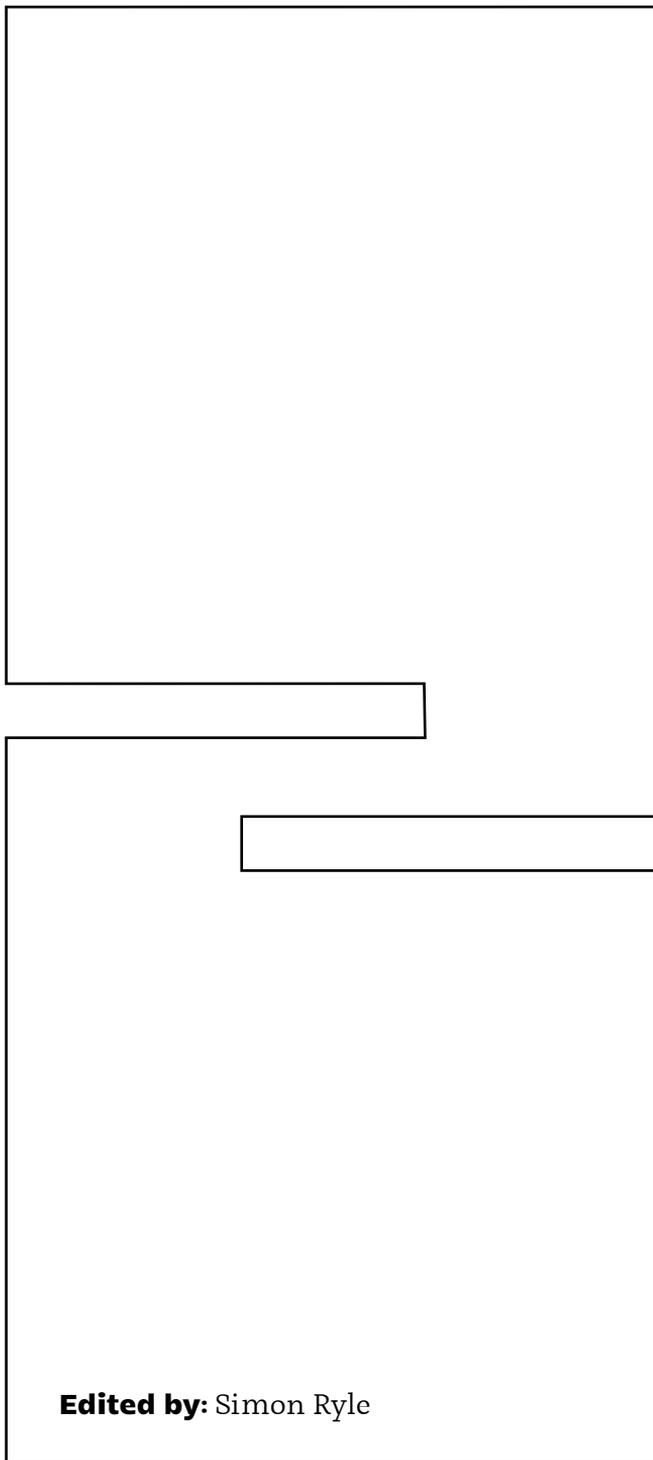


Cross Cultural Studies Review

A journal for comparative studies
of culture, literature, and the arts



Edited by: Simon Ryle

Reviews

***Human, Animals, and Biopolitics.
The more-than-human condition.***
**Ed. Kristin Asdal, Tone
Druglitro, and Steve Hinchliffe.**
Routledge, 2017.

Anita Lunić*

The more-than-human condition represents a step forward in employing Foucauldian analysis to explore human-animal relationships. As the title informs us, the focus of this collection is on the biopolitical approach to the animal. The clear association with Hannah Arendt's famous *Vita Activa (The Human Condition)* in the subtitle (*the more-than-human condition*) informs us further about the core idea behind this project: to rethink the relationship between animal and human and the impact one has on the establishment and development of the *world* of the other. In that sense, this assemblage of research papers serves both to rethink the place animals take in the human condition as well as the biopolitical strategies humans employ in dealing with non-human animals. The clear demarcation line between humans and animal which has led to the exclusion of the animal from the sphere of politics is now under question.

Choosing biopolitics as a framework to research this shift may, at the first glance at least, seem surprising as Foucault did not pay significant attention to animal research and did not include animals in his biopolitical scheme. Moreover, Foucault's focus on human sciences led to interpretations of biopolitics in an anthropocentric manner with the supposed granted difference between humans and animals, nature, and culture. However, this lacuna was followed not by refusal but rather by its rethinking and new readings that led to the concept of biopolitics suitable for the inclusion of nonhuman animals into the equation. This intention comes alongside the questioning of human triumphalism over nature and a general anthropocentric orientation.

* alunic@ffst.hr

Following this idea, the editors tend to further develop an understanding of biopolitics that can serve as a means to generate a *more empirically driven theorization of a-more-than-human politics* which would function as a helpful tool in rethinking our obligations towards the non-human. Building on previous debates on potentiality and the limits of biopolitics as a framework to research human-animal relationships (Lemke, Wolfe, etc.), the editors follow a reading of Foucault within a material-semiotic framework with the main aim of opening the concept of biopolitics for a new methodological and empirical research.

Developing versions of biopolitics that function for sentient beings is a step forward in recognizing both the need to analyze forms of dominance we impose on the non-human world, power relations laying between as well as recognizing that humans are not alone – *others* continuously co-create our condition which is therefore necessarily always *more-than-human*. This collection of research papers, therefore, is an important step in further developing both classical (human-oriented) biopolitics as well as a step towards articulating alternative (if not more appropriate) approaches in animal research.

In the first paper entitled “The Practices of Fishy Sentience,” John Law and Marianne Elisabeth Lien analyse human-fish relationships in fish farming industries with the example of farmed Atlantic salmon. Their focus is on lively practices in which farmed fish “come into being in tanks and pens” (p. 30). Recognizing the complexity of anthropomorphism in this particular case, they develop a relational understanding of anthropomorphism. This approach allows seeing interactions of fish and people, as well as understanding how fish sentience is produced and enacted as a relational quality (rather than as property) that emerge within heterogeneous assemblages of all kinds. Therefore, anthropomorphism is revealed as a tactic of the relation to animals rather than a simple projection of human features. As they see it, it comes in three different modes: anthropomorphic subjectivism, anthropomorphic teleology, and objectivist (non)anthropomorphism. This is where research of Law and Lien moves beyond the intended scope of the paper by opening three important general insights for animal studies: the first concerns the role of practices within science, the second concerns the importance of non-scientific practices in the production of sentience; and the third deals with the move from treating anthropomorphism as a sin towards analysing how different modes of anthropomorphism function. In the second paper, Vibeke Pihl follows multispecies ethnography on pigs with a special focus on “minipigs” used in a project examining the effects of gastric bypass surgery. Comparing the minipigs treatment at the experimental farm and in the laboratory, Pihl notices the co-existence of two different ways of knowing pigs: as individual personalities at the

experimental farm, and as the material of physiological models at the faculties/in the laboratory. Those two ways are expressed in two practices of transforming pigs into translational models: by naming and by number. The naming took place at experimental farms while numbering was present in laboratories. Those two strategies were employed because of different reasons. Naming functioned as an organizing strategy, rather than as an expression of emotional attachment. It ensured better monitoring and better recognition of individual characteristics of particular minipigs (expressed in names such as Speedy, Houdini, etc). Altogether, naming led to a better research track and added to the production of data. On the other hand, the numbering was used in laboratories to adjust to scientific requirements. Pihl argues that both names and numbers, as practices to transform pigs into models of human patients, serve the successful development of pig research biographies. Even though those two knowledge practices seem incoherent, Pihl discovers their continuity. This research, questions supposed correlations between labelling and emotions, informs us about the complexity of knowledge production tactics as well as about the complexity of anthropomorphizing strategies. It also opens up questions on how anthropomorphism and instrumentalization are related to each other.

The following contribution moves the emphasis from the treatment of particular animal species towards the legal treatment of nonhuman animals in general. In this contribution, Kristin Asdal and Tone Druglitrø focus on the emergence of nonhumans (by way of law) as sentient beings with intrinsic, rather than purely instrumental, value. The starting point is that law, as a moral technology, has a significant impact on both bodies and the biopolitical collective by rewording, differentiating, and expelling. Following the development of animal law in Norway, the authors show how the problem of the legal recognition and treatment of animals is intertwined with human interests and the concept of *humanness*.

Martina Schlünder's paper on the traffic of sheep in modern trauma surgery explores the movements of sheep and humans in biomedicine and agriculture. Schlünder argues that two distinct versions of sheep emerged. She names them by the products they deliver: meat and wool sheep, and bone sheep. While the first is found in the livestock economy, the other is characteristic of the knowledge economy. Even though those two versions are distinct, they are closely related. Schlünder explores transformations and translations sheep had to undergo in becoming bone sheep and the emergence of a trauma-surgery knowledge economy. Building on Fleck, she recognizes sheep as members of a collective, and, radically, acknowledges the role of sheep agency in the translation between animal and human as well as the transformation from biology to the tool. Encounters between humans and animals within (experimental

human) medicine are also the focus of Christoph Gradmann's paper. Gradmann explores the introduction of an animal experiment into pathology as he recognizes it as central to the development of medical bacteriology. In his examination of the history of the pathological animal experiment, Gradmann focuses on studies by Robert Koch and questions *whether a medical-bacteriological style of animal-experimental work exists* (p. 104). More precisely, Gradmann's concern are the concepts of measurement and disease as related to animal experiments.

Alternatively, Robert G.W. Kirk analyses other aspects of experimental techniques and laboratory animal science, with special emphasis on the adequacy of biopower for understanding nonhumans' position in a biopolitical collective. By reconstructing the historical emergence of reduction, refinement and replacement (known as the *three Rs*) as principles that form *a regulatory framework that sustains the moral legitimacy of animal experimentation* (p. 128), Kirk explores the relationship between care and truth as well as how the *human* is developed from the encounter with the *nonhuman*. The nonhuman not only helps to constitute the human as a scientist but also helps to produce humans as biopolitical subjects (and I would add here, as a target) via biomedical knowledge developed through animal experiments. Recognition of the role nonhuman animals have in the production of humans leads to the necessary establishment of more-than-human biopolitical collectives. The problem of health also concerns Natalie Porter. In her paper on *One World – One Health*, Porter addresses the problem of assigning protection in cases when biopower tactics cut across species and livelihoods. She uses the case study of bird flu management "to develop an approach to biopower that accounts for entanglements between species in contemporary global health" (p. 136). More precisely, her research focuses on the analysis of bird flu management in Vietnam. This case study helps locate the spheres of both knowledge and authority/bureaucracy tensions. Not less important, it helps analyse boundaries of the implementation of biopower tactics used to govern both humans and animals: or, as Porter puts it, humans "with" animals. Generally, this entry opens an important discussion on the relationship between human and animal health as well as on the impact of biopower tactics on human-animal relationships, including production practices.

In his contribution, Steve Hinchliffe examines the possibilities of a more collective approach to knowledge and sense. Focusing on the philosophy of Michael Serres but also including empirical research as well as a myriad of interdisciplinary resources, Hinchliffe tends to establish *livelier biopolitics*. To explain his position and develop his argument, Hinchliffe focuses on *knowing birds* as a sphere within which opens a space for rethinking animal roles in knowledge and community. His interpretation of the shift in attitudes that followed a shift in knowledge

after the outbreak of H1N5 avian influenza resembles some shifts we are experiencing today. As the migrating birds transformed from a source of delight and pleasure to source of danger, we are today, while witnessing to the tremendous impact of another zoonosis on our life and future, facing tendencies to undergo similar shifts concerning some other animals.

Finally, the last contribution of the book is by Susan McHugh. In her paper entitled "Loving camels, sacrificing sheep, slaughtering gazelles," McHugh widens the debate by including literary fiction as a critical point to reflect upon relations and coexistence with animals. Her focus is on Ibrahim al-Koni's desert fictions. al-Koni's work represents a picture of a human and animal relationship that falls under what Esposito labelled "impersonal singularity". The importance of this contribution lies in the inclusion of the non-scientific narrative to further explore how enmeshed human and animal lives are, as well as open and redefine biopolitics.

This collection of research papers opens up a lot of debates about the biopolitical reading of human-animal relationships. Even though the nonhuman is the key foci in this book, it is always (and not only implicitly) about the tension between humans and animals. It is about forms of human dominance over the nonhuman. It is about human-induced species extinction and the conditions domestic livestock and laboratory animals are kept in. On the other hand, it is also about our shared destiny and the impact our relationship has on us both. It is, we can say, about a shared environment and shared consequences – it is about shared diseases and the shared destiny of our exploitative tactics. Finally, it is about how our understanding of human (life and health) is conditioned on the nonhuman.

The contributions in this book present a wide array of analyses of mechanisms, intervention strategies, and bodily practices as well as a multitude of case studies that provide a basis for biopolitical research and more-than-human methodologies. Even though it does not put a strong emphasis on theoretical debates on biopolitics, it provides very much needed empirical studies that both show the significance of biopolitical analysis and provide insights useful for further theoretical development. In that sense, this book will be of interest to scholars interested in biopolitics as well as scholars working in the field of animal studies.

Kathryn Yusoff. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Iva Polak*
University of Zagreb

In the past ten years, the academic book market has seen an explosion of book-length studies on the Anthropocene, coming from myriad disciplines, from social and natural sciences to the humanities. The debates resulted in the production of a series of alternative *cenés* such as Agnotocene, Phagocene, Thanatocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, etc., either to provide a more “precise” term which befits corresponding discussions or to signal a specific deficiency in the prefix *anthropos*. The *anthropos* has further been criticised for its gendered bias with the rise of Anthropocene feminism, relying on a well-developed field of ecofeminism. However, no scholar has offered a systematic discussion of a distinctive colour palette of the allegedly uniform *anthropos* of the Anthropocene. In this respect, Kathryn Yusoff’s relatively short but extremely powerful book on the Anthropocene fills in this theoretical gap by adding to the discussion race studies.

Yusoff critically deconstructs the “vanilla” *anthropos* in order to challenge the racial blindness and consequential Eurocentric view of the genesis stories of the Anthropocene. In other words, instead of offering a somewhat anodyne version summed up by Timothy Morton as “I’m the detective *and* the criminal! I’m a person. I’m also part of an entity that is now a *geophysical force on a planetary scale*” (9, emphasis in the original), which has effectively become the grand narrative of the Anthropocene, Yusoff invites the reader to place that anthropogenic *Homo faber* under scrutiny. So, if we want to understand the now of the Anthropocene, it is not enough to rely on the subject-less geology or on some generic *Homo faber*, but on the destructive habits of the colonial *Homo colossus*, the

* ipolak@ffzg.hr

colonial man who has made “a Faustian bargain that mortgages the future [...] as the price of an exuberant present” (Catton 157).

Yusoff's method is simple and efficient: she redresses the “incompletes of the address in the Anthropocene” (Yusoff 4) by introducing its *darker* underbelly into its otherwise universalist semiotics. If we take into account the *anthropos*' toxic legacy such as the extraction of minerals, large-scale forceful movements of people, the movement of plants and animals across territories, the implantation of monocultures in the New World, mining operations, pipelines, coal fields, water management and land management, no matter whether these refer to protocapitalist or capitalist events in the history of mankind, it is clear that the neutral, post-ethnic and post-racial “we” of the Anthropocene hides a clear colonialist endeavour. Yusoff refers to it as the geotrauma of the Anthropocene, wherein the key events of the Anthropocene's origin story always connote the body that profits and the flesh that toils, i.e. the human subject and the inhuman object of the European culture, as Sylvia Wynter, the author Yusoff heavily relies on, calls it.

The resulting study verbalises the erased histories of racism rooted deeply into the story of the Anthropocene because, as Yusoff argues, it is simply impossible to map a serious theoretical field about the causes of the current human condition without the inclusion of “a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction” (Yusoff 2), where both slaves (and we could add colonial and neo-colonial subjects) and extracted materials are epistemologically recognised only through their inhuman properties – as matter. Moreover, as she maintains, excluding black, brown and indigenous bodies who have been exposed to long-term environmental racism, will “fail to deliver any epochal shift at all. It would be in Césaire's words [...] to think the thought of the other' without the other of thought” (Yusoff 18).

For Yusoff, no term is innocent and devoid of the axis of power and performance, including geological events or what has become known in popular discourse as the Golden Spike, a stratigraphic marker which shows a transition from the Holocene, or the past 11,700 years of the history of mankind, to the Anthropocene. All tentative “Golden Spikes” – European expansion and colonization, the Industrial Revolution and Watt's steam engine, and the atomic tests which caused the “Great Acceleration” – reveal the tension between the human (white), the inhuman (black and brown) and the subhuman (indigenous). The fabulation of these three possible material beginnings show that the colonial man became the explorer and the inventor only after he had forcefully taken the native land, initiated the biggest systematic transportation of African slaves to the New World to create a cost-free labour force, and carried on “material extraction under the guise of exchange” (Yusoff 32). As Yusoff goes further, the

Industrial Revolution in the United States was fuelled by allegedly “free” African Americans who predominantly mined coal, while the mapping of over 2000 nuclear explosions from 1945 which lurk behind the “Great Acceleration” exposes “the displacement and exposure of indigenous peoples in the Pacific Islands and the radiation of Native American and Aboriginal peoples in North America and Australia” (45). This is why Yusoff dedicates a chapter to construct the primary category underscoring the genesis of the Anthropocene, that of the inhuman as the matter without which geology of mankind is unfathomable. As Yusoff argues, it is blackness as “racialized matter that delivers the Anthropocene as a geologic event into the world, through mining, plantations, railroads, labor, and energy” (82). The very core of the Anthropocene exhibits a dehumanizing colonialist geology which, as the author maintains, has deformed the earth *and* the subjects. While the former has been acknowledged by the scholars, the latter still remains to become explicitly recognised.

Hence, Yusoff’s impeccably structured and deeply informative book serves as a manual for any subsequent discussions of the Anthropocene that wish to debunk the naturalisation of the neutral “we”, according to which “we” are all in it together since “we” have been playing the same role in the historical and current settler colonialism. Her book should be on the reading list of anyone who believes that epistemological innocence is not what got us here.

Works Cited:

- Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Catton, William R., Jr. *Overshoot. The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change*. University of Illinois Press, 1982 [1980].

Through a Vegan Studies Lens: Textual Ethics and Lived Activism. **Ed. Laura Wright. University of Nevada Press, 2019.**

Arthur Lizie*
Bridgewater State University

As I write this, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown drags into its second month. Amid tweets denying any responsibility for the virus's spread across the United States and recommending the use of household disinfectant to stem the virus, United States President Donald Trump just signed an executive order mandating the nation's meat packing plants to stay open in the interests of national security. This directive was signed despite increasing meat-packing worker deaths at the plants. Or maybe not despite, since these workers are typically poor, often immigrants, and more than occasionally illegal immigrants – three groups for which the administration has shown little but disdain. However, nowhere in the multiple articles I read were the lives that are always sacrificed at meat-packing plants discussed – the animals. This, succinctly, is the prevailing worldview that *Through a Vegan Studies Lens. Textual Ethics and Lived Activism*, edited by Laura Wright, attempts to confront and challenge.

The 14 chapters in this volume follow up on Wright's call for Vegan Studies as a distinct academic field in her 2015 monograph *The Vegan Studies Project. Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*. The intersectional field and this volume pull together work from scholars working in animal studies, ecocriticism, environmental studies, gender studies, and more generalized areas of the humanities. While loosely hanging together across these disciplines and fields, the break between this current project and past endeavors within each of these fields is the centralization of animals within in the discourse, and the desire to reduce/eliminate animal suffering, especially the physical consumption of animals.

* alizie@bridgew.edu

The volume is broken into four sections sandwiched between Wright's contextualizing intro and closing analysis of Miguel Arteta and Mike White's *Dinner with Beatriz*. In the opening remarks, Wright attempts to operationalize the Vegan Studies concept, one "informed by theory, driven by theoretical inquiry, but also fully engaged in activist praxis, dedicated to establishing a conversation that crosses boundaries and expands both knowledge and social engagement beyond the confines of the academy" (viii). This is the territory in which many recently emerging fields, such as Food Studies or Sustainability Studies, have found themselves – driven to justify social justice projects under the guise of traditional theoretical frameworks when what's really called for is "a lived politics of listening, care, emotion and the empathetic imagination" (viii). But, of course, that requires that others are empathetic and imaginative in ways you value. And when others are listening and caring and emotional, but not in ways that share your empathy and imagination, it's easy to slip from activism to "gotcha journalism," simply pointing out where others go wrong (which is what happens in a few chapters here).

The first section focuses on "expanding ecocriticism(s)." Kathryn Kirkpatrick's "Vegans in Locavore Literature" feels a bit circular in its argument, as looking for positive vegan presences in carnist literature seems like looking for gun critics at a Second Amendment rally. Alexa Weik von Mossner's "How We Feel about (Not) Eating Animals: Vegan Studies and Cognitive Ecocriticism" is one of the volume's stronger pieces, pointing pathway toward purposeful empathy construction. Von Mossner looks at media engagement with vegan themes and tries to figure out if a carrot (almost literally) or a stick (images of abused animals) is more engaging and persuasive. This type of "activist praxis" would benefit from some analysis beyond the humanities – public relations and marketing come to mind.

The second section and third sections broadly falling into area studies, the former tackling the United States and the latter, in an odd dichotomy for a book such as this, "beyond the west." The American section relies heavily on traditional textual analysis, with looks at Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker*, Johnathan Franzen's *Purity*, and the film *Soylent Green*, dissecting a number of present and conspicuously absent discourses while including mandatory sentences such as "The absent referent has significant implications regarding the process of identification" (83). The plant-based protein of this section is "The Sexual Politics of Meat in the Trump Era" from Carol J. Adams, author of the 1990 foundational text *The Sexual Politics of Meat. A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. It's less a how-to than a WTF? about what's happened during the Trump reign in the US, with the observation that the historical vegan experience, that is, "feeling alienated from current events, experiencing

deep despair, dealing with challenges to free speech, and feeling powerless in the face of great power,” offers insight into the tools of resistance.

“Beyond the West” includes two straight textual analyses, of Zoë Wiscomb’s *October* and Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*, and the next section includes a study of Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk*, making fully half the volume traditional print/word-based textual analysis. If a goal is to take Vegan Studies beyond the academy, a wider range of analytical artifacts would be useful. That being said, Kadri Aaviks’ “The Rise of Veganism in Post-Socialist Europe: Making Sense of Emergent Vegan Practices and Identities” offers an instructive if predictably disheartening doppelgänger to Adams’ piece.

Philosopher Shanti Chu’s “Nonviolence through Veganism: An Antiracist Postcolonial Strategy for Healing, Agency, and Respect” cuts the widest swath for rational, systemic thinking about veganism, situating it within arguments about slave-master and colonizer-colonized dialectics while drawing parallels between human master and animal slaves (the exploitation situation doubly articulated in this piece’s opening paragraph). Chu urges movement toward ahimsa, doing no harm toward other living beings, as espoused by Gandhi and A. Breeze Harper in *Sistah Vegan. Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*. This is the piece that will get read in graduate seminars.

The final section “Hypocrites and Hipsters” is like shooting fish in a barrel, a phrase that could certainly benefit from some analysis through a vegan studies lens. We find out that hipsters, especially isolated Portland, Oregon-based white middle-class hipsters, are selfish, and that one semester of a college course isn’t going to significantly change long-ingrained eating beliefs. Wright’s brief closing analysis of *Dinner with Beatriz* gives a glimpse of what vegan resistance requires and can look like in Trump’s America.

Taken as a whole, *Through a Vegan Studies Lens* is a tentative first step toward a broader understanding of Vegan Studies as an academic field, more an introduction for the uninitiated than a handbook for the committed – like the instructor’s friends guest lecturing for an intro-level class where you put your hand on but never get to see the whole elephant. Someday I hope to see the whole elephant.

Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2018.

Maria Lux*
Whitman College

Unlike many academic arguments that, as Seymour states, focus only on trying to “expose the problematic or biased elements of a text” and stop there, Seymour succinctly puts her finger on just what is so problematic or uncomfortable about mainstream environmental discourse – its self-righteousness, its seriousness, its “doom and gloom”, its guilt-inducement, its lack of self-awareness, its whiteness and classicism – and then gives us an entire book of examples of cultural production that do otherwise. In other words, her book excitingly offers examples of alternatives, not simply critiques. These case-studies of “bad environmentalism” embrace irony, humour, darkness, a complete lack of knowledge, the bodily and sexual, and “imperfect” authors. Seymour chooses some improbable texts for her archive – from the much-discussed films like Isabella Rossalini’s *Green Porno* and Mike Judge’s *Idiocracy*, to the so-far under-examined “MTV-style” animal show *Wildboyz* hosted by Steve-O, or the documentary *Goodbye Gauley Mountain. An Ecosexual Love Story*. Her archive cuts across genres and formats, too, from the animated sitcom *The Goode Family* to Edward Abbey’s novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. The works in her archive often utilize self-critique, or point their irony inward, at themselves, rather than outward towards an opponent, as traditional environmentalism often does (13). Her book serves to bring works that mainstream environmentalism would find inappropriate, incorrect, or not worthy of scholarly attention, into ecocritical conversations. In a context where many feel helpless, trapped in old arguments and stalemates,

* luxmc@whitman.edu

unable to convince others to hear different viewpoints through the same old appeals, this book offers disruptions, pleasurable alternatives, and refreshingly new perspectives.

Seymour's book is divided into five chapters, centring on themes like "the Problem of Expert Knowledge," "Perverting Nature/Wildlife Programming," "Queer Environmental Performance," "Re-writing Racialized Environmental Affect" and "Toward Trashy Environmentalisms." In other words, she deals with the very intersections that are most difficult, and most needed, in environmental discourse: class, race, sexuality, and necessity (or not) of knowledge. Building off her previous work in *Strange Natures. Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (2013), Seymour uses queer theory broadly, defining it as a focus on "improper attachments and inappropriate feelings" and that "takes pleasure" in what is perceived as "indecorum" . . . while re-visiting the "trademark sensibilities" of queer theory that she feels have been lost in queer ecology: "its playfulness, its irreverence, its interest in perversity, and its delight in irony," (24).

Along these lines, Seymour uses her archive as a whole to make an argument against a deeply entrenched assumption about works of creative production that address environmental issues, namely the insistence that they have direct and useful outcomes. Seymour "question[s] ecocritics' tendency to [. . .] to judge artworks primarily by their functionality: their capacity to educate the public or spark measurable change" (7). Later, she continues her concern that dominant ecocritical approaches can over-emphasize "inciting ecological advocacy" and miss other possibilities, and that "this instrumentalism potentially marginalizes artworks that do not articulate obvious or recognizable environmentalist agendas but nonetheless have something to tell us" (27). The possibilities Seymour sees are many, including ". . . revealing the strict codes of environmentalism, expressing dissatisfaction or *disaffectation* with the environmentalist status quo, bearing witness to crisis, enacting catharsis, raising activist morale, building community, serving as cultural diagnoses, indexing and helping us understand our current eco-political moment [. . .] inculcating a new range of responses to crisis, modeling flexibility and creativity . . ." (7). It is perhaps this willingness to embrace works that do more than simply educate or advocate that makes her book so stimulating.

Another of the most ubiquitous and taken-for-granted assumptions made by environmentalism, and particularly for scholars and critics of it, is the necessity of knowledge as a pre-requisite for "doing environmentalism." In her first chapter: "*I'm no botanist, but . . . Irony, Ecocinema, and the Problem of Expert Knowledge*" for example, she uses Mike Judge's *Idiocracy* as an example. She uses the "average-Joe" (whose name is actually Joe)'s testimony before congress that the corporate-sponsored water-replacement

Brawndo is not working on plants, causing agricultural disaster, and that they should try regular water. But his success is about him *not* being an expert, and not needing to be (40). In Chapter 2, which takes up the genre of wildlife programming, Steve-O seems actively against educating his audience, and incidentally avoids the associated awe, wonder, and reverence typically thought necessary to engender care and empathy for animals, and instead shows that abject, bodily experiences, grossness, or humour work just as well.

Animals themselves are not an explicit focus of Seymour's book, but it has a great deal to offer to animal studies scholars. So many of the critiques she articulates about environmental discourses echo and resonate with critiques directed towards (or perhaps that *should* be directed towards) animal studies and animal activism as well. Seymour's analysis is so perceptive and so well-articulated that it doesn't take much effort on behalf of the reader to see how some of the issues, like self-righteousness, sentimentality, earnestness, an insistence on expert knowledge, whiteness and classicism, and instrumentalist values, are issues animal activists and animal studies scholars need to contend with as well. By calling out these problematic aspects of mainstream environmentalism, Seymour lays the groundwork for the recognition of shared territory between the fields of environmentalism/conservation/ecology and animal studies, which is not an insignificant move since (though these disciplines might be expected to have a great deal in common), they often find themselves at odds.

This book is sorely needed to provide, not templates to be repeated, but instead evidence that other approaches are possible. Seymour doesn't suggest that we all just "flip the switch" to other affective modes, reminding us through her careful and insightful reading of these texts that they are "more complicated than that" (5). Each of the projects Seymour investigates are successful partially by virtue of their novelty or ability to interrupt the norm, sometimes without that even being the intention of their creator. Her analysis of these texts offer a series of examples for how some pieces of cultural production respond to or avoid the common problems of mainstream environmentalism, and leave the next round of responses up to a newly energized audience. For artists, filmmakers, performers, writers, and other people who make things, then, this book can be a highly generative one. And for scholars, it widens the conversation to include new and unexpected kinds of texts. Seymour's book therefore broadens what can count as discourse in the field of environmentalism and activism – opening doors for new things to be made, relieving artists and makers of the expectation that all work be instrumentalist or functionalist in outcome, and allowing for work that is contradictory, hypocritical, imperfect, or otherwise "bad."

Kim Stanley Robinson.
The Ministry for the Future.

London: Orbit, 2020.

Thomas Piketty.
Capital and Ideology.

**Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge: The Belknap Press
of Harvard University Press, 2020 [2019].**

Tarun K. Saint and Francesco Verso, Editors.
***Avatar अवतार: Contemporary
Indian Science Fiction/Fantascienza
contemporanea indiana.***

Rome: Future Fiction, 2020.

Brian Willems*
University of Split

A number of books have recently taken India as an inspiration and example for creating the future. This review looks at two non-Indian texts and one from India in order to identify what aspects of the cultures of India are seen as future-oriented. This is vital at a time when the far-right BJP and RSS parties are in control and Kashmir is under a continued communications blackout and security lockdown due to anti-Muslim sentiments. The three books reviewed are Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), Thomas Piketty's non-fiction economics text *Capital and Ideology* (2019), and an anthology of Indian science

* bwillems@ffst.hr

fiction called *Avatar*, edited by Tarun K. Saint and Francesco Verso (2020). Each of these books is looked at briefly in order to highlight how they see a number of aspects of the culture, economics, and politics of the Indian Union, outside of its current political direction, as role models for a way forward.

The Ministry for the Future opens in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh with a wet-bulb event, meaning a deadly combination of heat and humidity, which kills 20 million people. This leads the Indian government to break with the slow-moving environmental protocols of the Paris Agreement and take matters into their own hands, which takes two major forms. The first is to engage in an illegal act of climate geoengineering, or “a solar radiation management action,” aimed at lowering the global temperature by two degrees Fahrenheit for a year or so. The plan is to double the effect of the Pinatubo volcanic eruption in 1991, when the volcano threw enough sulfur dioxide up into the stratosphere for temperatures to drop nearly one degree Fahrenheit for the following few years. In the novel, engaging in this act of geoengineering breaks the demand for consensus stated in the Paris Agreement, although the Indian government does not care. As Chandra, its representative for the Paris Agreement states, “It was Europe and America and China who caused this heat wave, not us. ...we signed the Agreement to do our part. Which we have done. But no one else is fulfilling commitments, no one is paying the developing nations, and now we have this heat wave. And another one could happen next week! ... So we are taking matters into our own hands.” And this is what the Indian government does, sending planes, bought long ago from the Soviet Union, as high into the air as possible to pump aerosol mixes of sulfur dioxide and other chemicals into the stratosphere.

In the novel, the other strategy that comes from India for combating the causes and effects of climate change is more controversial because it is violent. The Children of Kali group is a direct action offshoot of a new political coalition. Kali wages economic (not military) war against the 195 nations that signed the Paris Agreement, as well as non-state actors and individuals. Starting off with suicide bombing, the group moves on to swarm drone attacks, kidnapping, as well as the outright killing of politicians, business people, and citizens who use fossil-fuel burning transportation such as airplanes. The Children of Kali follow the idea of “They killed us so we killed them,” although at first it might not seem like all of their victims are murderers. However, the group foregrounds the often hard-to-see correlation between causes and consequences in relation to pollution and climate change. For example, travelling by plane in Europe today might have consequences for people in India the following decade. Yet the group’s direct action is also based on a specific real-life

Indian model, the idea of integrated pest management, which is part of the Sikkim organic farming model, as well as the work of agricultural reformist Vandana Shiva. Being the first 100% organic state in the world, the northeastern Indian state of Sikkim has achieved a total ban of all pesticides and chemicals, as well as transforming the industrialization of food production as well as aspects of education, culture, commerce. Yet they still need to manage pests. The organic management of pests is taken as a model by the Children of Kali for the management of climate change, leading them to adopt a model of targeted eradication.

Yet climate geoengineering and organic terrorism are not the only two strategies for change adopted from India in the novel. In terms of governance, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is thrown out for having sold India out to the highest international bidder, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) party is dismissed for its “fake-traditional Hinduistic ethnic-nationalist triumphalism.” What comes to power instead is a syncretic “composite party” which composes all kinds of Indians, from every religion, caste, and class, from those both urban and rural, and from those educated and not. This party is called Avasthana, which is Sanskrit for survival. Other important models for reform in the novel are based, for example, on real-world work done in the southwestern state of Kerala (where, for example, Arundhati Roy is from and where here fiction is set). These include land reform, which takes the form of a return to local knowledge and ownership, as well as the nationalization of the country’s energy companies, the construction of large solar power arrays, and the reclaiming of India’s labor force from international companies to local production. All in all, the novel’s imagined polyglot, democratic coalition of India is taken to be the “bold new leader of the world” rather than a place of poverty and victim of history and geography as it is often taken by outsiders.

The second book under discussion in this review, Thomas Piketty’s *Capital and Ideology*, also takes India as a key reference for models for change. The book is a wide-ranging study of different ideologies developed in order to justify inequality. The main goal of the text is to provide a historical overview of many different ideologies in the hopes that readers will see how our current justifications for inequality are impermanent and open to change. India is a key example both for the deeply embedded nature of the caste system as a justification for inequality and because of a number of its current radical measures for challenging this ideology, which are then taken as guideposts for other countries to follow.

In Chapter Eight, “Ternary Societies and Colonialism: The Case of India,” some aspects of the history of the caste system, “which is generally regarded as a particularly rigid and extreme type of inequality regime,”

are laid out. The term “ternary” in the chapter title refers to societies composed of three main groups, the clergy, nobility, and workers. The caste system is not only more complex, but it has also left more obvious traces of inequalities in contemporary society than those left by the status orders in Europe. One of the main reasons for the entrenched nature of the caste system in India is the interruption of the country’s development by a foreign power, the British. Seeing the caste system as a means of control, the British colonizers inaugurated the census in India, conducted every ten years from 1871 to 1941. As Piketty says, “An unanticipated consequence of the census was that it gave the caste hierarchy an administrative existence, which made the system more rigid and resistant to change.” On the one hand Piketty takes one of his main concepts of the book from the Indian caste system, what he calls the “Brahmin left,” meaning the transformation of workers’ political parties into those of the educated throughout the world. However, of greater interest to us here is how since independence in 1947, some of the better aspects of the Indian Union has attempted to use its legal powers to combat the effects of caste discrimination. A number of these attempts, even though they have been weakened under the current government, are taken as lessons from which the rest of the world should learn.

Piketty is interested in ways that governments can intervene and regulate the reduction of inequality, including workers and their representatives making up a third to a half of corporate boards in countries like Germany and Sweden, and implementing the temporary ownership of property and progressive taxation, both of which were an important part of British and American progressivism as well as having been debated during the French Revolution (and all of which make up key elements of Piketty’s idea of “participatory socialism”). Aspects of the Indian Union are seen to be a key although imperfect example of such regulation, especially steps taken in the drafting of the constitution in 1950 which “began by abolishing all caste privileges and expunging all references to religion from the law.” Some of the most important legal tools it has used to overcome the consequences of the British solidification of the caste system are the quotas and “reservations” put in place in order to guarantee places, for those born into disadvantaged social groups (designated as “other backward classes,” or OBC), in universities, public jobs, and elective positions. One of the most contentious aspects of the OBC designation is that it included Muslims, which Piketty argues was part of the reason for the rise of the nationalist Hindu parties of the BJP and RSS. Yet Piketty and Robinson both still see the attempt at regulating inclusion as useful for imagining a more positive future. The next book under discussion takes a more pessimistic approach, perhaps because its writers are living through the current Indian government rather than seeing it from afar.

These first two books under review come from non-Indian authors who are interested in applying what they see as positive Indian solutions to the rest of the world. The final book discussed is a collection of science fiction stories written by authors from India. It is used as a foil of sorts to see what kinds of criticisms, support, and new ideas are found when read along with the previous two authors.

Avatar is a bilingual (English/Italian) collection of newly commissioned stories from India written in English. The editors Tarun K. Saint and Francesco Verso sent out a list of themes for potential contributors to respond to. Instead of focusing on traditional science fiction stories about alien encounters and space travel, the themes included topics such as biopolitics, the rise of big data and algorithms, 3D printing, CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing technology, and cybersecurity and surveillance. As Saint explains in the introduction to the volume, the title *Avatar* references both the manifestation of a deity in a mortal form, a concept which has a long history in Indian epics, as well as an icon or figure representing someone in a virtual space. This combination of the traditional with the contemporary informs many of the stories in the collection, even when they do not deal with avatars in any direct fashion. In the context of this review, a number of the stories develop and critique similar concepts to those raised by Robinson and Piketty, as well as raising some concerns of their own.

The first story is “The Man without Quintessence,” by Anil Menon. Ringo Singh Mann, a man living in Chedda Nagar, Mumbai, has fallen through the cracks of the surveillance state. In this near-future world, all transactions, from the simplest purchase to one’s employment, are centralized. This is managed through iris scans which function as unique identifiers that capture the uniqueness or “quintessence” of each citizen. The story features many of the elements found in *The Ministry for the Future*, including miniscule drones, the governmental use of blockchain technology, and heavy centralized regulation. However, Mann is not a figure of revolt who has gone off the grid. Rather, he shows the limitations of such ubiquitous regulation and the biases that it can contain.

The narrator of the story is a journalist who wants to write a story on Mann in order to show his readers what life is like when you are unconnected. When the narrator first meets Mann, he says it is “like staring at a mirror or a mannequin. Actually, even a mannequin has depth. Mann is all surface. Flat, opaque.” The narrator cannot do the future version of googling Mann when he meets him, and this makes Mann seem shallow, unknowable. When Mann needs to make a purchase, or get paid for his menial labor of ironing at a cleaners (a job that has not yet been automated), he temporarily connects to the grid, but this does not work perfectly. Due to his disconnectedness, Mann is seen as “the last representative of

an earlier time, not the future.” Yet this position is not one of personal choice or rebellion. The reason Mann has no “quintessence” is that his ancestors come from the Baluchi and Chitrali communities, who “exhibit a wide-spectrum of eye-colors, because of their large variation in the genetic complexes responsible for iris pigmentations.” The effect of this inheritance is that Mann’s irises “keep changing unpredictably over time,” and thus he is unable to be accurately scanned for “quintessence.” Mann wants this issue corrected, although no plausible solution is at hand. He is unable to obtain his basic needs without problems, let alone treatment for his cancer. The story leaves Mann in this unresolved state, although the tone is not one of complete tragedy, since the alternative of being completely locked into the system of surveillance is not seen as a positive solution either.

In fact, the kind of state intervention touted by both Robinson and Piketty comes under a lot of criticism in a number of the stories in this collection. Shikhandin’s story “Communal” takes the problems of networked lives as its main theme. The story is set in Jaisalmer, known as the “Golden City” because many of its buildings are made from sandstone as it is located in the middle of the Thar Desert. However, the sand has been taken over by an aggressive sort of network of trees which can reach up and knock helicopters out of the sky, and which eventually takes over everything, including people, turning them all into a connected world of greenery. And “Indra’s Web,” by perhaps the collection’s most well-known author Vandana Singh, features a networked power grid which is based on the structure of fungi. Called Myconet, and perhaps inspired by the Peer-to-Peer network of the same name posited by Paul Snyder, Rachel Greenstadt, and Giuseppe Valetto in 2009, this networked set of solar arrays powering what was once a slum outside of New Delhi is starting to malfunction. Yet this problem is not due to a bug in the system but rather to the network becoming something more than its parts by taking charge and reconfiguring itself. Thus the concept of “Indra’s Net” in Buddhist philosophy takes on a new meaning: emergence.

These stories expand and critique some of the concepts put forward by Robinson and Piketty. For example, while Robinson’s new vision of politics is unapologetically syncretic, the networks in Shikhandin’s story leave no space to breath. On the other hand, the networks in Singh’s “Indra’s Web” have emergent sentience, thus becoming more intelligent than the regulatory bodies that have created them. Other stories in the collection, however, reach far beyond these concepts.

The strongest example is Priya Sarukkai Chabria’s post-apocalyptic “Paused.” All life on planet Earth has ended. The narrator is one of a number of life-reactivation pods that have been placed at the bottom of the sea. These pods contain sufficient genetic information to restart life on

the planet. They were created by the Shell Beings, our evolutionary descendants who genetically modified themselves to return to the sea in order to escape the ecological destruction of climate change. Eventually the planet got so bad that the Shell Beings committed collective suicide, as well the annihilation of all other living things. First though they uploaded their collective consciousness into “The Head.” During the time of the story the narrator-pod is deciding whether to risk opening up or not. The decision is not entirely its own, since it is based on the accumulation of sufficient precipitation to support life. But the pod is not sure. “Did the sensors misread a whiff of moisture as running streams and running rain, as life sustaining surge?” it asks itself. It decides to activate, although when it does its fate is not entirely clear. It uses all of the water around it in order to gain enough energy to start the life-rejuvenation process, yet the story ends with the pod needing even more water to continue, and no more water is to be found. “I want water. I want to live. I want to live!” cries the pod, although presumably there will never be anyone to hear its cries.

“Paused” is a powerful story about a possible future. The manner in which the pod is developed, constructed, and employed use some of the features of centralized regulation suggested by Robinson and Piketty. The problem the story foregrounds however is the fear that the type of solutions of Robinson and Piketty will not be enough, nor will more radical changes that future generations might be forced to take. This is one of the strengths of science fiction, helping us not only understand the scale of the consequences of our actions, but using the imagination to map out possible futures, both making a wide variety of futures feel possible and developing the shocking consequences of problems yet to come.