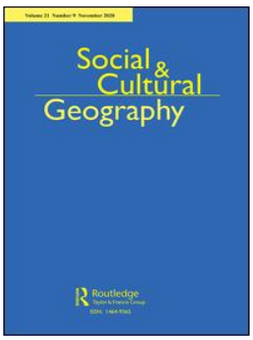

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Vegan world-making in meat-centric society: the embodied geographies of veganism

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ABSTRACT

The question of the human body – whose matters, where, when, and how much – has long been of concern in geographical thinking. Vegan geographies pose a challenge to this 'body,' bringing in critical concerns for and about animal bodies. In this paper, interviews with vegans based in Britain are used to discuss the role of the body and embodiment in veganism, a social, cultural and political movement that has been relatively under-studied in geography. Drawing on feminist and embodied geographical theory, this paper discusses the role of the body in three spaces of veganism: (1) in establishing vegan cultures through building shared 'truth narratives'; (2) in shifting veganism beyond individualism in meat-centric society; and (3) veganism as a world-making project, stretching beyond the body into social and cultural space. I conclude by discussing the wider implications of this empirical work understanding the social and cultural geographies of veganism, and how these further embodied geographical thinking.

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MOTS-CLEFS
Véganisme; géographie de l'incarnation; manger; mouvements sociaux; fabrication de monde

Creación de un mundo vegano en una sociedad centrada en la carne: las geografías incorporadas del veganismo.

RESUMEN

La cuestión del cuerpo humano (la materia de quiénes, dónde, cuándo y cuánto) ha sido durante mucho tiempo motivo de preocupación en el pensamiento geográfico. Las geografías veganas plantean un desafío para este 'cuerpo', al traer preocupaciones críticas por y sobre los cuerpos de los animales. En este artículo, se utilizan entrevistas con veganos con sede en Gran Bretaña para discutir el papel del cuerpo y la incorporación en el veganismo, un movimiento social, cultural y político que ha sido relativamente poco estudiado en geografía. Basándose en la teoría geográfica feminista y del cuerpo, este artículo analiza el papel del cuerpo en tres espacios del veganismo: (1) en el establecimiento de culturas veganas mediante la construcción de 'narrativas de verdad' compartidas; (2) en cambiar el veganismo más allá del individualismo en una sociedad centrada en la carne; y (3) el veganismo como un proyecto de creación de mundo, que se extiende más allá del

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cuerpo hacia el espacio social y cultural. Concluyo discutiendo las implicaciones más amplias de este trabajo empírico que comprende las geografías sociales y culturales del veganismo, y cómo estas incorporan aún más el pensamiento geográfico.

La fabrication d'un monde végan dans une société axée sur la consommation de viande: les géographies incarnées du véganisme.

RÉSUMÉ

La question du corps humain est depuis longtemps un sujet de préoccupation pour la pensée géographique. Les géographies véganes constituent un défi pour ce « corps » et apportent des préoccupations cruciales pour les corps animaux et aussi à leur sujet. Dans cet article, on se sert d'entretiens avec des végans britanniques pour aborder le rôle du corps et de l'incarnation dans le véganisme, un mouvement social, culturel et politique qui a été relativement peu recherché en géographie. En s'appuyant sur les théories géographiques féministes et de l'incarnation, cet article examine le rôle du corps dans trois espaces du véganisme: (1) en établissant les cultures véganes par la construction de « récits réels » partagés ; (2) en transférant le véganisme au-delà de l'individualisme dans une société axée sur la consommation de viande ; et (3) le véganisme comme projet de fabrication de monde, s'étendant au-delà du corps dans l'espace social et culturel.Je conclus par une discussion sur les répercussions globales de ce travail empirique de compréhension des géographies sociale et culturelle du véganisme et la manière dont ces dernières font progresser la pensée géographique sur l'incarnation.

Introduction

Veganism is defined by The Vegan Society[1] as 'a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment.' Contemporary veganism has focussed on a tripartite approach that has focussed heavily on human health and the environment, which has been interpreted by some as a 'lifestyle veganism' that has lost its radical intent (White, 2018). Veganism has also been positioned as a social and cultural movement that 'embed[s] the social actor in dynamic, processual relationships that shift over space and time' (Cherry, 2006, p. 157). As a growing social, cultural, and political force (Pendergrast, 2016), veganism is both a timely empirical subject and an emerging epistemological approach.

Whilst veganism has exploded as a social and political movement, it remains understudied in geography. Emerging vegan geographies critique human and nonhuman animal relations and geographies by problematizing the anthropocentric and humanist roots of 'the animal' (see White, 2015a). Fundamental to these vegan geographies are questions of the body – whose body matters, where, when, and how much – which has long been of concern to geographers, but this has been limited to the primacy of human

bodies (with the exceptions of challenges from critical animal geographers; see, for example, Emel & Urbanik, 2012; Hobson, 2007; Hovorka, 2015; Philo et al., 2000; Wolch & Emel, 1995).

In this paper, I bring together embodied geographies and vegan geographies to explore socio-cultural performances of veganism in a meat-centric world (DeLessio-Parson, 2017). The first section explores the overlaps and productive tensions between embodied geographies and vegan geographies. I then discuss the methods and the use of 'truth' in this paper. This is followed by three empirical sections addressing: how vegans establish 'truth narratives;' how veganism is shifted beyond an individualistic practice; and finally, the vegan body as a world-making project, stretching beyond itself into social and cultural space. I conclude by bringing together this empirical work to contend that geographical thinking on veganism, embodiment, and eating enables 'truth' to travel beyond the body and transform social and cultural space.

Embodied vegan geographies

Veganism's ethical and practical transformations of the self and society deal 'directly with practices rather than with principles – veganism is itself a principle, from which certain practices logically flow' (Cross, 1949, p. 15). Recently, Dutkiewicz and Dickstein (2021) sought to simplify definitions of veganism by moving away from beliefs and towards the material practices of abstaining from eating animals. Here, veganism is understood as a practice that does not necessarily follow a moral principle; a vegan could be someone under this definition who refuses animal products for any reason and not for emancipatory principles. This definition has the potential to further realise White's (2018) concerns over the loss of the 'radical intent' of veganism and its base in radical principles which has, at least since Cross's intervention, been at the heart of the movement. The definition of veganism has always been contentious, and remains so today, revealing how bodies can be differently implicated and engaged in shared practices.

The cultural turn in geography has drawn attention to the 'geography closest in – the body' (Rich, 1984/2003), rooted in 'questions that emerge from the everyday, embodied experiences of those who includes themselves in the dynamic and shifting category "women"' (Kern, 2020, p. 8). The articulation of how and why bodies matter has been considered across molecular (Brison, 2002), relational (Butler, 1993), and even metamorphic scales (Braidotti, 2002). Both Grosz (1994) and Probyn (2001) reveal how bodies are implicated in social, cultural, and material realities. Visceral food geographies follow lineages of embodied theory, rooted in feminist theory, to understand food and eating as a 'strategic place from which to begin to understand identity, difference and power' which moves beyond individualistic politics 'towards a radically relational view of the world … with an appreciation of chaotic, unstructured ways in which bodily intensities unfold in the production of everyday life' (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008, p. 462).

Where veganism is in part a control and practice of the body through eating, it aligns with literatures on embodiment, eating, and food politics, such as those exploring the practices of food in more-than-human worlds (Wilbur & Gibbs, 2020);

caring consumption in community food projects (Bedore, 2018); food ethics, abjection, and the body in halal meat consumption and belonging (Isakjee & Carroll, 2019); and in food-becoming-waste (Waitt & Phillips, 2016). Embodied geographies centre the body as a geography unto itself: not only as a conduit for moving through the world, but as a source of relational and originary knowledges (Anzaldúa, 1987). The body is 'less of a thing/being than a shifting/changing historical meaning that is subject to cultural configuration/reconfiguration … a battlefield, one that is fought over again and again' (Yancy, 2005, 215–6).

However, vegan embodiments are not only concerned with eating, nor are they confined to food. Rather, veganism is an embodied practice of ethics, relationships, and world-making. Veganism also incorporates wider human-animal relationships, from keeping animals as 'pets' (Sutton, 2020); rescue and sanctuary practices (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2015); and the potential responsibilities of vegans to advocate for leaving animals alone (MacCormack, 2014). Debates about veganism have been deployed across different scales, from individual wellness invoking health discourses (Christopher et al., 2018), to planetary concerns affecting animals such as the climate crisis and industrial agriculture's incompatibility with sustainable food transitions (Twine, 2018). The embodiment of veganism relies, to varying extents, on *feeling wrong* in embodied practices of eating animals, whether for health, environmental, or animal causes. It is entangled with political, cultural, and social imperatives.

Vegan debates are commonly subsumed under discourses of rationality, rights, justice, and ethics. This focus on rights and justice has long been critiqued by feminist animal scholars such as Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (1995, p. 29), who understand the interconnections between feminism and animals as 'a sense of ethical responsibility, deriving from our historical praxis of care.' Emerging vegan geographies might align with, build on, and critique literatures on 'caring geographies' by offering new answers to how far we should care (Smith, 1998). As Conradson (2003, p. 451) reflects, geographical perspectives change how we see 'relations and practices of care – things such as listening, feeding, changing clothes and administering medication – are implicated in the production of particular social spaces.' Veganism can be understood as a more-than-human approach to caring geographies, one that shapes individual and collective spaces, practices, and experiences.

Veganism is not only a practice, but an *embodiment* of (not) 'eating the other' (Crosfield, 2013) The boundaries of the body are permeable, constituted beyond us. When we eat, our bodies become implicated in violence, or in liberation, with material consequences. Eating challenges subjectivities (Mol, 2008). Veganism thus asks distinctly geographical questions: whose body does my body consume to sustain me? In what processes and spaces am I implicated by eating these bodies? How might our bodies be differently implicated in one another?

Methods

This research is based on sixteen semi-structured interviews[2] with vegans, recruited through personal connections, ethnographic work, and social media. In recruitment, I was open about my own veganism, centring subjective experiences of veganism and everyday experiences and knowledges as an important source of knowledge (England,

2006). The interviews took an open, conversational tone with one interviewee, Rhys, referring to it as 'cathartic.' My interviews were reciprocal processes and spaces (Dowling, 2005). Shane, for example, explained how when entering a vegan space, that space became one of safety and comfort: 'there are really positive, life-affirming ways that veganism can impact your relationships.'. Interviewees were aware that I was also a vegan, eliciting this comfort in the space.

A sense of belonging in the interviews created a flow of conversation through storytelling as a narrative arc (Daigle, 2016). In the interviews, 'truth' narratives framed these discussions about becoming vegan. For example, interviewees recounted in disgust their powerful and visceral reaction at learning the violence (or what was often referred to as 'the truth') of eating animals, and their complicity in this violence (McDonald, 2000). These initial encounters with veganism were solidified over varying lengths of time through researching the health, animal, and environmental factors, and from being in proximity to other vegans. Importantly, these encounters with veganism were experienced in and of the body – in the stomach as the site for liberation (Veggies Nottingham, 1986) – but this encounter shifts beyond the body as vegans over time come into friction with meat-eating cultures and social worlds.

In the remainder of this section, I draw on empirics addressing the use of 'truth' in this paper as grounded in vegan's own narratives. I contextualise 'truth' in postmodern and feminist critique as important to engage with, both spatially and socially, to explore how 'truth' travels. 'Truth' in this paper is rooted in the narratives of vegans, revealing insights into the importance of embodiment to building vegan communities in meat-centric society.

'Truth' narratives

For Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008, p. 461), visceral politics (where visceral refers to a 'fully-minded body') and feminist theory hold the potential to enliven and specify 'the links between the materialities of food and ideologies of food and eating.' In veganism, 'truth' narratives further complicate these entanglements between food and ideology. When talking about transitions to veganism, references to the 'truth' of veganism recurred across interviews. These 'truth' narratives were consistently talked about within a process of self-education on the conditions of animal agriculture and how animals become food. This education was less commonly defined by relationships with *actual* animals and more so with virtual or mediated animals invoking visceral reactions to violence.

The factors influencing vegan transitions have long been of interest to animal advocates and scholars (on ICT, Lawo et al., 2020; abstention, Grassian, 2020; stigma, Markiwski & Roxburgh, 2019; and becoming vegan; McDonald, 2000). Richard Twine contends that veganism requires a transition 'from a naturalised view of (some) animals as edible food to a stark divergent resistance to their commodification which now sensually and affectively evokes violence' (Twine, 2014, p. 634). Parkinson et al. (2019) found that people shifted their ideas about veganism when they were exposed to its complexities. For example,

their non-vegan 'participants agreed that there was too much emphasis on how healthy a vegan diet can be and that it can be as "unhealthy and unbalanced as any other diet"' (ibid., p. 69).

'Truth' has long been deployed in vegan activism and outreach, holding a particular affective power, and this language has also become central to how vegans understand their own transition. As interviewee Daisy explained, watching undercover footage '*constantly reinforces your veganism, to be constantly faced with the truth.*' Similarly, Esme says veganism is '*An intrinsic truth once you accept it. I could never go back*.' The language of 'truth' was especially important to Rachel:

> I see veganism as normality that has been distorted by the world and then requires activism to make other people see the truth. You could in my mind replace the word veganism with truth. It's the truth. And we've called it veganism.

These narratives of 'truth' are individual, describing how people decided to become vegan, but also construct shared social bonds within the vegan community through shared knowledges and experiences. This shared narrative, or 'truth,' is vital to the collective vegan identity in a meat-centric society. Becoming vegan requires not only exposure to new forms of knowledge, but to perform and embody these in visible ways. The use of 'truth' in this paper is not claiming an unchallenged truth but rather rooted in these self-descriptions of vegans, centring the complexity of 'truth' in veganism. Despite postmodern and feminist critique of 'truth,' it is important to engage with the concept as spatially and socially located, and the ways in which 'truth' travels. The concern with 'truth' is rooted in the narratives of vegans, revealing important insights into how these knowledges are not only embodied, but allow communities of care to develop.

The quotes above resulted not only from learning these new knowledges, but from *feeling* them. In meat-centric society, these knowledges may have led to vegans receiving ridicule, claims of oversensitivity or faddishness, or even being perceived as hostile (Cole & Morgan, 2011). In this paper, because the interviewees related to me as a vegan insider, veganism's framing as a form of 'truth,' reveals how vegans are reconfiguring their personal and social bonds. My (vegan) gaze on their veganism was outside of the *hypervisibility* of veganism in a meat-eating world (informed by Johnson's work on hypervisibility, comfort, and controlled and imagined gazes in Muslim women's clothing practices, Johnson, 2017).

Embodying vegan knowledges

In this section, I consider how vegans embody their beliefs when they become vegan. Through embodying vegan knowledges, vegans reconfigure their social relationships and have to resituate themselves in meat-centric spaces.

> Even when I was a vegetarian, in the back of my mind, there were some animals that we take things from and others that we don't. In your mind it's easy to make these distinctions but, since going vegan, I see animals in the same light.

Amy, above, is her 30s. She has been vegetarian since childhood and vegan for 18 months. Amy's veganism is rooted in her identity as someone who cares about animals. Her transition to veganism has undone what she calls '*totally ingrained*' knowledges of dairy as part of a '*wholesome and natural chain of events*' and instead has found:

> actually, the truth is that it's not a happy life for these animals that have been bred for an industry where they are destined to end up on a plate.

Knowing where food comes from is not the same as understanding the processes of who food comes from (see Hocknell, 2016). Amy realised that her vegetarian diet implicated her in meat, dairy, and egg industries with which she ethically disagrees. Amy's veganism is narrated as building from a revelation moment when she couldn't 'unknow' these knowledges (McDonald, 2000).

Veganism reconfigures the borders between humans and different kinds of animals – the borders which determine value and care (Taylor & Signal, 2009) – as not scientific and philosophical, but socially and culturally constructed (Wadiwel, 2016). Veganism challenges how far it is possible to care (see Conradson, 2003; Smith, 1998). For vegans, it demands a responsibility of refusal by considering their position in more-than-human communities. Charlie, for example, reflected on how his veganism made him differently consider his past encounters with animals:

> Where I live there's a model farm and there's these pigs. I used to love bacon, but I look at the pig and think I wouldn't kill that. Why should someone kill that animal so I can it [sic]? I started to have this visceral feeling sick.

Veganism moved Charlie away from objectifying relations with animals, which he recognises *felt wrong* in hindsight, through a move into shared vegan *truth narratives*. Animal encounters, both mediated and actual, often precede a vegan transition:

> If I saw a bird who has been run over, it would literally make me sad, even though it is dead already and I didn't know the bird. I feel pain when I see animals that are in pain or have suffered. That does break my heart. That is the hardest part of being vegan, that empathy, because a lot of the time you are sad.

Sheila, above, had been vegan for six years at the time of interview, and vegetarian since she was a young child. Her veganism is 'pro-animal,' based on a self-described emotional affinity with animals. Emotion, embodiment, and education in vegan *truth narratives* demonstrate how veganism disturbs and transforms the extension of empathy. This is not to say, however, that a care for animals necessarily pre-empts veganism. Rachel focussed heavily in her interview on the actual process of transition. This was related to becoming vegan for health reasons and only later considering animals:

> When I first had that revelation moment, it was quite difficult. I cried at random stuff. I was reading and reading and reading. I was listening to 'Farmageddon' when I was driving to work, and I'd have to pull over and be like 'oh my god the bees! The bees!' as fresh waves of realisation and horror came over me.

Rachel is engaged in a process of learning and un-learning of not only the realities of human violence to animals and its insidiousness, but also of how this has been 'hidden in plain sight' (White, 2015b). Her *'fresh waves of realisation and horror'* suggest she is

realising that the world has always been this way and is horrified at her failure to see it. This revelation is disturbing her life and space, not only emotionally, but literally: embodying veganism has led to her pulling over to the side of the road to contend with this knowledge. *Truth* as a guiding narrative in veganism suggests that more-than-human care is important in strengthening convictions to counteract the negative reactions towards veganism in a meat-eating culture (Greenebaum & Dexter, 2018).

The embodiment of veganism through animal encounters is a space of interest to animal activists, many of whom focus on shock tactics in their social campaigning. Many of these encounters take place on social media, a space that relies on and rewards strongly evocative 'content.' Briony, below, talked about how she was isolated geographically from other vegans and so used social media served as a space to relate to a wider vegan community:

> Social media videos are good because people don't necessarily know what they are watching to begin with. They can have a powerful message in a short time, whereas if you try to talk to people it just goes in one ear and out the other.

Briony hopes that she can be part of a collective activist strategy that floods social media with videos and images and breaches non-vegan online spaces. The importance of social media in activism emerged early in all the interviews as a vital activist strategy, one that is rooted in longer histories of animal activist (undercover) exposés. Activists no longer rely on traditional forms of media to pick up their stories but build their own networks as influencers on social media platforms. Online activism has created a digital-visceral politics, making veganism at once become more connected but also enforcing rigidity, policing, and ever-more drastic shock tactics, exploiting embodiments. The prevalence of these *truth narratives* is contextualised within an online 'shock' culture that influences how vegans understand their identities (see Craddock, 2019).

Veganism's *truth narratives* are reinforced through mediated encounters, but also through actual encounters with animals. Jack, a vegan since childhood, became vegan through meeting animals volunteering in an animal sanctuary:

> I was vegetarian for a long time and the transition to vegan happened when we started getting ex-battery chickens . . . when you physically go into those rooms and smell it, I could never eat eggs again and gave up dairy the same day.

A visceral reaction to the *truth* about animal agriculture leading to a vegan transition was a common refrain across the interviews. McDonald (2000) identified that the choice to become vegan is often narrated as occurring when 'choosing not to know' becomes impossible. These interviews demonstrate that vegan transitions are often narrated through visceral, embodied reactions to eating animals. While virtual confrontations tend to rely on shock tactics common to social campaigning, more subtle encounters in the real world also feed into this embodiment, as does a longer period of education on veganism. This *moment* results from a series of orientations and locations, and while it is often narrated as a 'moment of truth,' it was contextualised by vegans in much longer processes. This insight is important in understanding how truth travels and becomes rooted in veganism. Rhys described his decision to become vegan as:

> a commitment to do something for a political ethical reason. Once you have made that commitment, you are betraying yourself if you have a wobble.

In the next section, I contend that the strength of conviction in veganism, visible in these *truth narratives* is related to its refusal of governing social and cultural norms. I follow the vegan body into meat-centric spaces to understand how veganism as an embodied practice is experienced in friction with the dominant society, putting demands upon vegans to discipline their bodies to perform 'goodness.'

Vegan bodies in meat-centric society

In the previous section, embodied knowledges were considered as an important part of building vegan *truth narratives*. In this section, I move out from the scale of the body to explore how the vegan body moves through, and is constructed in relation with, social and cultural space, other vegans, and non-vegan norms. I argue that embodiment plays an important role in the pressure to perform veganism as *feeling good*.

A commitment to veganism creates 'a strange, bifurcated existence. I live in my vegan world, in which I see what I think is food; and I live in a meat-eating universe' (Stallwood, 2013, p. 44). The world becomes an unknown and uncomfortable place, filled with mourning for animals' deaths (Stanescu, 2012), an unacceptable feeling and practice that attracts ridicule and hostility (Cole & Morgan, 2011). In meat-centric spaces, a public commitment to veganism does not allow for 'wobbles.' Reconfiguring *truth* as a vegan narrative creates space to navigate their beliefs from the geography closest in – the body (Rich, 1984/2003). The question of the body in veganism has, however, been deployed in different ways, most popularly in mainstream society as alternately a vessel for 'healthfulness' or a site for liberation.

Greenebaum (2012a, p. 143) writes that 'ethical vegans devalue health vegans. In doing so, they are evaluating the purity of the hypothetical "other".' Where the former group are vegan for primarily animal and environmental reasons, the latter prioritise eating plant-based diets for their mental and physical health. The healthfulness of a plant-based diet has become a tenet of 'lifestyle veganism' which, 'viewed as a profitable vehicle for corporate profit, contemporary 'lifestyle or foodist' approaches to veganism [are] bereft of the ability to usher in a more ethical, peaceable, and non-violent world into being (White, 2018, np). Ethics and health were entangled in complex ways for the vegans that I interviewed, reinforcing one another, where feeling good health affirmed ethical commitments and vice versa.

Lifestyle veganism capitalizes on veganism's perceived healthfulness in thin-privileging societies to encourage not eating animals and their byproducts (Berkow & Barnard, 2006). Vegan social spaces and communities are 'potential hotbeds of body-policing and fat-shaming' and 'non-thin women are practically nonexistent in high-profile vegan media spaces' (Wrenn, 2017, p. 90). This healthism focuses the body's feeling good on their diet being 'light' while animal foods are 'heavy' (Ossipow, 1995) and can reproduce sizeism and aesthetic bodily norms as a representative of veganism's virtues, promising to produce 'good' bodies. While veganism is often entangled with embodying 'goodness' that reproduces societal thin privilege, there are also more elusive embodiments at work. Veganism is implicated for Charlie in embodied affects and good feelings:

> Being vegan is entangled in what a body should look like, healthy eating and eating clean. [But] I'm vegan for how my body feels, my body's comfort. There is a body justification. At the same time, I say that I miss things to not position myself as this all-knowing person who's doing the "right" thing and is not conflicted about it. I take up multiple positions.

The interplay of good feeling and feeling good works across health and comfort as an authenticator of their veganism as 'right.' This is not without conflicts but, as Charlie points out, these conflicts are not embodied ones. Rather, they are what Goffman (1956) would understand as re-presentations of self, intended to manage others' perceptions of the self, body, and veganism. Individuals are producing their bodies as representative of veganism itself through a process of self-surveillance in relation to vegan communities and to meat-centric socio-cultural spaces. Rhys finds that:

> There is this problematic veganism bound up with clean eating that I don't want to be associated with. So, when people say, 'do you feel healthier?', I'm like yeah, but resentfully to make sure they know that's not why I did it.

The embodied good feeling resulting from ethical practice is in tension with an assumed focus on health detracting from veganism's ethical impetus (Greenebaum, 2012b). Food choices made for personal health are more easily absorbed into meat-centric social norms because they do not challenge human supremacy and are understood as potentially reversible. For Rhys and Charlie, pushing back against this healthism is important to centring the ethics of their veganism, whilst recognising their improved feeling of healthfulness as a happy side effect.

Arppe et al. (2011, p. 286) relate veganism to 'the forbidden,' contending that vegans find some "prohibited' animal products are 'temptations' . . . they feel drawn to them yet struggle against them in the name of universal ethical principles.' When Charlie admits that he misses some non-vegan foods, he is curating himself as an imperfect vegan subject and working to construct veganism as an achievable ideal that does not require purity. While veganism is bound by the shared (if contested) rules and boundaries of vegan cultures, there is room to navigate within this space. When asked how they defined veganism, all of my interviewees responded with some form of The Vegan Society's definition presented at the opening of this paper. However, this was often presented with contingencies and tweaks. Ethical versus lifestyle veganism was a common point of contention. As Matthew shared from his experience of online arguments over these definitions:

> There were vegans having a go at someone who was talking about being plant-based [saying] you're not a vegan, you're plant-based, that's not the same. I don't think we should allow that to fragment the movement. You've got your old school animal rights against your modern plant-based. It's just not helpful.

Matthew has witnessed the policing of veganism not for adherence, but for underpinning motivations, placing ethical and lifestyle veganism in contention. As veganism mainstreams, it is transforming to become a 'palatable disruption', largely under the moniker of 'plant-based' (Clay et al., 2020), and separated from other vegan practices of liberation. However, the interplay of ethics and health is more complex than this oppositional situation suggests. By attending to the embodiments of veganism, issues of health and ethics are not only in conflict but affect how vegans choose to navigate meat-centric spaces of surveillance and disciplining to present a *good* vegan body.

Veganism requires a political and social performance of *goodness* at different scales – bodily, ethical, and global through the environment – to be reproduced. Vegan bodies are disciplined into presenting *goodness* by the need to pushback against stereotypes by

non-vegans (Cole & Morgan, 2011) and by insider surveillance of the vegan community (Cherry, 2015). These performances of veganism are multi-layered social acts that rub against meat-centric spaces. For example, Rhys found that:

> through the ethics, my veganism also turned into an aesthetic thing: the sight and smell, the thought of meat and more recently dairy, is actually off-putting. I have a bodily reaction if I see a pizza covered in greasy cheese or smell eggs, a physical reaction to it. The ethical stance has changed my sensory perception. It becomes as much about finding it distasteful as the abstract idea of ethics.

Vegan ethics lead to material changes as veganism is embodied. The vegan body is produced as a site of complexity that is co-produced with human, animal, and socio-cultural worlds, mediated through encounters with other vegans and non-vegans. Vegans are embodying *truth narratives* and navigating society in light of their transforming ethics and practices. This embodied good feeling is easily co-opted into an 'intensification and totalization of health as a governing norm' (Dean, 2014, p. 142), leading to the centring of a self-oriented healthism narrative. These interviews show that, for ethical vegans, pushing back against healthism and 'lifestyle' veganism requires centring an ethical vegan practice that also produces *good feeling*. This is vital to navigating both meat-centric and healthism plant-based narratives that attempt to either dismiss or co-opt veganism as an individual choice, rather than a social and political movement.

Both meat-centric and healthism critiques of veganism fail to consider how veganism allows people to move 'from social disconnection and a focus on body image to a stronger emotional (empathic), cognitive, and behavioural investment in their social worlds' (Costa et al., 2019, p. 1). Accordingly, in the next section, I explore veganism as a site of transformative possibility for different multispecies futures and worlds that begin with the body.

Veganism's world-making project

The catalysts for veganism have been the focus of both academic and activist attention, but there is less research into how *being* vegan is an ongoing iterative process and renegotiation of space. Veganism is constructed in relation not only to vegan culture, but to dominant meat-centric society. It is produced across bodies, in a process of re-making personal ethics and social worlds. In this section, I contend that veganism, whilst rooted in the body, is realised beyond the individual as a world-making project.

In an episode of *The Simpsons*, 'Lisa the Tree Hugger,' the policing of veganism is captured in meme form: Lisa's crush attempts to impress her by saying *'I am a level 5 vegan, I don't eat anything that casts a shadow'* (2000, Season 12, Episode 4, see also Grant & MacKenzie-Dale, 2016; Wright, 2017). The monitoring of veganism by non-vegan society is undertaken here through mockery, but elsewhere, this is also undertaken through presenting veganism as difficult, a fad, or asceticism (Cole & Morgan, 2011). This surveillance of veganism enforces, through its disciplining gaze, that work is undertaken to counteract perceptions and stereotypes of vegans. This shapes the worlds of vegans, filling them with everyday conflicts between their beliefs and practices, and the lack of support for these in social spaces.

Vegans attempt to make their lifestyle 'acceptable' through 'face-saving techniques' that 'normalise' veganism (Greenebaum, 2012b), but these techniques are not homogenous. For some, socio-spatial friction is a vital site for making veganism's ease and normality visible. For example, Sheila and her husband Alf, often attend social events that require them to manage perceptions of themselves (and of veganism) by refusing to be 'the vegan killjoy at the table' (Twine, 2014):

Sheila If I was angry and ostracising myself, then I would be living up to their stereotype of vegans being awkward, antisocial, and angry. I don't think that would help the cause.

Alf There's always someone who has a bit of a gob on them, and they'll say something. You have got to be there, so you're not ostracising yourself and them saying they're not here because they're vegan.

Vegans navigate social space as 'affect alien[s] who must wilfully struggle against a dominant affective order and community' (Twine, 2014, p, 623). The perceptions of others are important to vegans, who understand that their presence can be a placeholder for veganism itself. Meat-centric socio-cultural spaces demand a presentation of veganism that is determined, but not *overly* so. To illustrate how she navigates this, Sheila explained:

> There is a misconception that it's hard to be vegan and you have to deprive yourselves of things and ostracise yourself. Every time somebody with those preconceived ideas in their head sees that that is not the case, suddenly it's not hard: you won't be ostracised, you can stand next to your friend who is eating a beef burger and eat something that tastes and looks similar without the cruelty.

Counteracting perceptions and stereotypes of veganism relies on continual presumption and anticipation of others' reactions, making social space stressful where vegans conflict with dominant norms (Meyer, 2015). Stressful social spaces require work to perform veganism not only a positive practice, but a frictionless one that blends in. As Sheila said, these performances are about making veganism, and vegan products, '*look similar, without the cruelty*.'

Jackson et al. (2020, p. 9) explore the 'the significance of sensory and visceral experience in the judgment of specific foods.' They contend that making taste public is difficult because of the intangible qualities of food. Food is a holder for social and cultural meaning; it affirms or contradicts (gendered and racialised) social norms (Hart, 2018; Polish, 2016). As vegan food advances through technological development and corporate investment (White, 2018), it increasingly aims to reproduce the form of animal products. These mimetic developments of veganism smooth out the presence of the 'vegan killjoy' and remove the productive friction of difference:

> I have a friend who really loves animals. How can you love animals if you eat dead animals? I can't say stuff like that because it comes across as aggressive, so we just don't talk about it. It is becoming easier now with stuff like Ben and Jerry's has vegan ice cream, so we get one of each [dairy and non-dairy] and it feels like you are eating together.

Veganism has traditionally been related to eating vegetables: feminised and supplemental to the centring of meat as the main course in patriarchal societies (Rothgerber, 2012). As veganism veers into the mainstream, the path of resistance and friction that vegans usually face in meat-centric spaces is being smoothed out. For Freya, above, the availability of

vegan alternatives is not only a matter of eating, but of maintaining her pre-vegan relationships and practices. It removes what might be read as the *aggressive* nature of veganism and weakens veganism's radical spatial interventions. This process of making spatial, and thus social, relations *smooth* requires material transformations of food as well as social and cultural shifts that incorporate veganism into meat-centric spaces, whether by inclusion on menus or in supermarkets, or through producing veganism as no longer disruptive.

The removal of friction relies in large part on significant corporate investments in food technology and while investments in, for example, cellular meat remain aspirational (see Stephens et al., 2018), the effects of this green-washed investment might have significant impacts on how vegans challenge and produce space in a non-vegan world. As Hart (2018, p. 133) contends in her work on gender, faux meat, and vegan food blogging, 'gendered discourse of vegan food reinforces, rather than challenges, traditional gender norms through the use of tropes describing "carnivorous men" and "manly meals" with hopes of satiating male appetites.'

During interviews, I asked people what made them become vegan. All of them mentioned to varying degrees the importance of being in close proximity to vegans, having conversations with vegans online or offline, and in doing so, being able to see how other vegans lived. Each of these conversations was made possible by a world in friction, one that had not yet been 'smoothed out.' For Rhys,

> what made me become vegan was being in close proximity with vegans, having conversations with them and using that to reflect on my own decisions

This desire to portray veganism as a complex but welcoming community and space is often met with resistance particularly in close relationships; for Daisy, this resistance is felt when,

> my sister refers to me as 'The Vegan', and you feel almost like you're imposing on people, or someone goes "are you still doing that vegan thing?" It's almost like it's a fad, you're going to get over it.

The navigations of friction, resistance, and mockery curate social and spatial performances, portraying a complex picture of veganism's consequences for social relations, cultural practices, and navigating space. Veganism requires a complete overhaul of and beyond the self, across eating, wearing, and entertainment most obviously, but also demanding renegotiations of relationships, society, and cultures. Paying attention to veganism's embodiments reframes veganism as an ongoing process and renegotiation of body and space, in which moments of revelation are contextualised in much longer transformations, as revealed in interviews with vegans. This temporal and spatial expansion of veganism is produced across bodies, both welcoming and refusing, as a collective practice of (un) making the world. As Sheila contends, this friction is vital to materialising vegan spaces:

> You can't just surround yourself with vegans because it is a bit of an insular world, an echo chamber. Things won't change if all you do is sit within your own little world.

Veganism can be understood as a knowledge which is performed through embodied and collective practices. It also has material impacts on the worlds not only of vegans, but of mainstream society through the navigations and interactions of vegan worlds with(in) non-vegan dominance. However, the vegan world-making project is not one that is homogenously

experienced; it also reproduces and heightens the exclusions and violences of mainstream society. Polish (2016), Harper (2011), and Ko and Ko (2017) offer particularly salient commentary on how veganism as a world-making project is co-opted not only by green-washing capitalism, but also by white supremacy. Vegan space and navigating space as a vegan are not homogenously experienced or encountered. As Esme told me:

> I am friends with loads of people on Facebook who are vegan. If there is a vegan event, the majority will click 'attending.' Then I'll see an anti-racism march happening in London and there will be one vegan Facebook friend who is 'attending.' It's really easy to be a vegan and only care about that.

Esme points towards veganism's omnipresence in public and virtual space as the reason she, and the people she knows, are more likely to undertake vegan outreach than anti-racist activism, which is entangled with the risks of racism and hostile policing black people and activists face. Racist language and violence are, as Polish (2016, p. 373) explores in the context of vegan whiteness, 'dehumanizing' in ways that 'position people of color (POC) [sic] as less than human: as "animal",' which is specifically rooted in anti-blackness (Jackson, 2020). For Ko and Ko, the '"animal" is a category that we shove certain bodies into when we want to justify violence against them, which is why animal liberation should concern all who are minoritized, because at any moment you can become an "animal" and be considered disposable' (Ko & Ko, 2017, p. 212). This rhetoric is bound up in veganism and white supremacy, but also for Ko and Ko in mischaracterizations of veganism's radical intent.

Aph Ko (2019, p. 8) also argues that 'When we treat veganism as only a matter of what food one eats, it can feel as if we're holding the key to racial liberation in our hands but only conceive of it as a spoon.' Where veganism is depoliticized into a lifestyle through corporate interests and external societal mischaracterization (Wrenn, 2020), the transformative world-making potential of veganism is hidden. As Greenebaum (2017, p. 355) argues, 'allegations of "vegan privilege" conceal and reinforce the cultural invisibility of speciesism and carnism . . . vegans must understand the animals are not the only ones that suffer. The structural and interactional process of "mindless eating" exploits both consumers and workers,' and this has material gendered and raced consequences in society. For example, the slaughterhouse is geographically located in poorer areas (Morin, 2018) and draws its workforce from marginalised, often migrant, communities (Blanchette, 2020), but these similar geographical entanglements are often hidden from mainstream narratives.

Veganism 'opens your eyes to the world around you' (Alf) and 'fresh waves of realisation and fresh waves of horror' (Rachel) transform the world through informing new *truth narratives* of the social, cultural, and material world. Whilst veganism does have a race problem (see, for example, Polish, 2016; Harper, 2011), this is not separate from wider societal oppressions but rather bound up within them. For Titan,

> It is impossible to talk about veganism without drawing it into a billion other discourses. You have to talk about veganism with environmentalism, capitalism, feminism, racism. The things you say about injustice applies there too. And there. And suddenly, the world is new and exciting and terrible.

Veganism is not only experienced as an embodied or individual practice but rather a more-than-human approach to caring, one that shapes particular individual and collective spaces, practices, and experiences. The embodied experiences of veganism are not

isolated to the body but come into conflict with meat-centric society. Where veganism has traditionally been in friction with meat-centric spaces, its move to the mainstream through lifestyle veganism and corporate investment has smoothed socio-cultural space for vegans to hide themselves in plain sight. Veganism, whilst rooted in the body, is realised beyond the individual as a world-making project in contention with dominant meat-centric norms, and the removal of friction is transforming the experiences of vegans.

In this section, I argue that as veganism mainstreams it is grappling with its own world-making project and with its relation to other contemporary world-making projects, such as environmentalism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism, healthism, and other contemporary cultural phenomena such as fashion and food, that work alongside and in tension with veganism. Paying attention to the embodied elements of vegan knowledge and practice reframes veganism as an ongoing process and renegotiation of body and/in space, transformed by *truth*.

Conclusion: beyond veganism

In the conclusion to this paper, I summarise this paper's contribution to social and cultural geographies through understanding how veganism, embodiment, and eating stretches beyond the body to transform social and cultural space.

Veganism is an important, and growing, socio-cultural movement and community across the globe, with vegan individuals and organisations drawing together and promoting its transformative potential for health, animals, and the environment. In this paper, I have been less concerned with the validity of these truth claims, and more interested in understanding veganism's embodied knowledges and their material social, cultural, and spatial consequences. Drawing on interviews with vegans, I have discussed the role of embodiment in veganism to shift eating *beyond* the body and beyond totalising norms of healthism in these discussions to understand how veganism might ungovern the body, collectives, and negotiations of the world.

Attending to how vegan knowledge is embodied, and the consequences of that embodiment, this paper offers a conceptualisation of veganism as a multi-scalar ethical and political practice, that entangles embodied knowledges with a vision for a just and sustainable future. This seeks to move beyond 'lifestyle veganism' and proposes that scholars might instead pay more attention to the complexities social and cultural realities vegans are producing and participating in, as veganism's impact and popularity grows. Understanding veganism as a growing and coherent set of socio-cultural principles and practices with material transformations of space is increasingly important to understand the diffuse vegan movement (Cherry, 2006), and geographical perspectives are essential to fully comprehending the socio-spatial potentials of veganism.

Embodiment is a powerful factor in provoking transitioning to veganism, but also in sustaining veganism and undertaking forms of activism in everyday lives. These insights call for veganism to be attended to as a serious and important social, cultural, and political force by taking seriously not only its practice and meanings, but the material consequences that follow from embodying vegan knowledges. This furthers understandings of eating and embodiment in geography by stretching these narratives *beyond* the body into social and cultural space. Continuing to explore geographies of veganism will be vital to intersecting knowledges of eating, ethics, and embodiment but also of the affective

power of social movements that incur bodily reactions through the travelling of *truth*, influencing not only our understandings of these spaces but of wider socio-cultural transformations.

Notes

1. This is the contemporary definition which has been in use since 1988: https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism. However, there is a longer history of the term 'vegan' to note its contentious history: the word 'vegan' was coined by Donald and Dorothy Watson in 1944 as a contraction of the word 'VEGetariAN'. The use of 'vegan' to describe the group was first published in the first newsletter of *The Vegan Society* (https://issuu.com/vegan_society/docs/the_vegan_news_1944). The Vegan Society's history says the actual definition of veganism was adapted from 1944 to 1948 – meaning there was no official definition for five years of the Society – before this definition was settled on in 1948 and tweaked over the following four decades. There are also indigenous and majority world practices of plant-based eating that predate this: https://www.veganmelanated.com/critical-veganism-what-have-we-learnt/
2. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Birmingham's ethical review board (approval number: ERN_17-0640). All interviewees provided informed consent on their participation and publication.

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