

Creaturely Realism, the Critique of Property, and the Climate Crisis

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Bénédicte Boisseron signals a new possibility for theories of animality, arguing that the decade long explosion in critical animal studies “offers a unique chance to take an in-depth look at the modern impact of a historically grounded system of mutual racialization and animalization.”¹ I contend that taking advantage of this chance we must think Blackness and animality together as converging on a common critique of the human without drawing a direct equivalence between these distinct forms of being.² Given the complex intersection of the questions of species difference and the formation of the human with logics of sexual difference and the construction of the sexual minority, we can extend the link between Blackness and animality and thus Black studies and animal studies to eco-feminism and queer engagements with the non-human.³ My project here shares space with Mel Y. Chen’s proposal of an optic “that seeks to make consistently available the animalities that live together with race and with queerness.”⁴ We can think of these links in essentially intra-active terms with animality. The central project of this paper will be reading the critique of property into the critique of the human in order to bring animal studies together with the questions of power and difference addressed by minority discourse. I will conclude with some reflections on the forms of togetherness and alliance engendered by our pandemic times and what possibilities emerge from alliance beyond the human.

The analytic I develop for these readings and engagements that bring together theories of animal life with minority discourse travels under the heading of creaturely realism. The creaturely as a theoretical term is borrowed from Anat Pick’s notion of the creature as something “material, temporal, and vulnerable” caught between the forces

¹ Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 2.

² I capitalize the ‘B’ in Black as a way of keeping in view the freedom struggles and subjectivity of the people of the African diaspora.

³ For a connection between queer theory, disability studies and animal studies see Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability, Anima* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 53-4.

⁴ Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect, Perverse Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

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of contingency and necessity that shape life.⁵ The creaturely for Pick is deeply connected to embodiment, serving as “a powerful antidote to anthropocentrism,” especially the forms of anthropocentrism that rely on a separation between mind and body whether conceptually or substantively.⁶ I take both these dimensions of Pick’s framing and further emphasize the aesthetic dimension of its fleshy embodiment in contrast to a philosophy that abstracts non-human life from its corporeality.

I hinge upon realism for two related but distinct areas of intervention. The first takes its cues from literary conceptions of realism and works to de-romanticize the animal which is often idealized in post-Heideggerian philosophies of animality such as in the thought of Derrida. That is, while Derrida encourages us to confront the exploitation of animal life in industrial agriculture and techno-science, his primary archive in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is twentieth century anti-humanist philosophy and modernist literature.⁷ In contrast to this, I want to emphasize capitalism as the central technology of articulating the species line, rendering historically contingent both the formation and reproduction of capitalism and also the formation and reproduction of animality: that is, I hope to emphasize the dimensions of social and political thought that focus on the material construction of animality as a form of property. I see this move as the key mode of intervention necessary to critical work in animal studies.

The second sense in which I summon realism here is the political intervention of “thinking the war” against animals, i.e. as a balance of forces that enshrine anthropocentric domination, as Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel has argued.⁸ The “war” is understood here as the massive amounts of exploitation and death meted out to non-human animals in slaughterhouses, farms, and laboratories but also the blunting of compassion that such mass killing requires. While Wadiwel’s argument makes use of biopolitical critiques of sovereignty, I emphasize differently the construction of capitalist property as central to animal exploitation and thus to the war on animals. That is, the argument of this paper takes inspiration from Wadiwel’s thinking the relations of force that define animal life but place it more explicitly within the property-form.

⁵ Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). For a critique of Derridean animal studies in line with my own see Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, *Posthumanities* 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 29–42.

⁸ Dinesh Wadiwel, *The War against Animals* (Brill, 2015), 253, <http://brill.com/view/title/32110>.

The analytic of creaturely realism shares space with recent work like Christopher Chitty’s concept queer realism which seeks to recast queerness not as “marking some utopian opening up...of self-transformative play” but instead as a “precarious social status outside the institutions of family, property and couple form.”⁹ Creaturely realism is thus in close dialogue with this focus on dedramatizing the queer from a necessarily transgressive position, an escape or even affective intensity, to a set of relations with a material history that is closely yoked to the history of property. In a similar fashion, animality is not understood as a legitimating notion with which to rethink ontology—much less to bestow humanity with certain features—but rather as a set of relations that exist in close formation with the development of capitalist social formations. The claim at the heart of this argument is that the animal (as a discursive form) has a history and that such history emerges with the formation of property through a process of accumulation and dispossession that subtends the valuations of capitalism and the workings of the commodity form.

I place the animal in the circuit of what Donna Haraway calls ‘encounter value.’ Encounter value is added to Marx’s classic dyad of use value and exchange value to address “relationships among a motley array of lively beings, in which commerce and consciousness, evolution and bioengineering, and ethics and utilities are all in play” within the circuits of capitalism.¹⁰ I thus mark creaturely realism as a kind of chilling of the romance of the non-human. This deromanticizing serves to interrogate what has been allowed to ossify into dogma in critical animal studies: the animal as a liberating resource of difference.

By difference, in this particular sense, I am referring to the privileging of alterity within post-human theory such that animal studies, in particular, comes to focus primarily on the species line. That is, my hope is to think against the polarization of metaphysical separationism and biological continuism with a focus on the material structures that shape human and animal relations, with property being the chief among them. Rather than theorizing animality exclusively as a “marginal object” against forms of anthropocentric representation, I argue that a critical animal studies worthy of the name must interrogate the political and economic formations that subtend anthropocentrism.¹¹ It also opens up the possibility of theorizing without the gaze of the human since, on these terms, while humans and non-humans are dialectically entwined, the dual poles retain a relation of dependent

⁹ Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System*, Theory Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 26.

¹⁰ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Posthumanities 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 46.

¹¹ Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction*. Vol. 1: ..., Critical Climate Change (London: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 30.

autonomy. Through a critical engagement with the animal question, we call into question the sets of exclusions and presumptions that form hegemonic constructions of the human.

Susan McHugh's interrogation of sheep sex orientation studies, for instance, marks an underground current within queer theories of the non-human for this kind of intervention. Sheep sex-orientation studies and their framing of homosexuality as natural, obscures the way in which sheep figured as homosexual are used for sheep farming profit maximization.¹² As she bluntly questions: are the sheep engaging in same sex acts gay? Or "are they all just sheep?"¹³ The lesson of queer theory McHugh draws from here is that these tightly prescriptive definitions are unhelpful as it "enables the same old identity categories to cover over wildly divergent relations and activities."¹⁴ I emphasise differently here the intersections between capitalist production and the use of same-sex acts performed by non-humans with a kind of deromanticizing of queerness as a transgressive horizon. The "just sheep" of it all speaks not to some gay order of nature but the resistance to shoring up a gay identity per se as an enshrining of a recognized and recognizable category of difference. The productive dimension here is an interrogation of the logic of difference and whether difference or the human-animal distinction should represent the key problem for animal studies to solve. My contention is that such a focus already presumes difference is in itself valuable, keeping the animal question forever searching for alternatives to or syntheses between biological continuism and metaphysical separationism and in tired debates about the limits and affordances of anthropomorphism.

Derrida as one of the central figures of contemporary critical animal studies places the animal at an abyssal difference from man and figures animality as undying spectrality and thus leaves uninterrogated the question of a human-animal difference even in its radicalized form.¹⁵ Derrida's rhetoric of abyssal difference, results from the idealizing tendencies present within his discussion of animality. Matthew Carlarco confronts the question of difference directly in his break with Derrida's insistence on maintaining the human-animal distinction, which Carlarco flatly admits he sees as "one of the most dogmatic and puzzling moments in all of his writings."¹⁶ Derrida

¹² S. McHugh, "QUEER (AND) ANIMAL THEORIES," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 154, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2008-022>.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 29–30.

¹⁶ Matthew Carlarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 145.

believes in insuperable divisions between human and animal, strangely repeating Heidegger's rhetoric of the abyss that Derrida elsewhere seeks to trouble.¹⁷ Derrida's critical confrontations with Heidegger proceed by interrogating the set of binary oppositions that reduce animality to an undifferentiated mass called 'the Animal', an idea that forms the central intervention that Derrida thinks against in all his writing and speaking about animals. Derrida's critique of Heidegger is ultimately focused on an interrogation of the distance that Heidegger places between humans and non-human animals, without philosophical justification or scientific reference. Derrida proceeds by rethinking whether humans can be said to possess what Heidegger sees as distinctive to humans.

However, the abyssal difference Derrida sees between animals and humans in Heidegger, recurs within Derrida's own interventions and conclusions in thinking and rethinking the question of human and animal difference. As Carlarco argues "Derrida's insistence on maintaining and reworking the human-animal distinction is profoundly mistaken."¹⁸ As a contrast to Derrida, Carlarco cites Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" which argues that we could just let the distinction go.¹⁹ What if we pose the question of the animal in terms of creaturely realism? Animality, along these lines, would be a concrete entity outside of the romantic logic of spectrality and so subject both to relations of life and relations of force. Rather than positing a human and animal distinction, and the resultant problem of how to think of that distinction, we let that distinction go and instead thought in terms radically outside its purview.

The task of creaturely realism as a politico-theoretical framework is to think animals as political entities and so subject to sovereignty and thus to relations of racializing assemblages, sexual difference and minoritized sexuality even if the way they fit into those nexuses is necessarily bumpy and messy. The bumpy messiness may be constitutive in order to avoid the collapse of the animal question into these other dimensions of historical experience. The account presented here takes inspiration from Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel's critical interrogation of anthropocentric forms of sovereignty. Sovereignty for Wadiwel "does not refer to a right or capacity to rule, but instead to a form of violence that claims and prevails to govern an arbitrary...distinction between those that might otherwise be

¹⁷ Ibid., 146. See Jacques Derrida and John P. Leavey, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand," in *Martin Heidegger* (Routledge, 2006).

¹⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹⁹ Ibid., 150.

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undifferentiated from us.”²⁰ Wadiwel here is drawing from Derrida’s own work on sovereignty as a kind of stupidity referring to “a right to judge poorly (upon no basis) inherent in the right to judge.”²¹ It is this violent stupidity inherent in sovereignty that undergirds the infamous Heideggerian gesture of the distinction between world-less, world-forming and poor in world, and therefore distinction between Being and beings as well as the privileging of human subjectivity.²² The analytic of creaturely realism with its investment in a materialist politics further develops this account by placing the formation of the human within a nexus of racial, sexual, and gendered relations and within the nodal points and productive relations of global capitalism, which proceeds by marking out particular bodies for extraction and exploitation as well as premature death.

The alternatives to seeing the human-animal distinction as the central question of the non-human can be found within Black feminist theories of the human and the refiguring of posthumanism through those theories. Writing in this tradition, Alexander G. Weheliye names the racializing assemblage as a “set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans.”²³ This process has a historically specific character and is yoked closely to various regimes of colonial difference and the intimacies between settler colonialism, the slave trade and indentured labour as well as the formation of modern liberal conceptions of property and political freedom.²⁴

Sylvia Wynter reads the formation of the human without putting it in terms of a universal condition to be overcome, and so casts the problem along radically different lines of historical-materialist conjuncture. The point here is both historical and theoretical. Wynter’s work emerges at the same moment as posthumanism is conceived within the academy and uses “many of posthumanism’s critical concepts” but it also “interrogated the racialized and gendered relevance of these thematics, often transforming posthuman concepts in the process.”²⁵ The central project of Wynter’s racialized refiguring of posthumanism is a need to “reimagine the human as an index of a multiplicity of historical and ongoing contestations and to identify the relational operations of such contestations rather than take

²⁰ Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 261.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

²² *Ibid.*, 261.

²³ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

²⁴ On these intimacies see Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1–43.

²⁵ Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” ed. Kalpana Rahita Seshadri, Michael Lundblad, and Mel Y. Chen, *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013): 673.

the ‘human’s’ colonial imposition as synonymous with all appearances of ‘human.’²⁶ The upshot here is that a critique of anthropocentrism must mark out a central role for racialization and patriarchy. The materialist aspect of creaturely realism is a focus on the actuality of non-human life as subject to relations of being and relations of force, without a strict division between those sets of relations and even intersections and coincidences between those sets rather than merely deciding the human-animal distinction as the be all and end all of the animal question and philosophies of the non-human. These alternatives under the heading of materialist critique return critical theory to the critique of property in so far as race and queerness both exist in relations of a dependent autonomy with capitalist social formations and modern statecraft, i.e. the broad preconditions for contemporary property.²⁷ It is this critique of property and state that leads me to think about the climate crisis as it is by now cliché to note that capital and empire form crucial stages on which the drama of the crisis plays.²⁸

Claire Colebrook identifies three different types of extinction: “the now widely discussed sixth great extinction event (which we have begun to imagine and witness, even if in anticipation); extinction by humans of other species (with the endangered species of the ‘red list’ evidencing our destructive power); and self-extinction, or the capacity for us to destroy what makes us human.”²⁹ It is this auto-extinction that is echoed in Donna Haraway’s question: “What happens when human exceptionalism and the utilitarian individualism of classical political economics become unthinkable in the best sciences across the disciplines and interdisciplines?”³⁰ I read both these reference points as signalling the death of the self-enclosed individualism of man and a move from the death of man as a theoretical gesture to a theoretico-political necessity since the availability of these conceptual apparatuses have been made impossible in the advent of multi-layered forms of extinction.

The gesture, as I read it, can be seen in moves like Foucault’s famous closing lines of *The Order of Things* who signals that some unknown event “of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility –

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 681.

²⁷ See Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony*, 35-8 and Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership, Global and Insurgent Legalities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 1–33.

²⁸ For a recent examination of both the structural and historical links between capitalism and the climate crisis see Nancy Fraser, “Climates of Capital: For a Trans-Environmental Eco-Socialism,” *NLR* (Jan/Feb 2021): 94-127. For recent work reading the Anthropocene as an imperial formation see Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 2.

²⁹ Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman*, 9.

³⁰ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 57.

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without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”³¹ We can also here cite Derrida’s cryptic remarks at the end of his essay “Structure, Sign and Play” who signals the advent of something “unnamable” (sic.) traveling under the sign of the “species of non-species” and in the “formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.”³² The theoretico-political necessity, by contrast, is the coming extinction of Man and his properties in the contemporary conjuncture of overlapping extinction that faces us today. The shift from gesture to necessity is not meant to impute some kind of oracular power to figures like Foucault and Derrida. While there is a long tradition of critical theory focused on a fundamental challenge to the structure of human subjectivity, at a particular level this has yet to be understood in its fullness, namely the destruction of what is proper to man in a dialectic between a particular socio-economic formation and statecraft- te bourgeois state and its process of accumulation by dispossession and the various non-human forces that have been intensified by this formation even as they threaten to overwhelm the system of production itself.³³ We can think here not just of climate disasters but perhaps more readily of pandemics themselves caused by deforestation and factory farming and thus a kind of “externality” of capitalist production. A provisional answer to Haraway then is that the apparatus of the human must be rethought not only as a social construction but as a construction contingent on nexuses of racialization and capital as well as gender and sexuality. Thus, the task for social and political thought and critical theory writ large is an interrogation of the properties of man, understood as the legal embodiment of property along lines of gender and the normative composition of the human subject.

In writing the above paragraphs, thinkers working within Indigenous critical theory have long challenged the ‘conventional’ temporalities of climate change inherited from European political thought. For example, Kyle Whyte points out that “Indigenous peoples have already endured harmful and rapid environmental transformations due to colonialism and other forms of domination.”³⁴ The belated recognition of the imbrication between humans

³¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Repr, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2007), 422.

³² Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Reprint (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 293.

³³ Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 18.

³⁴ Kyle P. Whyte, “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 1–2 (March 2018): 227, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618777621>. Indigenous critical political thought has also long interrogated the property-form as part of a larger critique of settler colonial dispossession see Robert Nichols, *Theft Is Property! Dispossession & Critical Theory*, Radical Americas (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

and the non-human world in European critical theory is a welcome one, but it is important to keep in mind the existence of such thinking from within traditional Indigenous ecological knowledges that long predates such turns within European philosophy, even radical philosophical thought.

The interrogation of man moves away from the abstract destruction of self-enclosed individualism and the utilitarian homo economicus toward emphasizing a very different history and form of political struggle. We can find the materials for such an emphasis in work like Ghassan Hage's *Is Racism An Environmental Threat?* Hage brings together anti-racist politics with ecology in order to analyze the overlapping structure of racism and environmental destruction. He argues that not only are racism and ecological collapse imbricated with one another but that they are “in effect one and the same crisis, a crisis in the dominant mode of inhabiting the world that both racial and ecological domination reproduces.”³⁵ Hage argues for a more politicized conception of ecology stating, in manifesto-like terms, “one cannot be an anti-racist without being an ecologist today, and vice versa.”³⁶ Domestication functions as a kind of archetypal pattern for modes of domination writ large. This expansive conception of domestication termed generalized domestication is “a mode of inhabiting the world through dominating it for the purpose of making it yield value: material or symbolic forms of sustenance, comfort, aesthetic pleasure, and so on.”³⁷ In other words, discipline creates a sense of place and home through a dialectic of exclusion and inclusion premised on rhetoric of ownership and value.

The domesticated speaks to the disciplining of nature and deviant bodies from the nation-form whether through exclusion or incorporation- we can think the latter along with Jasbir Puar's trenchant formulations of homonationalism.³⁸ It also, perhaps somewhat obviously, speaks to disciplining animality. The placing of animals within certain kinds of enclosures and toward certain kinds of labour serves as the primary structural and historical purpose of animal domestication. Barbara Noske notes that many animals today under contemporary capitalist productive relations exist within what she calls “confinement systems.” These confinement systems serve as loci of value extraction by crowding as many animals together as possible and “manipulat[ing] them toward ever greater

³⁵ Ghassan Hage, *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?*, *Debating Race* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2017), 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁸ See Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Tenth Anniversary Expanded Edition, *Next Wave* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

productivity.”³⁹ The homology then between the domestication of the racialized other, of nature as a resource for value extraction and of the animal as resource and labour speaks to their exclusion from the ambit of Man and thus also their propertyless status.

As Christopher Chitty locates, Marx draws the term proletarian from an analogy with the propertyless citizens of ancient Rome.⁴⁰ The subjects within this proletarian positioning both in the Roman constitution and for Marx can only sell their labour-power. The “freedom” of capitalism is precisely this freedom to sell one’s labour-power which as Wadiwel points out is likened by Marx to the process of tanning such that the proletarian is “like one who is bringing his own hide to market.”⁴¹ This equation between the propertyless and animals generally and more specifically with their points of connection under capitalist relations of production speaks to a mutual condition of lacking property both in the sense of status and possession and also a lack of that which is proper to man.⁴² While more theoretical research is necessary to make the claim of common condition, I do make the claim that animals, minority, subjects, and nature fall under the aegis of that lack.

The condition of lacking property, of being in a sense proletarian, and its intimacy with being queer and being racialized marks out the space for a theory of the non-human that is attentive to the complicated intersections between animal life, the climate crisis, capitalism and structures of domination and forms of oppression. My hope is that such a lack can be productive for modes of thinking and collective political resistance beyond polemical bifurcations between the natural and social and between human and non-human. Precarity as the new norm universalizes or at least extends this lack and so the conditions for forms of alliance to act against it.⁴³

Thinking with increasing precarity means addressing the conjuncture: the arrangement of forces both human and non-human to which our writing and thinking must respond. The pandemic inspired new forms of alliance and togetherness. The networks of mutual aid that have sprung up to support the increasing number of

³⁹ Barbara Noske, *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997), 14.

⁴⁰ Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony*, 27.

⁴¹ Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, “‘Like One Who Is Bringing His Own Hide to Market’: Marx, Irigaray, Derrida and Animal Commodification,” *Angelaki* 21, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2016.1182725>.

⁴² On the key role of the animal as raw material in the formation of Fordism see Shukin, Nicole, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, *Posthumanities* 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 88–89.

⁴³ See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 20–21.

homeless people as well as the ill, the elderly and the disabled. All subject positions rendered disposable by the bourgeois state, as even meagre protections against the ravages of privatized care and the housing market were allowed to fall away under the aegis of a return to an imagined normality. The return to normal made manifest by the abandonment of mask mandates and other public health measures only throws into relief the way normality is always-already in contention.⁴⁴

The time of the COVID-19 pandemic, still ongoing, also generated new forms of togetherness and intimacy in its particular regeneration of the struggle for racial justice and against the death-dealing institutions of the state. The coercive function of police and prisons were thrown into sharp relief as the pandemic raged through heavily policed racialized enclaves and throughout prisons and immigrant detention centres. The assemblies generated in response might have been identified as ‘the swinish multitude’- to echo Edmund Burke’s elitist panic over democratic power. The inhuman identification of the popular mass diacritically resonates with the proletarian as only having his hide to bring to market. That is, the mob is figured as inhuman particularly the mob existing outside the aegis of the ‘normal’; one that contests the normal of police violence and immiseration of capitalism. The ‘unruliness’ of this kind of crowd formation and togetherness forms a possible historical realization of a propertyless subject beyond the non-human. In so far as this paper is an intervention in animal studies it is one that wants to think about what is called the political turn in animal studies. As Eva Meijer argues, the turn “from ethical consideration to political participation shifts questions about non-human animals from how they should be treated to how more insight can be gained into the ways they want to live their lives, what types of relationships they desire with one another and with humans, and how we can and should share the planet that we all live on.”⁴⁵ The sharing of the planet and the contested conceptions of that sharing bring to the fore socio-economic arrangements and particular state-forms with the questions and problems posed by animal studies and critical theories of climate change. The intimacy between the critique of capital and the state and how the planet is shared as critical political questions are questions brought from the position of the propertyless in contestation with systems of profit and extraction subtended by the property-form and the repressive state apparatuses. These forms of precarity and

⁴⁴ Dionne Brand, “On Narrative, Reckoning and the Calculus of Living and Dying,” *The Toronto Star*, July 4, 2020, sec. Books, <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2020/07/04/dionne-brand-on-narrative-reckoning-and-the-calculus-of-living-and-dying.html>.

⁴⁵ Eva Meijer, *When Animals Speak: Toward an Interspecies Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 2.

immiseration are reproduced ideologically by a discourse of responsibility that places the blame for suffering and death on the individual as the fundamental unit of not just economic but political life. The forms of assembly and togetherness forged by democratic political alliance against this logic of individual responsibility put forward an alternative set of ethics embodying “the insight that this is a social condition that is both shared and unjust” through the enactment of different political and ethical life-worlds.⁴⁶

The pandemic serves as something of a prelude to and an intersection with the fundamental precarity that will be generated and intensified by climate crisis.⁴⁷ Precarity demands alliance that exceed the limits of the human, not just beyond the rhetorical and material constructions of human rights but also in alliance with non-human animals. That is, if it is essential to think questions of inhabitation, then it is essential to think political alliance beyond that which calls itself man. These questions have and will be thrown into sharp relief as the crisis intensifies and persists manifesting in the increase of a common vulnerability beyond the properties of man. The rhetorical figure of being ‘all in this together’ has been revealed as a trick of the camera obscura of ideology. However, a common lack of property instantiates an alliance through difference toward a ruptural unity that can free the sacrifices from the altar of property.

⁴⁶ Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 15–16.

⁴⁷ We should keep in mind the way the repressive elements of the state fully acknowledge the disruptive impacts on climate change and plan to engage in repression brought on by unrest. See Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 138–41, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226323176.001.0001>.

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