 217). The pack also is a costume, which allows the backpacker to be defined as such and leave behind the cultural expectations and stereotypes of "tourist," even though there are expectations of backpackers as well (Shaffer, 2004). Yet, even more than simply denoting one as a backpacker, the pack also physically changes the backpacker's body, "constraining [it] in some ways, liberating [it] in others" (Terry & Vartabedian, 2013, p. 346). The pack constrains the backpacker, because if loaded too heavy or if the pack is not suspended on the wearer's back correctly, the increased load can cause the backpacker joint fatigue and injury (Lei, Howard, & Jones, 2013). Yet, the pack can also be liberating, as the backpacker may not feel as pulled by capitalist desires to spend as a tourist, because they do not have space for luxuries. In this way the backpack frees its wearer to experience the present moment under a slightly looser grip of capitalist ideology.

While my performance of "backpacker" shapes my experience along the Camino, I also use a multi-species ethnographic perspective to attempt to include other species in the broader Camino experience. Applying Harman's (2018) OOO to my performance, the nonhuman others along the Camino still exist as integral parts of the Camino whether or not I choose to include them in my narrative. Multi-species ethnography attempts to "highlight rather than suppress alternative voices" (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017, p. 15). Given the relative unfamiliarity many researchers have deploying this methodology, those of us attempting to incorporate animals into

our research are still negotiating how to reconfigure our humanist research systems and processes to best critically reflect upon these traditions. In many ways, we have to un-learn the processes of the past in order to address systemic biases implicit in those processes. Only through reevaluating the biases in the research process can we better include nonhuman others into our research. Hamilton & Taylor (2017) argue that “an inability to speak human language and to live within human behavioral norms should *not* be a basis for exclusion from social scientific research” (p. 12).

While we know that we need to include nonhuman others in our research methodologies, the next question becomes how to go about doing so. If we as scholars need to unlearn much of the way we have originally learned to conduct research in order to include the more-than-human, it can be difficult to know where to start. Hamilton & Taylor (2017) suggest a few ways to go about conducting multi-species ethnographies, one of which includes arts-based techniques. These participatory methods serve both to inform academia and provide advocacy for nonhuman voices through creative practices that “[decolonize] research as an elitist academic venture, done by and for researchers... these methods [are] a vehicle for public engagement and for opening out the world of research to a greater audience” (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017, pp. 16-17). In my “Cats of the Camino,” I use the art-based technique of participatory photography to collect photos of nonhuman others along the Camino. While I initially started out taking photos of cats along the trail with my sister, Noel, as awareness of the project grew, other human pilgrims helped us find cats to meet and photograph. As Noel and I noticed the cats along the trail, we started taking photos of many other nonhuman beings as well. While I only include a few of the many photos we took, the photos also served as a research tool—a sort of visual journal to reflect back upon during the writing process. While these photos are from our perspective as humans,

they do cause me to reflect deeper upon how the photo would look if taken from the cat's perspective. They also remind me of the bodily experience of meeting each animal, plant, rock, and hill, helping me develop a thick description (Geertz, 1973) for these encounters. I include many of these photos within the text of the chapter to help the reader more deeply engage with the nonhuman beings we encountered as well. While I strive for my research to act as advocacy drawing human awareness to those we share our ecosystems with, I realize the messiness of conducting this multi-species ethnography opens me up to criticism about whether or not this strategy is helpful for opening up communication research to non-human others. Because of this shared goal, I hope that this research will spark conversations about how we can better approach multi-species ethnographies in future research.

TAKE, EAT, THIS IS MY BODY

It's a quiet Saturday morning as I scroll through Pinterest looking for dinner ideas. I have my go-to main dish for company coming over— a vegan spinach lasagna with tofu instead of cheese and homemade noodles. However, I always feel I need a full spread, especially for my three close friends who I haven't caught up within a couple of months. I settle on adding the homemade breadsticks, a vegan green bean casserole, and vegan pumpkin pie for dessert. As I start my meal prep, I think of the art of the dinner party. How I've set aside a whole day to prepare the food, timed when everything should go in the oven, and picked out the perfect cloth napkins and fresh flowers for the occasion. It dawns on me that I'm more my mother than I like to admit. She has taught me to perform the role of hostess, as the perfect dinner party is one where everyone feels so natural that they do not even realize the political statement made by the food they eat. Andrea Nightingale reminds me that my performance of gender and the environment are mutually constituted. These gender subjectivities “are performed and contested through social interactions that are always imbued with power” (Nightingale, 2016, p. 280). I'm reminded of my mother's favorite dish to make— a rice and hamburger dish covered in a thick, turkey gravy sauce. Turkey and hamburger that I now do not accept. The first time facing this reality at one of her dinner parties floods my thoughts.

The Fall

I expected coming home for my first Thanksgiving with my *Evangelical Christian*^{*18} family since I had become vegan would pose some tricky conversations. The questions darted

¹⁸ Throughout this chapter, italicized words and phrases with asterisks denote a glossary entry. See Appendix for glossary.

through my mind on the nine-hour drive to Kentucky— why won't you eat the turkey Kensey? Are we supposed to cater to just you? What if it¹⁹ was raised in a humane way? But Jesus ate fish, are you saying he was immoral?

I imagined my eloquent defense, devoid of any perceived “hysterics” that could ruin the force of my logical rebuttals, unknowingly reinforcing the metaphor of conflict as a courtroom taught to me ever since my youthful nightly bible studies. Since God wasn't usually available as judge, my dad had to do as the closest substitute, and the Bible was my only witness as a younger woman.

My husband Reed and I found out upon our arrival that my childhood pastor and his wife would be joining us for Thanksgiving dinner. A couple who I vividly remember kicking a woman out of our church for cheating on her husband, but only after making her stand up in front of the congregation and “confess her sins.” It wouldn't shock you to learn that I can't read *The Scarlet Letter* without thinking of this couple as the priest, only they masked their puritanism with a hip, relaxed tone and the occasional glass of wine.

When they arrived, my Southern pleasantries took over with an ear-to-ear grin and safe *Joel Osteen**-style jokes about gas prices and the weather. Carol immediately took over as head chef, a role she seamlessly plays in most areas of life. While a woman in her context can never be considered the head of the household or hold official power, when Carol tilted her chin down and raised her eyebrows at you, you forget about the *Proverbs 31 woman** and fall in line.

¹⁹ From my parents' perspectives, animals are “its,” but throughout this piece, my perspective will use the pronoun “she.” As Carol Adams articulates, “Language distances us further from animals by naming them as objects, as ‘its.’... Patriarchal language insists that the male pronoun is both generic, referring to all human beings, and specific, referring only to males. Similarly, ‘it’ refers to either to non-animate things or to animate beings whose gender identity is irrelevant or unknown. But just as the generic ‘he’ erases female presence, the generic ‘it’ erases the living, breathing nature of the animals and reifies their object status... The absence of a non-sexist pronoun allows us to objectify the animal world by considering all animals as ‘its’” (Adams, 2014, p. 93). Adams goes on to argue for the pronoun of “she” to refer to animals instead.

I innocently chop potatoes when the question hits:

Dad: “So Dave and Carol, have you heard about Kensey’s new lifestyle choice?”

Mom: “Now Greg, you know it’s just a diet.”

Misled by my mom’s description, but still finely attuned to my dad’s dry sarcasm, Dave and Carol knew we weren’t talking about the Beachbody diet. They look at me expectantly.

My cheeks flush, my heart quickens, my face tries to smile.

Kensey: “Ugh, oh you know, I’ve been vegan since last January. My New Year’s resolution, actually.

By vegan I mean I don’t eat animal products. So no meat, milk, eggs, cheese, butter...”

Dave, quizzically: “Huh. And why would you do that?”

He means it as the polite, next thing to say, but it’s my dreaded question. The one with no socially right answer—I say it’s a diet and undermine my passion for the environment and love for our fellow beings; or I say the real reason and risk those I care about projecting, assuming that I’m judging their eating choices. Instead of Adam’s rational for veganism as an “ethical stance based on compassion for all beings” (Adams, 2014, 113), I choose the usual vague answer to avoid the already-present conflict.

Kensey: “Oh... you know, for both ethical and health reasons.”

While I haven’t been discredited as “hysterical” or “tree-hugger” or worse, “liberal” yet; I have made a worse faux pas: “holier-than-thou.”

Carol: “What do you mean ethical reasons? You know Jesus ate fish.”

My mind is blank. I realize my well thought out rebuttal is pointless here because it was in a language Dave and Carol, my mom and dad don’t speak. The Bible is my only witness to this panel, but even our interpretations of this one collection of documents differ radically. My

Jesus as a challenger of imperialism, classism, religious elitism, and gender binaries is a different person than their defender of six-day creationism, purity culture, and the Republican party. Any scientific argument would surely quickly be shot down, because while animal agriculture is the largest single contributor to climate change (Koneswaran & Nierenberg, 2008), *science** isn't persuasive when your audience believes it is "*fake news**." Luckily, I brought a translator. Someone who believed like me but spoke Evangelicalism more fluently thanks to various Facebook arguments.

Reed: "True, he did, because he was poor and had little means to choose. But today, we have the options and money to afford choice. I think Kensey and I agree that we have to look to Genesis on this issue. In the creation story, God calls the garden perfect. Some biblical scholars interpret this to mean that now, we should be working toward a world that looks like the Garden of Eden and that perfect state."

Reed strategically leaves out the fact this particular scholar is actually the progressive theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who argues that "the Christian belief in creation be interpreted and reformulated, if it is no longer to be itself one factor in the ecological crisis and the destruction of nature, but is instead to become a ferment working toward the peace with nature which we seek" (Moltmann, 1985, p. 21).

Reed: "We also know there was no death in the garden. This means that Adam and Eve wouldn't have eaten meat, because an animal would have had to die in order to produce the meat. So if there was no death and that was the perfect state, then it would make sense that in order to work toward a perfect world now, we also shouldn't kill animals for meat."

While the feminist in me recoils at relying upon a man for defense, my inner lawyer rejoices. He's hit a fatal blow! They believe in a literal creation story, surely, they can see my perspective now. But the nuance and logos of Reed's argument are lost.

Carol: "But God tells Adam and Eve to have dominion over the animals. So now, it's fine for us to eat them."

Reed: "But what is meant by dominion? Does that mean killing animals, or could it mean taking care of them?"

Carol, finally showing some of all of our pent-up emotion: "Well, dominion means dominion!"

As usual, Carol has the hold on holy. She falls into our common dualistic response to animals: we either dominate or project (Peters, 1999). While the argument continued on after Carol's truism, something clicked in my mind. I'd been a feminist for a couple of years at this point, which was a long time considering my only recent *deconversion** from Evangelical Christianity. I now saw the connection between being a feminist and caring for the environment and caring for animals. At this moment, my mind remembers Ruether's articulation that, "We were not created to dominate and rule the earth, for it governed itself well and better for millions of years when we did not exist or existed as nondominant mammals" (Ruether, 2007, p. 104). Dominion truly does mean dominion. The same patriarchal structures which told me to keep my legs crossed and that I was worthless once I had sex and that wearing a crossbody handbag made me a temptress and that sat silent when I admitted I'd been sexually assaulted were the same patriarchal structures that saw animals as a means to an end and all life on earth as free to do with as we choose. It didn't matter that the ever-present turkey carcass present in this conversation didn't want to be there—dominion was dominion.

[End Scene.]

“Eat the turkey, Kensey,” I imagine Carol pushing as I make my gravy sauce with mushrooms instead of turkey. “Eat the beef, Kensey,” my dad continues as I put tofu in my lasagna instead of sausage. The animals that make up my family’s connection to Southern-style American food are not animals at all in their eyes, which furthers not only the oppression of nonhuman animals, but of women, and of countless other groups interwoven our world’s many complexities. While my guests have already expressed excitement about the meal, a voice in the back of my mind whispers, *They aren’t going to like the meal. They won’t be full. You’re in cattle country— they will think you are judging them because they do eat meat.* I try to set these thoughts aside. As fellow feminists and Evangelical deconverts, I know my guests do not think that eating animals is as holy as partaking in the body and blood of Christ. But my guilt and uncertainty stem from a separate dinner party where this was not the case. One where I was the guest. A guest of very affluent and powerful Southern Baptist community members, who were kind in a “bless your heart” kind of way. Yet, as Carol Adams describes, they still saw as a “personal challenge” or a “teasing game of manipulation” the fact that I “made something absent on [my] plat[e]” (Adams, 2014, 123). The situation was not an opportunity for education, but one of survival.

Embodied, Crucified Christ

While I knew that disembodiment of food was an underlying assumption many have, it struck me just how ingrained this thought process is when I went to a friend’s house for dinner. The Smiths were an older couple who had long been donors of my university and had actually sponsored one of my scholarships. We had developed a close relationship over the years when

Liz asked me if I'd join them for dinner the next week. While I'd been over for dinner before, I was not vegan at the time, however, it would be rude to refuse her Southern hospitality.

Kensey: "Oh Liz, I'd love to! But remember, I'm vegan now, so I don't eat animal products. I'd hate to be a nuisance to you, so why don't you let me bring something for everyone? I'd be happy to contribute and help in any way I can."

Liz: "Pssh, no, I'm not letting you do a single thing! Don't worry, my daughter doesn't eat red meat so I completely understand."

Kensey, nervous: "Yes, I remember that. I also don't eat red meat. But I don't eat a lot of other things too, such as other meat, milk, eggs, cheese, butter..."

Liz: "Well, what *can* I make you?"

Kensey: "How about we just do a salad? Just veggies and fruit. I'd love that."

I say, wanting the only safe option I can think of.

When I pull up to the Smith's house a week later, I'm fully prepared to squirm a little on my ethics for the sake of comfort and community. I don't want to offend my hosts, so if I eat a little cheese or butter, I won't say anything.

What I wasn't prepared for was fish.

I didn't know how to control the emotions of shock, disbelief, pain, and horror that scroll across my face like a marquee. *What about not eating animal products made her think of fish??*

Is the only response I could process. "The Word was made flesh" (King James Bible, 1987, John 1:14), before me.

Kensey (after a pregnant pause): "Oh Liz, I'm *so* sorry, but I told you I can't eat animal products..."

Her face doesn't register my words. She stares blankly, confused at my confusion.

I feel the need to justify my choice, to prove that I'm not weird or disrespectful.

"I haven't had animal products in so long, I will get physically ill. My stomach can't handle meat anymore."

Liz: "You said you don't eat animals... fish aren't animals."

Kensey: "Yes, they are!"

I lose my decorum.

Carol Adam's voice reminds me that, "We live in a culture that has institutionalized the oppression of animals on at least two levels: in formal structures... and through our language" (Adams, 2014, p. 94). I saw here firsthand how our language continues to oppress, and with animals, many times it oppresses to the point of death. The rest of the dinner went about as awkwardly as expected. I just ate the "salad," which was a fruit salad that I picked the marshmallows out of. While I knew that people don't think of their food as the animal which makes it up, I didn't realize just how deep this disconnect can go. The salmon sizzling on the stovetop didn't get a chance to defend herself, as I did; yet I felt we were both being grilled. While I was being silently grilled for my lack of conformity and for refusing the community that comes with friends and food, the salmon was being literally grilled after either living a life predetermined by humans, from fertilization to market; or maybe after being ripped from her home by a woman who thought she was going to get a job to support her family, but was really sold into the Indonesian fishing industry's slave trade.

Dominion means dominion.

[End Scene.]

“Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me” (King James Bible, 1987, 1 Corinthians 11:24). The fish who gave her life calls me, calls us, to remember her. Remember her story. Our stories are mangled, as my story is constituted in hers, her story in mine, and now your story in ours. Celeste Conduit (2006) describes this relationality as communication itself— a spider’s web of connection. As I remember the salmon’s sacrifice, I continue to put the finishing touches on the lasagna, the casserole, the breadsticks, the pie. Everything goes in the oven at the perfect time, preparing to finish right as my guests should be arriving. While I adapt my present cooking schedule to the future arrival of my guests, I think of Moltmann’s belief that we as Christians do the same on a larger scale, which he articulates when he says, “In their fears and hopes, they (Christians) anticipate their still unknown future and adapt their present to it, shaping their lives accordingly” (Moltmann, 1990, p. 340). Moltmann, as a lover of the environment, believes that we should be always shaping our seemingly mundane day-to-day actions to create the future that we believe to be perfect and just— a praxis toward paradise. My food may only make up one meal for one table in a larger world of oppression, dominion, and pain, but it is through the everyday that we as individuals have the power to take on hegemonic systems. This work through the everyday reminds me of my friend Catie.

Resurrection

Catie Roberts was a close friend of mine from my job at our local gym, and when she heard that I’d been helping other older adults in the community with my small cleaning business, she asked if I could come to her house once a week too. We enjoyed our Saturdays cleaning together, as both of us were somewhat closeted Bolivar outcasts. In Bolivar, you can still hear the faint murmur on the wind labeling Catie a “*homewrecker*,*” despite her marriage to John

Roberts over a decade ago and continuous community commitment. While the town silently attached their scarlet A's to Catie, John, who constantly wrecks the connections in his home, was and is one of the most powerful people in town. As one of Bolivar's VIC (Very Important Cattlemen), he had climbed his way to the top of the social ladder by slaughtering hundreds of cattle year after year, and the desensitization to violence carried over into how he addressed those who committed the sin of disagreeing with him on anything. It was clear that John had adopted Abby Wilkerson's (2017) "family farm" rhetoric— an American myth seeped in the ideals of the heterosexual nuclear family and conservative gender expectations. Catie frequently undermined these expectations, much to John's annoyance.

After knowing Catie for around two years and cleaning for her a couple of months, I finally met the ego-in-a-MAGA-hat that was John Roberts. I usually can engage pretty well with people like John, so I pull out one of my trusty Joel Osteen jokes.

It falls flat.

I'm dealing with a different breed of Baptist.

John, reclined on the leather couch under his deer head wall mount drinking a beer, proceeds to not-so-subtly insult me by asking if I had a real job. I continue to mop as I describe my upcoming work in international development. John criticizes my international focus when people are in poverty in the United States, so I bring up Bible passages that had persuaded my Evangelical family to support me. Yet, John didn't seem to be persuaded. While still Baptist, we spoke different dialects.

Despite John's harsh tone and put downs, I realize that he's actually starting to like me. He feels better than me, so it's safe to have me around. I start to exhale... when:

“You know what, you’ve been such a hard worker today. Why don’t you take home some fresh beef out of the freezer?”

“...ugh oh! How sweet!” I stammer, my eyes flitting to Catie for help. No response. “I appreciate the offer, but I’m fine thanks.”

He pushes. Pushes. Pushes past my pleasantries, past my pleading eyes, past my persistent rejection.

I confess my sins. I don’t eat cows. I don’t drink their milk. I don’t contribute to their skinning to let the carcass warm my skin.

I sugarcoat my response with the least amount of detail possible. But John Roberts pushes and probes to know more. My typical response to his “why” does not satisfy his lust for my consumption of his commodity. I imagine him as the dominant man that Brazilian ecofeminist theologian Ivone Gebara calls out when she argues:

[D]ominant men, seeking ultimate salvation from vulnerability, constructed systems of abuse and exploitation of other humans and the earth to achieve overweening wealth and power. Women became the particular targets of this flight from vulnerability because they represented man’s finite origins and the realities of earth/bound pain and limits. To rule over and to flee from woman, the body, and the earth was to seek to conquer and flee from one’s own denied finitude. (Ruether, 2007, p. 105)

As John keeps probing, Catie helps me to find my strength when she reassures him that I’m healthy and strong and clearly don’t need meat to maintain my health. For myself, for Catie, for all the other women that show him his finitude, I begin to explain the human side of why I don’t commodify cows. I describe the increased number of domestic violence reports linked to those who are asked to slaughter animals all day (Broadway, 1990, 2000; Stull & Broadway, 2004). I talk about the unfair treatment of workers on factory farms since many workers are undocumented and do not have legal rights protecting them from abuse (Government Accountability Office, 2005).

John cuts me off.

“What’s the definition of a factory farm? I’ve got a couple hundred cows— does my farm count?”

It most definitely does.

My confidence deflates like a balloon as I stammer that I’m not sure on the exact definition. I lie and say I’m sure his farm doesn’t count.

I wasn’t asked to clean for the Roberts again.

But my lost income was made up by Catie’s newfound comfort confiding in me about her longing for family unity, her displacement as John’s second wife, and her escape through art. Catie is able to specifically use her art as a way to create beauty and help others despite her husband’s patriarchal presence. Catie teaches me not to give up on John. Like Derrida (2008) with his cat, I hope John may one day see his cows looking back at him and feel the weight of nonhuman eyes. Drawing from Donoghue and Fisher’s (2008) “Decomponomics” performance, I begin to realize that much like compost, John’s outdated and dying ideas about gender, the environment, and nonhuman bodies lay the groundwork for future growth and life. While dominion means dominion, sometimes we find hope in solidarity.

[End Scene.]

When it comes to cow meat or any other animal products, my freezer is Jesus’ tomb on the third day— empty. My freezer represents Ruether’s “vision of ‘reciprocal interdependence’ rooted in ‘our actual solidarity with all others and with our mother, the earth, which is the actual ground of our being’” (Bouma-Prediger, 1995). With my dishes out of the oven and the pie in the fridge, I move on to preparing the table. Before, I had questioned, “Can God furnish a table in

the wilderness?” (King James Bible, 1987, Psalm 78:19). Now, I see that table set before me.

Piled with filling, nutritious, cruelty-free food as an embodiment of a radically new social vision.

CATS OF THE CAMINO

Ca click

Ca clunk

Ca click

Ca clunk

Ca click

I hear the sound of my feet and trekking poles hit earth, rock, vine, earth again. It took some practice initially to get my feet in step with the carbon fiber poles, but after a good 50 or so miles, the poles have become an extension of my body.

Ca click

Ca clunk

Ca click

Ca clunk

Ca click

My pace speeds up as I reach the climax of the story I'm telling my younger sister, Noel. My voice quickens, my feet bounce forward, and by the time I reach the end of the story, we have to stop to sit on a nearby fallen tree to catch our breath and grab a drink of water. During our break, our friends from Canada pass us again—we've continually been passing one another throughout the past three days as our journeys intertwine and overlap. "How about them Reds?" He calls out over his much-larger-than-most Osprey 75-liter backpack. Noel responds, "They suck!" as we laugh, and the couple move on. Earlier, the couple had shared that they drive down from Canada multiple times every year to watch the Cincinnati Reds play baseball, while Noel,

living right outside of Cincinnati, is not a huge fan. These passing moments collectively make up a trail community on the Camino, allowing pilgrims to come together to share stories and hopes, insecurities and pain with strangers from across the globe.

The Camino de Santiago is a traditionally Catholic pilgrimage in Northern Spain that ends in the city of Santiago de Compostela. While some still hike the Camino for religious or spiritual reasons, today, people from all over the world come with various reasons to trek the Camino as a time of self-reflection. While I had personally hiked the traditional Frances route two times prior, in the summer of 2019, I set out to hike the Camino Portugués with Noel. We started in Porto, Portugal and hiked to the holy city in Santiago.

Personally, I find myself continually coming back to the Camino and other long-distance backpacking trails. The more you hike, the better you get at observing the world around you. I notice things that others may see as superficial or unimportant, such being able to guess where a person is from based on the brand of their backpack—a Deuter pack? Probably from Germany. Osprey pack? Probably from North America. And the list goes on.

However, I now notice ever-present phenomena on the Camino that others may view as unimportant. I started this Camino after having read John Durham Peters' (1999) "Speaking into the Air" and other posthuman books and authors, which opened my awareness to the ways I was constantly communicating with nonhuman others. This Camino, I was determined to apply these ideas throughout my trek and look for ways to become-with (Haraway, 2008) the other beings on the trail.

Porto

My first time trekking the Camino on the Frances route, I was still negotiating what I had been taught growing up in an Evangelical Christian household and community with my ever-broadening view of the world. I had not yet read the books that were to be my impetus into veganism, so during my first Camino, I was metaphorically in Porto the whole time.²⁰

In the Critical Vegan model, Porto represents the place where many pilgrims begin in our relationship with nonhuman others: a dominion framework.

The idea that humans have dominion over the earth, plants, and animals is fundamentally rooted in human exceptionalism, which Stanescu (2013) describes as, “based fundamentally in a desire to create protected lives, and lives that can be, or even need to be, exterminated” (pp. 135-136). By seeing humans as separate and over other beings, it becomes justified to treat other life as objects. Kimmerer (2013) roots this dominion relationship with nature in Western Christianity’s narrative of the Garden of Eden. In the Genesis story, God tells Adam and Eve to have dominion over the Earth (King James Bible, 1987, Genesis 1:26-28). Conversely, many North American indigenous people have stories of Skywoman as the first human, a figure who was rescued by the other animals of the Earth and strived to live in community with them, planting seeds in the ground as her gift (Kimmerer, 2013). Religious stories of the first people shape a culture’s relationship with the world they live in, so it is not surprising that the Genesis story and many others throughout the Bible were historically used to justify murdering

²⁰ For those familiar with the different Caminos, you know that the Camino Frances route, the traditional route which I took my first two trips, actually starts in St. Jean Pied de Port, France. Furthermore, the Camino Portugués which I base this metaphor of critical veganism upon, actually starts in Lisbon, not Porto. However, since I base the metaphor off of my own personal journey in 2019 along the Camino Portugués route, realize these places hope to serve metaphorically if not literally.

indigenous people and pushing them off of their land, ideas such as Manifest Destiny, and Western colonists' continual pillaging of the earth for resources.

While pillage and plunder are more dramatic examples of a dominion mindset, what Porto looks like on the Camino is more subtle. Many pilgrims simply do not notice the other life surrounding them unless that life is human. During our hike, Noel and I started a project to take photos of the cats we saw along the trail. We were trying to find at least one cat per day to document the places we had been through the nonhuman animals we encountered. Almost daily, we would talk to different human pilgrims along the path and notice a cat along the side of the trail. We would interrupt the conversation to say that we needed to take a moment to meet the cat and take her picture. There were three common responses to our project.

The first response was the most common. Because Noel and I hiked early one morning, we were some of the first human pilgrims to get out on the trail. A young German couple were the only other humans we saw for hours, and while we tried to greet them, neither of us knew much of the others' language, so we passed one another with smiles and waves instead of words. About an hour into our walk, Noel and I noticed a beautiful white cat along the side of the road. She purred and nuzzled, so we stopped to meet her (Figure 2). This white cat danced her way up to us with the kind of elegant walk only cats can do. She seemed very comfortable around humans, which encouraged me that she hopefully had loving interactions with our kind. Or at least we gave her what she wanted, which kept her coming back to us. I will always be puzzled about whether cats like her are more femme fatale or feline friend. Cats have a way of toying with what you think you know about them. Seeing our attention to the white cat, a black cat (Figure 3) also came up to say hi, giving what my husband and I call an "activation noise"—a short yip that cats do when they start to come your way or otherwise change what they were

previously doing. Black cat started to purr loudly like a boat's motor, his tail wrapping coyly around Noel's leg.

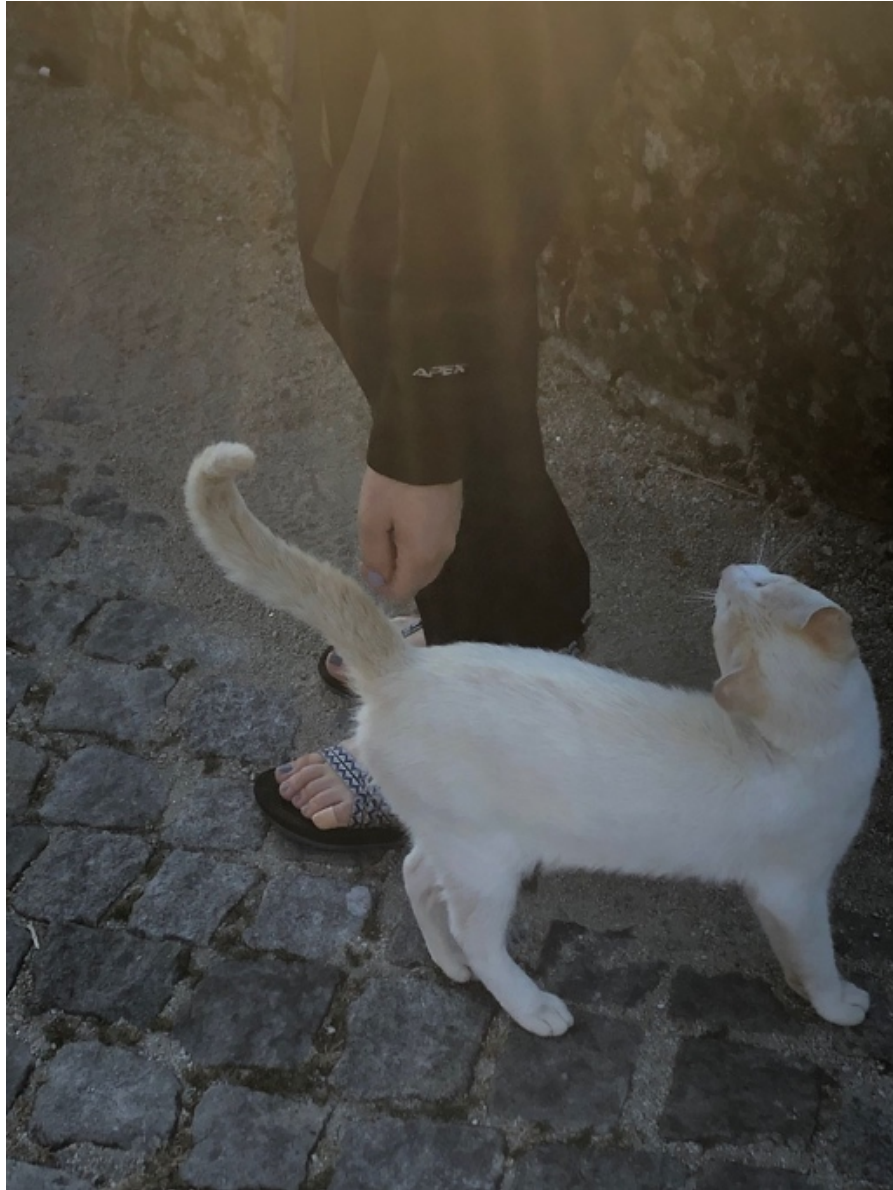


Figure 2. The white cat we met on the path near Gândara, Portugal.

We had stopped hiking for a few minutes to meet our new friends and take their picture for our ever-growing collection of Camino cat photos when the German couple caught up to us.

They smiled but continued walking. Their Camino was not to be interrupted by these cats, let alone to include the cats as pilgrims.



Figure 3. The black cat along the path near Gândara, Portugal.

This first response to the Camino cats typically told us that the pilgrim was likely still in Porto along their Camino journey and had not seen the significance of the other pilgrims joining them along the trail. However, a pilgrim does not have to stay in Porto, and the Camino is a

perfect space to start the journey out of Porto and the dominion mindset toward nonhuman beings.

A few days later, Noel and I were talking to our previously mentioned Canadian friends when the four of us decided to stop for a quick coffee at a café alongside the trail in Redondela. There were around five other human pilgrims there when we arrived along with a blue-gray stray cat weaving in and out of the café tables. Noel and I immediately perked up (pre-caffeine, mind you) and went to meet and take some pictures of the Redondela cat (Figure 4). We asked a group sitting at a table if we could slip past their chairs in order to see if the cat wanted to play. One group member exclaimed, “Wow, I hadn’t noticed it there!” and they leaned over to meet the cat with us. Redondela cat did not, in fact, want to play, which he communicated with us by backing away from us to keep a few feet’s distance and clicking at us.

While my cat, Lando, and I playfully click at one another, I’ve come to learn the difference between a playful click and a “mind your own business” click. Redondela cat circled the humans from a safer distance, swooping in for food scraps when pilgrims left the café. When pacing the café, back and forth and back and forth, onlookers can catch a glimpse of the housecat’s close genetic evolution with the mighty tiger stalking her prey—only, of course, the prey here are the forgotten crumbs of a biscotti.

The second response characterized by the group at the café does acknowledge the nonhuman other yet may or may not continue to expand the horizon of one’s Camino. We never saw this particular group of pilgrims again, so we could not follow up to see if they had continued to notice the cats or other nonhuman pilgrims. The second response could be an impetus for a pilgrim to leave Porto, but the pilgrim may also continue not to notice the nonhuman others and operate under a dominion framework. The pilgrim had seen the path

toward Santiago— they had not noticed the nonhuman other before but had started to notice the cat. What happened after this encounter typically determined whether the pilgrim continued moving toward Santiago or stayed in Porto.



Figure 4. Redondela cat walking along a ledge next to our café.

Along every Camino, a pilgrim usually meets a few people who truly add a spark to your step and whose presence is engaging and electric. For Noel and me, Larissa from Germany and Daniel from Florida were those people. We met them about two thirds of the way into our

Camino. While having never met until the Camino, Larissa and Daniel clearly had a romantic spark with one another and were people who were friendly, inquisitive, and unbridled. It was not long until Noel and I saw our first cat of the day and stopped to take his picture. We named this cat “Blue Eye” (Figure 5) because he had one clear baby blue eye and one hazel eye, which especially stood out against his white coat.



Figure 5. Blue Eye timidly walking up to closer to us for the first time.

Blue Eye was more timid than some of the other cats, but curious of the new strangers. We offered for Larissa and David to keep walking if we were slowing them down, but they gladly stopped with us to pet the cat. Blue Eye’s fur was course and rough, giving me the

impression that he did not go home to a human house. While this may not be true, there was something about the feel of his fur which implied struggle and hardship and something about the look in his eyes which drooped with sorrow. It is hard attempting to read feline emotion as a human—while they may have evolved to read ours (Galvan & Vonk, 2016), we are not always the best at reciprocating. Blue Eye, while beautiful, left us with a haunted feeling as we started back along the trail.

At this point, Larissa was particularly interested in our project, and when I shared, she decided that she wanted to help. At our next café, Larissa helped us find two more cats (Figures 6 and 7) and introduced us to about five other people that she had already met that we had not. The two cats, which we called the Barro cats after the town where we met them, must have been housecats instead of strays, like many of the other cats we met. They seemed to live at the café, even having a bed under the lean-to, and would play with each other and the house dog. The orange and white Barro cat was a little shy, which reminded me of my own orange and white cat, Lando, once again.²¹

The black Barro cat was the alpha cat—he exuded an air of confidence by rough housing with the orange Barro cat and the dog and by hopping up into guests’ laps. He would not let the humans fail to notice him. This cat got me thinking that if the Camino is a performance for human backpackers like myself, it may also be a performance for cats such as this one as well. He clearly liked putting on a show and seemed to constantly attempt to reestablish his role as the alpha cat, even when it meant falling off of a nearby ledge to chase a bug.

²¹ Although, of course, when I say Lando is “my cat,” I mean that as I would say “my brother” or “my mother.” I am not implying that I do or ever could own him. This is evident when he wakes me up for food every morning at 5:00 AM.



Figure 6. The orange and white Barro cat who reminded me of Lando.



Figure 7. The black Barro cat chasing a bug near a flowerbed.

After we left the café, it was clear that Larissa in particular was already past Porto, as she not only noticed Camino cats, but she noticed people we had not and continually drew our attention to flowers, sticks, bugs, and nonhuman objects. I later found out that Larissa was a vegetarian and had been for three years, which while not necessary to start the journey out of Porto, did reaffirm what I had already learned about her. This third response was my favorite, while also the rarest.

When someone who had not previously noticed the cats before started to notice them, it opened up the door to continuing to notice nonhuman others. The cats themselves are not the end destination, but rather the start of a journey of living respectfully toward nonhuman others. In my own journey, because I was looking for the cats, Noel and I started taking pictures of ducks (Figure 8), frogs, sheep (Figure 9), and snails (Figure 10). The Camino then expanded further to include hydrangeas (Figure 11), a mountain (Figure 12), and the sorrow stones on top of a trail marker (Figure 13). Our Camino community grew exponentially when we started to truly notice those around us. This experience takes the Camino pilgrim on the journey toward Santiago.



Figure 8. A duck walking along a stone bridge in the morning mist.



Figure 9. Sheep who actually hiked along with us for a few minutes as they shifted pastures.



Figure 10. A snail slowly crawling along the Camino, reminding us to take our time and notice even our smallest surroundings.



Figure 11. Noel enjoying the fragrance of some hydrangeas after a long 20-mile day.



Figure 12. The mountain who reminded us to press on feeling the sturdiness of those who have been around long before and long after humans will.



Figure 13. The stone communicating that we were about 10 km away from Santiago and the rougher “sorrow stones” left behind, communicating the hardships of pilgrims before us.

Critical Vegan Journey

The way my Camino journey reflects a critical vegan understanding is by experiencing the Camino as animate and ever-changing rather than stagnant (Kimmerer, 2013).²² While this

²² This idea of changing the way we think of the Camino as animate rather than stagnant stems from Kimmerer’s (2013) explanation of the grammar of animacy and the difference between seeing something as a noun versus as a verb (pp. 54-57). She describes how in the Potawatomi language, rocks, mountains, water, fire, places, and many other ideas that English considers nouns are actually considered verbs. However, a new materialist turn on Kimmerer branches away from the grammar of our language surrounding objects, as grammar stems from our embodied experience with things. Harman (2018) describes OOO, one of the original bases for new materialist thinking, as being realist rather than idealist, meaning that “the external world exists independently of human awareness” (p. 10). Harman means that no matter how we think of the Camino, as a verb or noun, it exists regardless. However, I do think that our experiences with real objects shape the way we then communicate about them, which flips the order of the linguistic turn. It is not our language that shapes our reality, but rather our embodied experience with real objects that shapes our language about them. When I physically embody a pilgrim trekking toward Santiago, I experience my Camino, which then shapes the way I communicate about that experience with others. The way I verbally communicate about my experience on the Camino does not change the experience itself, as my Camino exists independently without my language about it.

may not ring true to every pilgrim's Camino, my experience of the trail and trail community was more animistic—at any moment, the trail and trail community may become something else instead of simply staying stagnant. The earth could be turned into a condo or a parking lot by a wealthy developer. The people could be physically on the earth, but they could leave or not truly see the grape vine winding overhead or the spider weaving his gossamer web in the Spanish morning sunlight. The cats could go inside instead of waiting eagerly further up the way. Many who have not felt the Camino's dirt under their shoes may think of the Camino as an abstract idea of a physical place, but by experiencing the Camino as an animate embodied act, we better encompass all aspects of what make the Camino special and even sacred. The Camino is, thus, redefined as the combination is the combination of earth, humans, nonhuman animals, plants. To live in reciprocity with our fellow pilgrims is to Camino, and to Camino at its fullest potential. This reciprocity allows us to give to our fellow pilgrims while also receiving what we may need in return.

If Caminoing pilgrims include both humans and nonhuman animals, what might I be able to give fellow cat pilgrims? One graze of my hand along the soft yet coarse fur of the white cat toward the begging of the trail shows me that she is thin. I can feel each individual rib. She is hungry, which she tells me through persistent meows, a tail straight up in the air, and by nuzzling against my leg. I know this message, as my own cat, Lando, has taught me many times at 5:30 every morning. As a vegan, I don't have any meat on me. I know that cats are obligate carnivores, but most conventional cat food includes grains as filler, so my sister and I decide to give our new friend some crackers to help hold her over. She gobbles up the crackers in a few seconds.

Caminoing by living in reciprocity does not inherently mean that this cat will give Noel and I something in return for our pets and food. This reciprocity is a more holistic kind.

About three kilometers further up the trail, Noel and I notice an unusual pilgrim shell on a garden wall's ledge. The pilgrim shell is a Camino symbol, guiding pilgrims along the correct route. Next to the shell is a water spigot, a bowl of fresh lemons, a bowl of sugar, and some cutlery. We look up to see rows of lemon trees, branches reaching out with the gift of their sweet fruit. We rest to make fresh lemonade as a gift from not only the kind family, but also from the trees.

As Noel and I walk, recounting stories and making new ones, we spit out lemon seeds into the morning dewy grass. We return the favor, opening up the possibility for the trees to pass along their genes to a new generation of lemon trees. The cycle of gift-giving and receiving continues.

Atlantis

Atlantis represents where we have a tendency to get off of the trail and Camino toward a place that does not exist and that leads us away from Santiago. In my Camino, the threat of Atlantis came and continues to come from the challenges of learning how to write about the human and nonhuman pilgrims I met along the way. Derrida (2008) argues that we should strive to take “difference into account within the whole differentiated experience” of other life forms “without reducing this [difference]... to one between the human subject, on the one hand... and the nonsubject that is the animal in general, on the other” (p. 126). If one falls into this binary trap, Derrida (2008) warns that we make “the nonsubject... subject to the human subject” (p. 126). Under a posthuman framework, nonhuman others are subjects, so to relegate them to

nonsubjects only meaningful when they help to serve the human subject in some way would be to feed into a dominion framework of our relation with nonhuman others and thus veer off the path to Santiago. When writing about other animals, humans historically have been notorious for projecting human-like qualities onto the other animals we write about (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2018). This projection takes away from the legitimate experience that each animal has and denies other forms of being that do not mirror our own. If we do not imbue the nonhuman animal with human-like qualities, then we tend to make them a metaphor to teach a larger story about the human experience (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017). We need more representations of nonhuman others that try to legitimately recognize and understand the others' experience. Yet, in writing this chapter, I have wrestled with trying to best portray my fellow cat pilgrims. I have never been a cat or seen the world through a cat's body and lived experience, so who am I to claim to represent their real, embodied experience? Is my description of the Black Barro cat as "confident" really my own projection of human emotion upon him? I am not sure, but I do my best based on my own extensive communication with my cat, Lando, and other cats I have met before. I wish I could translate my cat's purrs and different types of meows into text to put on the page. I wish I could record the voice of the Camino cats so they could speak of how they notice the human pilgrims along the trail. But cats and other nonhuman animals do not communicate with us through words that I can transcribe on the page. They communicate through other means to bridge the species divide. Nor should they have to speak in verbal words that we can understand in order for human communication with the nonhuman other to count as worth of scholarly inquiry. As I imagine Harman (2018) would argue, my communication with cats of the Camino exists outside of the words I have written here on the page and outside of the words I might speak to a friend—what I verbally describe does not change the experience itself. In this

sense, I find freedom from the path toward Atlantis and find my feet back along the trail to Santiago. I can only hope that in this chapter I have done my best to translate the experience of cats so that other pilgrims can learn to listen to the cats in their lives.

Why Cats?

The circle of awareness grows the more we dive into a critical vegan perspective, yet for many human pilgrims I met, it seemed easier to start by becoming aware of cats. But why cats? Why not the birds or salamanders or insects? It could partially have to do with the fact that many of us have not previously spent much time communicating with our fellow pilgrims, making our relationship less personal. When we meet an egret, if we have not communicated with an egret before, then we may not know how we are to relate with her or what our common interests may be. However, many of us not only know cats, but we may know them very intimately if we ourselves live with a cat in our household. We, like Derrida (2008), may have found ourselves standing naked in front of our cat and wondering who the creature is who looks back at us. Our species have coevolved with one another over millennia—making it millennia of close relationship whether we live with a cat or not. We generally know their favorite snacks, what signs mean they want to cuddle or play, and what signs mean to leave them be. So, it makes sense that the average human pilgrim would start broadening their circle of awareness into the posthuman Camino through cats.

Dawkins and Wong (2016) explain that while humans domesticated some species of plants and animals through artificial selection of certain genes beneficial to us, we would be skewing the picture not to realize that these other species have domesticated humans as well. For example, Dawkins and Wong describe our evolution to develop the enzymes to break down

lactose found in cow milk (which, of course, many people still do not have, causing them to remain lactose intolerant). While Dawkins and Wong follow our coevolution with dogs, we clearly coevolved with cats as well. There is something about cats that has historically drawn us to them. Cat domestication is estimated to have happened 10,000 years ago in the Middle East's Fertile Crescent (Driscoll et al., 2007). Wild cats self-domesticated to early human settlements (Driscoll et al., 2009) despite humans not initially seeing a benefit for having the cats around the settlement. Some guess that humans allowed the cats to stay around to help control pests, however it took a much longer time for humans to domesticate cats compared with domesticating dogs, as the cats lived and reproduced outside of the human settlements and were often hard to catch (Driscoll et al., 2009). Now, based on scientific metrics of mutual multi-species relationships, Turner (1991) describes how humans and indoor cats serve one another in a mutually rewarding relationship by eagerly fulfilling the other's need for interaction, from the younger vulnerable months when the kitten establishes trust with their human companion to their older years when the human takes care of the elder cat. Furthermore, more recent research has found that cats may alter their behaviors based on humans' emotional cues, especially if that human is one they know very well (Galvan & Vonk, 2016). They also use social referencing of humans they know to try to evaluate new people and situations (Merola et al., 2015).

When researching how feral cats contribute to their ecosystems, I was initially rather frustrated that I could not find how they positively impact their environment. Feral cats are listed in the top 100 worst invasive species globally (Lowe, Browne, & Boudjelas, 2000), they have contributed to 33 (or 14%) of the present-day bird, mammal, and reptile extinctions (Medina et al., 2011), and they are notorious for destroying local bird and small mammal populations wherever they live (van Heezik et al, 2010). But yet, this damage mirrors our own species'

impact on our local ecosystems to a much larger scale than the cat's destruction. While humans have caused species extinction throughout our history, the Anthropocene has heightened this problem resulting in a loss of biodiversity and climate change that threaten human life on Earth (Harari, 2015).²³ Perhaps we become aware of nonhuman animals in physical space starting with a species like cats because they mirror our own destructive tendencies. Not only do the cats mirror our destructive tendencies, but we have heightened theirs by breeding, introducing, and releasing cats into ecosystems not adapted to their predatorial ways. Humans are just as responsible, if not more so, for this biodiversity loss as the cats themselves.

Santiago

On my second Camino journey in 2017 along the Frances route, I remember the building excitement and anticipation with each kilometer closer to Santiago. The group I was travelling with grew giddier with each passing day, and 100 kilometers out, a new wave of pilgrims joined in, adding to the electric feeling sweeping us forward and making our packs seem lighter than ever before. With one pilgrim in my group getting injured and on crutches, we would meet up with the other group who taxied ahead outside the city gates and walk over the threshold into Santiago together. When we finally crossed the bridge into the city, we still have a long walk before we make it to the cathedral, but we do not mind. The kilometers seem to pass with each minute, each second. We're getting closer, we can feel it. We come to a plaza with a cathedral under construction with blue panels up all around the spires. "Is this it?" inquires one of my teammates (Figure 14). "No, I don't think so," I respond back. "This doesn't look like the

²³ See Harari's (2015) example of early human's arrival in Australia, which coincided with significant nonhuman animal extinction. He continues to give many other examples, demonstrating that this destruction was commonplace even for some of our earliest known ancestors.

pictures. We've also seen much larger and grander cathedrals along the way. Maybe this is a smaller cathedral before we get to the real one." Our group, in agreement, continues to walk around for about ten minutes looking for the cathedral. The crowd has now dispersed, and we are starting to feel lost. We ask an officer outside of the tourism office where the church of St. James is located. He points us back to the church we walked by initially.

"Well, I guess this is it..." Sydney trails off.

"I expected it to feel different once we made it," adds Nick.

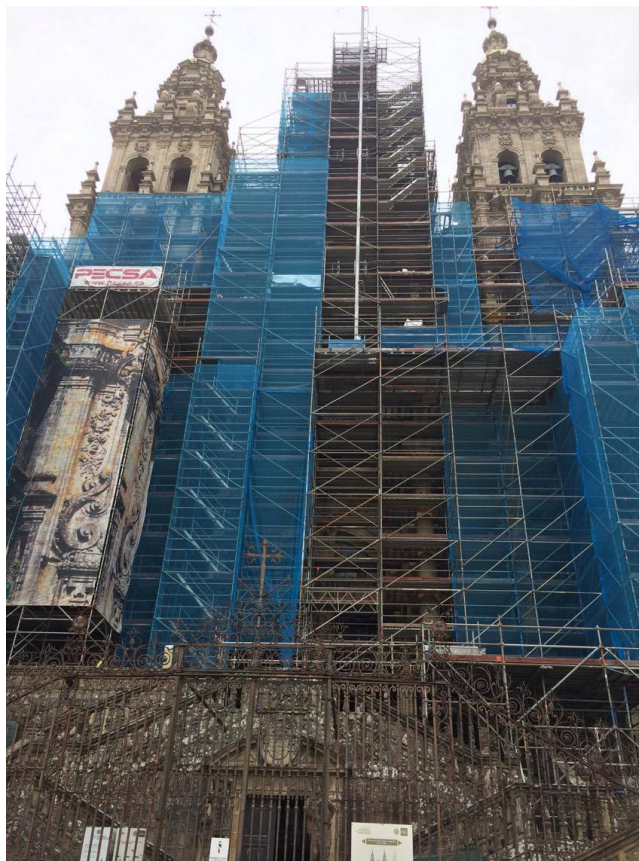


Figure 14. The church of St. James in Santiago, Spain, under construction.

We took our group's photo anyway, asking our friend Brett from Australia to take the photo (Figure 15).

Since I had previously had lengthy religious and philosophical conversations with Brett along that Camino, I felt comfortable confiding in him that the construction kind of ruined the experience for the group. “Naw,” he exclaimed, “I think it’s a beautiful metaphor for the church today. Modern Christianity is in shambles and we need to rebuild the traditions of the past in order to rise to meet the challenges of today’s era.”

While Brett’s metaphor has stuck with me long after that trip, I think the church under construction reflects another metaphor as well. My group’s experience in Santiago represents the vegan imaginary. Just like the image we had constructed in our minds about what it would look like, feel like, and be like to walk up to the church of St. James for the first time, this vision is a utopia that does not actually exist.



Figure 15. Our group photo once finally reaching the Church of St. James in Santiago.

There is a physical real place called Santiago, but our imaginations could never accurately capture what it would be like. The vegan imaginary, similarly, is a utopia that we know is a utopia and cannot exist with our world's current interwoven complexities. While we may imagine what it would look like to live in a world without cruelty to any beings, this world is currently impossible and unattainable. My cat, for instance, is an obligate carnivore, meaning he needs the flesh of other animals in order to survive. To feed him is to create suffering, but to not feed him is to also create suffering. Maybe in thousands of years, house cats could evolve to not eat meat, but that does not change the physiological makeup of my cat today. So, should we give up? Of course not, because we can still work toward and hope for the imaginary to reduce the overall amount of harm to our fellow beings and our planet. Jill Dolan (2008) describes these utopias as necessary and inherent in any social movement striving toward changing systems of oppressions. She writes, "My goal in prodding people to see performance practices as effective and pleasurable methods for contemplating visions of a better world is to reanimate a (post)humanism that can incorporate love, hope, and commonality alongside a deep understanding of difference" (p. 64, parenthesis mine). This social vision encourages us to creatively reconceptualize what is possible.

Unfortunately, much of popular culture veganism falls into the trap of idealizing a naïve view of the world that cannot possibly exist, which is a fine line away from Dolan's (2008) performative utopia. This popular culture perspective is what has led to attacks on veganism from scholars such as Donna Haraway (2008) and Harold Fromm (2010). While maybe we should strive to become more perfect, it is humbling to know that there will continue to be suffering beyond human control. Thinking of cats reminds us of this fact. As obligate carnivores, cats have to eat meat to stay healthy and survive. They did not evolve their sharp teeth and

scratchy tongues to eat plants. A vegan who may not know cats well may try to feed their cat a vegan diet, but they would be doing more harm for the cat than good. Yet, it seems cruel for vegans to not adopt cats from shelters who desperately need love and affection because of their diet. A critical vegan orientation might mean that we adopt the cat and feed it animal products to help her stay healthy and happy, realizing that by doing so, we may in turn create less ecological harm. Less wild birds will be killed locally than if the cat were to become feral. Many times, the meat in cat food comes from scraps of other animals already being killed for human consumption through the factory farm system. We can work toward less suffering and harm as a praxis that sets into motion the posthuman perspective on our planet.

CONCLUSION

Now that Rawvana no longer eats a fully vegan diet and the controversy has waned, she took down her initial video and changed the name of her channel to her name, Yovana Mendoza (Mendoza, n.d.). She still keeps her old videos up on her channel as a playlist, I assume so that those who stumble upon them might have better luck on a fully vegan diet than she did. As time goes on, it becomes clearer that the popular culture vegan response to her change not only does not allow for nuance but is not actually what is best for the material bodies of animals long-term. As of this writing, Yovana's channel still has 474,000 followers (Mendoza, n.d.), meaning that all of those people and more still could stumble upon vegan meal ideas, helping them to reduce animal consumption. The harm that Yovana may cause to a few animals in order to stay healthy seems to pale in comparison with her reach at influencing others through social media. A critical vegan orientation toward posthuman scholarship not only challenges us as scholars to think more broadly about nonhuman others in our research, but it also serves as activism, demanding more of some of the simplistic strands of veganism that can run prevalent in popular culture. As individual actors, we can find hope in striving for Santiago and looking back on the reduction of suffering we make along the way. Even a single meatless Monday does make a difference for that one cow's body you would have otherwise consumed. While this perspective can help us with our actions from day to day, we also know that individually, we have a miniscule impact on broader systems of oppression. However, if critical veganism can shift our society in the direction of consuming fewer animals and renegotiating our relationships with nonhuman others in the world, then we have the potential to make broad, sweeping change. Animal liberation is human liberation (Singer, 2009), meaning that both humans and nonhumans benefit from this

shift. If we are to have any hope of humanity surviving the climate crisis, then we desperately need a societal shift in the way we relate with the other beings around us. A dominion framework only pushes us closer toward the 1.5° C warming benchmark (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2019), it does not pull us the other way. I offer up a critical vegan orientation as a potential way forward to start mending the relationships our society has broken and thus save both human and nonhuman lives in the process.

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APPENDIX: GLOSSARY FOR “TAKE, EAT, THIS IS MY BODY

Word	Definition
“Bless Your Heart:”	a Southern “fuck you.”
Deconversion:	Conversion, but the opposite. A process that, when happens away from Evangelical Christianity, results in one burning in hell for all of eternity.
Evangelical Christian:	Christians who think that they are the only Christians.
Fake news:	see “science.”
Homewrecker:	A person (almost always a woman) who single-handedly decides to destroy God’s ideal of a heterosexual nuclear family, causes divorce, and then takes that nuclear family as her own. Note: a homewrecker cannot be a Proverbs 31 woman.
Joel Osteen:	A mega-rich capitalist who preys on the distraught and makes white people feel good.
Proverbs 31 woman:	A woman who is physically impossible to actually be. She always has her house in line, pumps out kids, submits to male authority, and is probably good at playing the piano.
Science:	see “fake news.”