



SPACES OF VIOLENCE, PLACES OF HOPE: READING GEOGRAPHIES OF SOCIAL AND SPATIAL JUSTICE IN JOHN SORENSON'S WORK

Richard White, Sheffield Hallam University, UK.

5th annual meeting of the International Association for Vegan Sociologists. October 6th 2024

Richard.White@shu.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

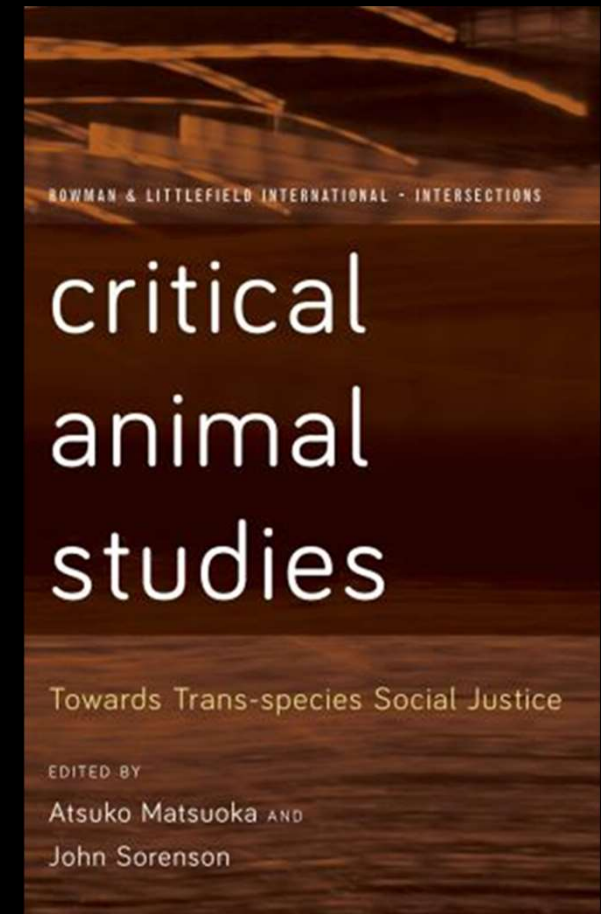
Themes far from exclusive, or exhaustive. Hopeful that these themes may resonate with many scholars and activists who have benefitted from engaging with John and his writing.

1. **Creating new spaces within academia** – for interdisciplinary flourishing within CAS.
2. **Emphasising the importance of the imaginary** – capitalism and speciesism.
3. **Encouraging us to think about the spatiality of violence**– focused on spaces of animal (ab)use.
4. **Transgressing spaces: by many means necessary:** animal activism and liberation
5. **Futures and challenges:** post-speciesist and post-capitalist possibilities .

Departing thought: embodying the best of “us” – John as fellow earthling.

1. ENCOURAGING NEW VOICES AND NEW CONTRIBUTION WITHIN AND BEYOND CAS

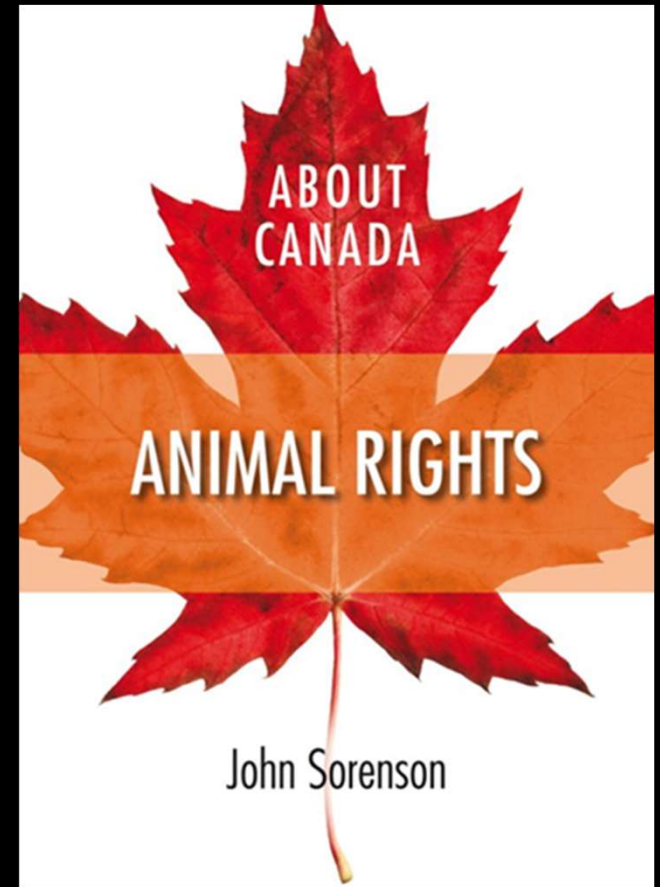
- Debt to the influential contribution and commitment to open up and create space for other scholar-activists and disciplines.
- “One aim of the book is its effort to demonstrate the relevance of a CAS approach to disciplines where it is still largely unknown, such as social work, psychology, political science, and historical archaeology,[and geography!]” (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2018, 2)
- Championing othered/ hidden voices within these disciplines.
 - Beyond academia
 - Emerging scholar-activists
 - Spaces for activist voices and experiences beyond the academy



2. . EXPOSING THE MYTHS WE LIVE BY– CAPITALISM AND SPECIESISM.

- Immense contribution to deepening and enriching our understanding of **capitalism** and **speciesism** and the myopic and profoundly violent worldviews that they perpetuate.

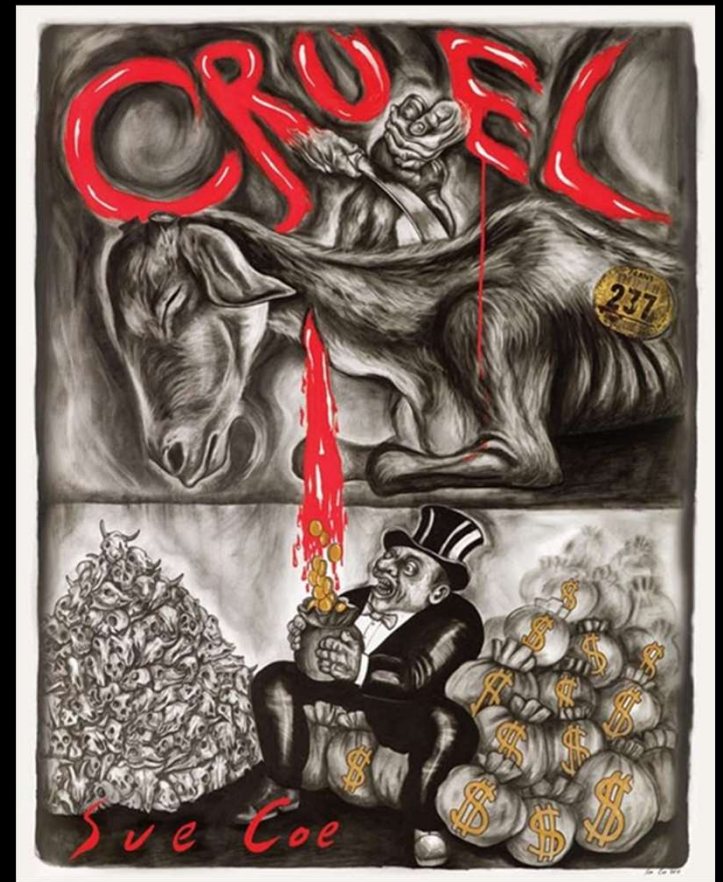
Capitalism encourages us to live in a world of illusions in which inconvenient truths are silenced, unpopular ideas suppressed. Those who benefit from systems of oppression and exploitation present those systems as natural, appropriate and humane. They work to deflect criticism of their power, attacking those who dissent and trying to undermine, trivialize and marginalize their critics. Within this system, exploiting and killing animals for profit is taken for granted. Capitalism transforms everything into a commodity but it intersects with and incorporates speciesist ideology. From a speciesist perspective, other forms of life are already considered legitimate targets for exploitation. The scale of exploitation of other animals is colossal, indeed barely comprehensible, with typical estimates of 58 billion land animals killed for food annually; numbers of fish and other sea animals



3. HOW VIOLENCE SITS IN PLACE

“Exploitation of animals is a fundamental component of capitalism, systematic and institutionalized, with interlocking industries that breed, feed, cage, sell, transport, experiment upon and slaughter animals, using their skins, flesh, organs and genetic material.”

(Animal Rights, 2010, pg. 18)



*Cruel: Bearing Witness To Animal
Exploitation by Sue Coe
OR Books, 2012*

BORDERS – AND BORDERING

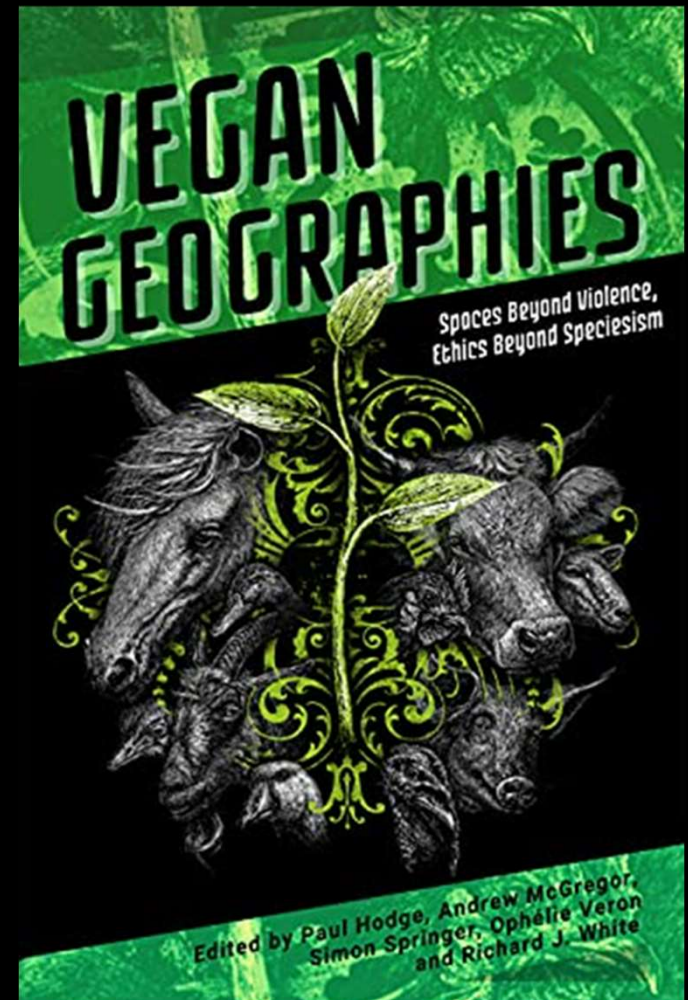
Moral Panic over Fake Service Animals

- “Panic rhetoric of ‘epidemic’ also indicates lack of control, disorder and a spreading contagion that threatens life, alerting awareness as it refers to rampant diseases. Such stylized rhetoric which escalates moral panic is a common element in social control culture (Cohen 2011). Generally, ideas of disease and contamination are part of a discursive apparatus **used to maintain a sense of distance and borders between humans and other animals**. Panic discourse signals a breakdown of **borders** and order (Cohen 2011), in this case, concerning who has access to **public spaces**, such as restaurants and air carriers. Voices for control become louder, **warning of breaches of the boundary that must be maintained between humans and other species....** “(Sorenson and Matsuoka, 2022, 439)

FOR SPATIAL EMANCIPATION IN CRITICAL ANIMAL STUDIES

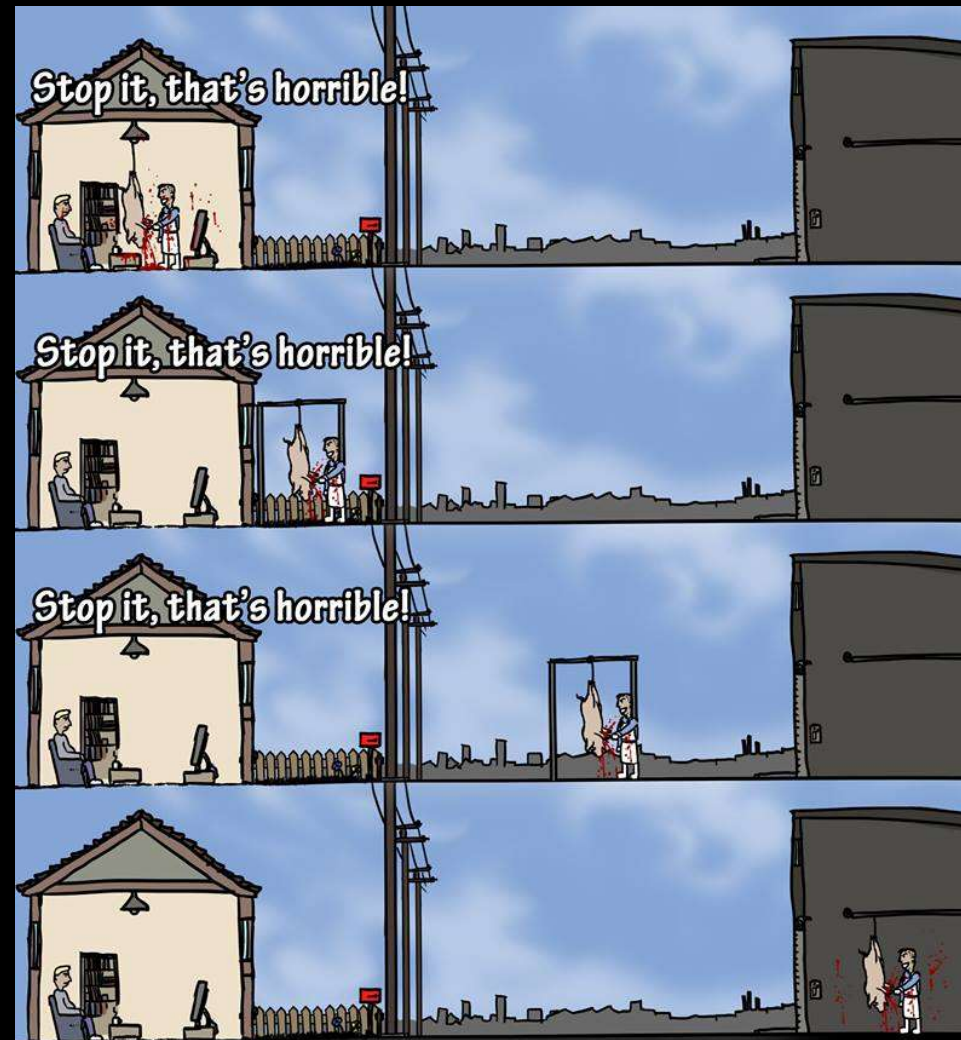
- **“For Spatial Emancipation in Critical Animal Studies”** (White and Springer 2018, Chp 7).
- **“CAS needs to be more aware of the constellation of relations that exists between the “social” and the “spatial”.** The emancipation of the former requires the emancipation of the latter, which requires use to rethink the geographical terrains upon which our encounters with nonhuman “others” literally take place. “ (p.162).
- **Looks across space and scale, exploring the appropriateness of vegan ethics among diverse social and cultural groups,** and within the midst of broader neoliberal economic and political frameworks that seek to commodify and marketize the movement

Vegan Geographies (2022)...



ETHICS OF CARE: DELIBERATE BORDERING/ CAGING OF THE WORLDS OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

- Geographical proximity, (in)visibility and ethics of care & compassion.
- Out of sight, out of mind...

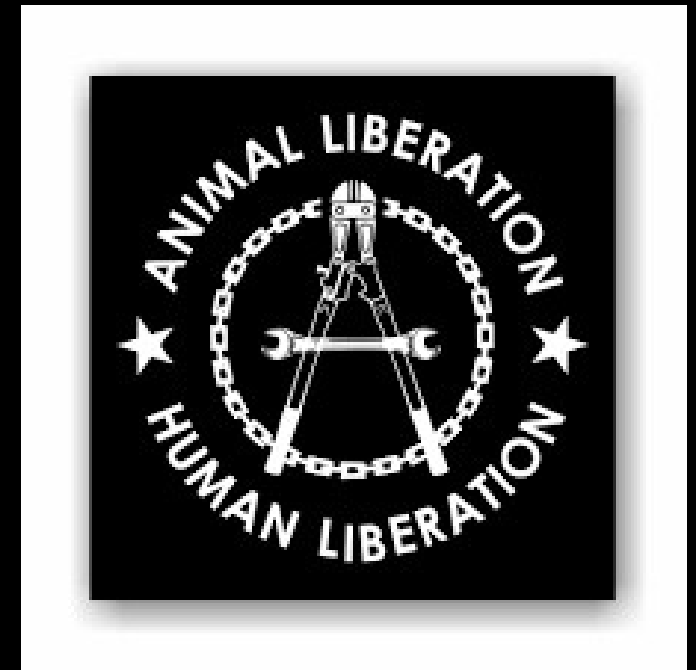


AT WHAT DISTANCE DO YOU STOP CARING?

4. REMINDER THAT ANIMAL LIBERATION IS HUMAN LIBERATION

- “Dismissing concern for animals, they say human problems must be solved first. Of course, Canadians face many challenges — environmental degradation, economic turmoil, impoverishment of the Indigenous population, homelessness, threatened social services, war in Afghanistan and so on. However, **caring about animals does not exclude concern for human problems.** Placing these in opposition is merely a means to avoid inconvenient modifications to one’s own behaviour while preserving a complimentary view of oneself as a moral person

(Chap 1: Animals and Social Justice, pg 10)



SITES OF (AB)USE: SLAUGHTERHOUSE WORKERS

- Slaughterhouse – literally the *house of slaughter*. Who gets to work here?



Slaughterhouse workers: - composed of most marginal and disenfranchised populations.

Chronic physical and psychological impacts
PTSS, Perpetrator-Induced
Traumatic Stress” (PITS)
syndrome

- Community impacts (increased alcohol and drug dependency, higher crime rates, and instances of domestic violence)

- SUE COE, RED SLAUGHTERHOUSE, 1988. EXCERPTED FROM CRUEL, PAGE 71. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF OR BOOKS AND THE ARTIST.
- SOURCE: [HTTPS://BOMBMAGAZINE.ORG/ARTICLES/DRAWING-ATTENTION-SUE-COE/](https://bombmagazine.org/articles/drawing-attention-sue-coe/)

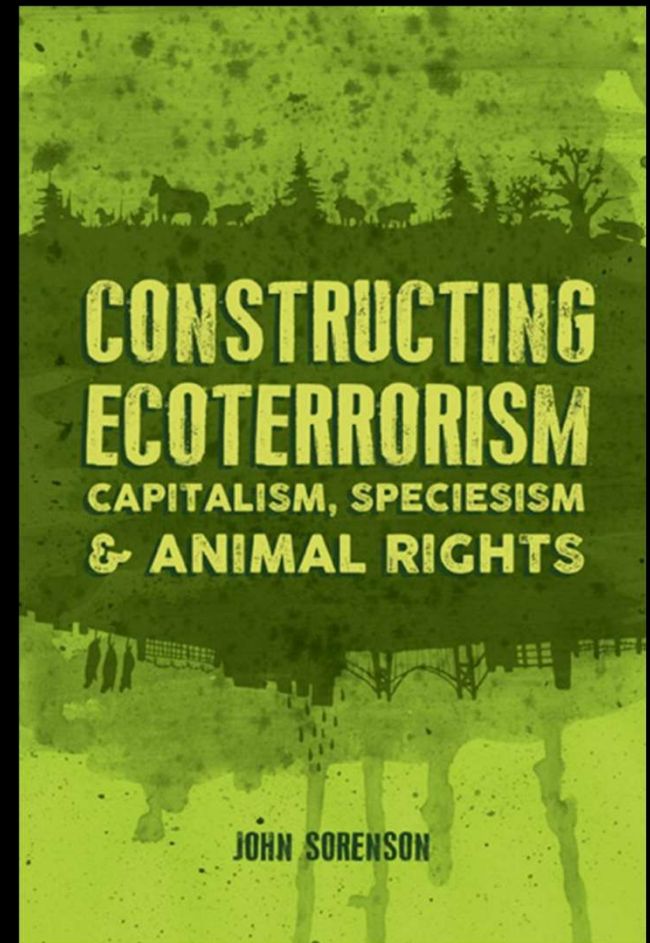
5. BY MANY MEANS NECESSARY (ANIMAL ACTIVISM AND LIBERATION)

2016 (Interview with John)

Ian Purdy: What inspired you to write *Constructing Ecoterrorism: Capitalism, Speciesism and Animal Rights*?

John Sorenson: What inspired me to write the book was the efforts of animal activists who have dedicated their lives to helping animals, speaking out against the atrocities that are inflicted upon them and working to create a more compassionate and just society.

- Solidarity and support for direct action/ diversity of strategies and tactics.
- Increasingly rare in contemporary neoliberal academy



ACTIVISM: TRANSGRESSING PRIVATE SPACES OF (AB)USE

“The rendering of the spatial fabric into 'public' and 'private' spaces, in ways that remove the realities contained within spaces (of animal abuse) from public consciousness, is fundamental to ensuring that these atrocities continue”.
(White and Springer, 2018)

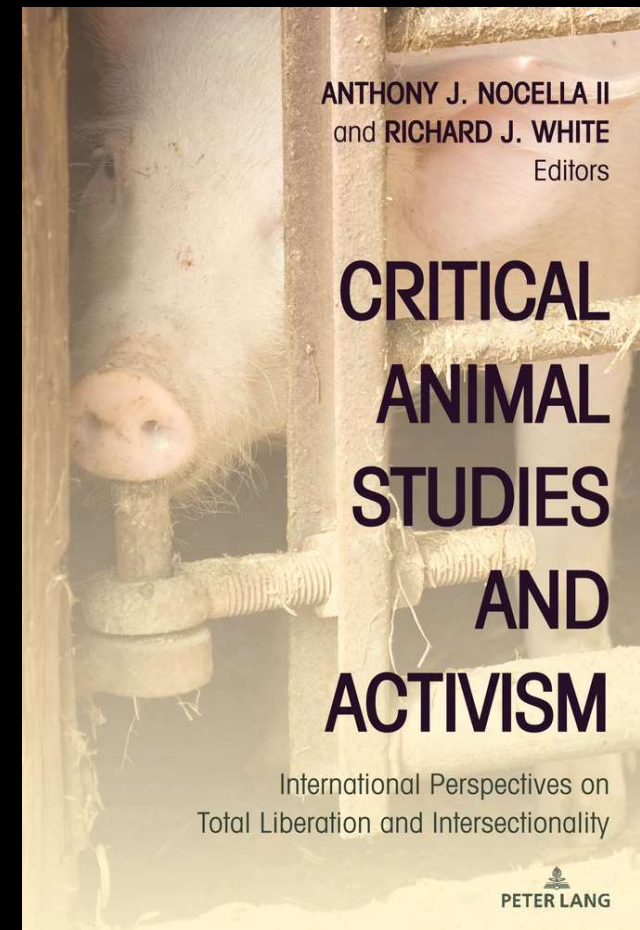


"The open rescue from a factory farm of a ewe and her two lambs."

Photo copyright Jo-Anne McArthur/Unbound Project/We Animals Media.

CRITICAL EMPHASIS ON RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS AROUND THE VIOLENCE AGAINST ANIMAL ACTIVISTS

- “... I wanted to spend some time discussing how corporations and police are involved in changing laws, infiltrating activist groups, using direct violence against activists or inciting violence as a means to justify repression and so on. I also wanted to put this in the context of repression against other forms of activism and how media frame other social justice movements” (Sorenson, 2016)



2023

<https://www.peterlang.com/document/1288792>

VEGAN GEOGRAPHIES: MEDIA

By Chris Brooke

ISSUING warnings on everything from bullying and 'hate crime' to 'micro-aggressions', they were clearly expecting the worst. But the woke organisers of the Royal Geographical Society's annual international conference appear to have misjudged those attending.

For as the event in Newcastle drew to a close yesterday, there had been no reports of 'inappropriate behaviour' – and the 'recovery space' staffed by a counsellor remained largely unused.

Around 1,200 geographers from around the world had been asked to follow a strict code of conduct, with the threat of 'expulsion' for any transgressors.

A pre-conference workshop on 'preparing for disclosures' was organised for anyone who thought they might be told about incidents of harassment, discrimination, bullying or violence.

And a special 'recovery space', attended by a counsellor, was set up for those wanting to 'disclose

Geographers told: Go woke or you're on dodgy ground

Warning issued on 'micro-

an incident' or needing a place to 'relax and decompress'.

In the foyer at Newcastle University large banners read: 'Keep your hands to yourself. Don't judge what you can't see. Misogyny is a hate crime.'

But yesterday, without so much as a report of a verbal bust-up,

ately impact geographers who are starting out in the discipline.'

Everyone attending was asked to help in 'actioning change' and told 'bullying and belittling behaviour' would not be tolerated.

At the 'recovery space' counsellor Joy Easterby was alone with no one to help, but she said she had 'seen a couple of people'.

She added: 'If I had seen something

Warning issued on 'micro-aggre

an incident' or needing a place to 'relax and decompress'.

In the foyer at Newcastle University large banners read: 'Keep your hands to yourself. Don't judge what you can't see. Misogyny is a hate crime.'

But yesterday, without so much as a report of a verbal bust-up,

delegates tackled subjects such as 'fulfilling the radical potential and promise of vegan geographies' and 'geographies of the domestic energy hydrogen transition'. The studios atmosphere seemed at odds with a prominent section on the RGS conference website about 'inclusivity and safety' at the conference. Delegates were told 'incidents have history' and 'challenged' at the conference. The advice on micro-aggression was 'power – how to use it or unconsciously'.

Saturday 03 September 2022

- Upsetting/ enraging the Daily Mail readership?

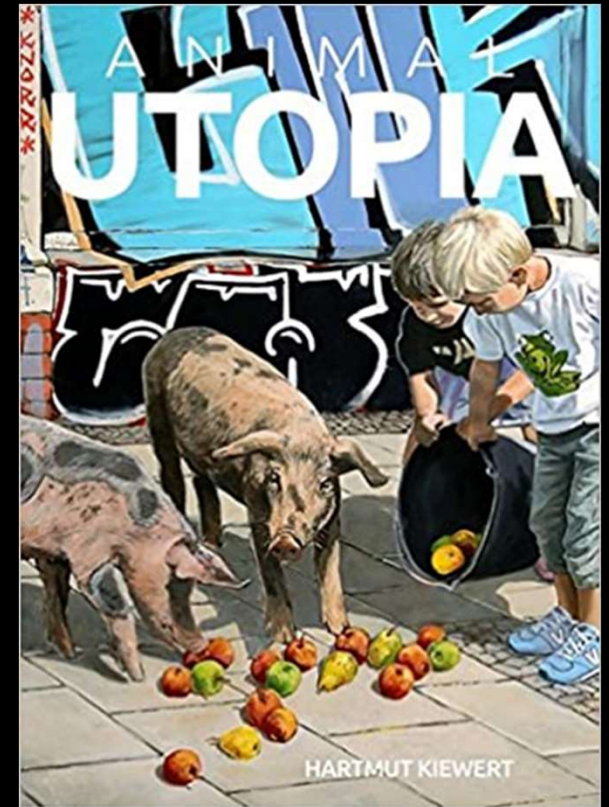
Through focusing on vegan geographies, we direct attention towards the spatialization of activism— involving confrontation politics oriented to alleviating spaces of suffering, as well as more generative practices seeking to prefigure more convivial worlds...”

FUTURES

Sharing Space More Justly

HOPES AND POSSIBILITIES

- John's work is always hope-full, inviting us to usher forward new imaginaries: post-capitalist / post-specieist worlds. How may these inform and create new socio-spatial imaginaries of living justly into being?
- Challenges "Opposition to animal rights is understandable from industries based upon animal exploitation. **More surprising is opposition to serious thinking from those who are otherwise progressive but who ignore animal rights as a social justice issue.** "(About Canada, pg. 10)
- Importance of a critical animal studies: and thinking seriously about academia as a site of activism and struggle for trans-species social justice.
- Questions of social justice are always – at some level – spatial.





FINALLY...

EMBODYING SPIRIT OF CAS: JOHN AS A FELLOW EARTHLING

- “At the same time as we are sorry to lose so many of our comrades in the journal, we are glad that John Sorenson (Brock University) has agreed to take over as the new —Editor-in-Chief...John was our, mutual, first choice to take over the editorship of the journal and we cannot think of anyone to take over who could better uphold the ideals for which the Collective fought. For John, too, displays this same ethical commitment to merging animal activism and academic research, this same commitment to intersectional and revolutionary analysis, and this same vision that is both resolutely anti-speciesist and anti-classist.
- However, what most draws us to John is, again, him as a person and the way that he responds to everyone regardless of what position they may, or may not, hold in or out of the academy with the same kindness, thoughtfulness, and respectfulness that were the hallmark of the editorial collective style...”
- JCAS Editorial, Editorial Collective, 2012

