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An Unthinkable Politics for Multispecies Flourishing within and beyond Colonial-Capitalist Ruins

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Colonial-capitalist animal agriculture is a site of ruin and a process of ruination. Farmed animals at the heart of these agricultural systems become sites of production and capital accumulation, their bodies genetically coded for commoditization and their short lives organized around logics of extraction. Farmed animals in settler states like the United States are simultaneously colonized subjects and settler-descendants and, as such, occupy a complex position in imaginaries of anticolonial futures. This article considers the possibility of flourishing for those farmed species never meant to flourish, explaining first how animal agriculture as a taken-for-granted institution forms part of the fabric of the ruination delivered by colonial-capitalism. And yet, even as animals' bodies are devastated by production and consumption processes, there exist glimmers of possibility for radically different conceptualizations of farmed animals' lives in multispecies worlds outside of farming contexts. This article analyzes sanctuaries for formerly farmed animals as one such site of possibility. Sanctuaries mark out geographic spaces as sites of hope that manifest in spite of and actively against colonial-capitalist logics, where human–animal relationships are radically redefined, articulated, and practiced—indeed, where animals' lives are organized around how they can *flourish*. As such, this article calls for an unthinkable anticolonial politics of multispecies flourishing beyond colonial-capitalism. *Key Words:* *agriculture, animals, colonial-capitalism, flourishing, multispecies.*

In “A Manifesto for Abundant Futures,” published in the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg (2015) called for “futures with more diverse and autonomous forms of life and ways of living together” (323). They argued that within the colonial-capitalist ruins that define the planet’s current state of crisis, there are hopeful, generative ways of thinking about more robust and less harmful multispecies worlds and relations (Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015). I am writing, in part, as a response to this call: to trace the multispecies ruins that demand a radical reformulation of both multispecies relations and the underlying colonial-capitalist structures that have, for so long, shaped these dominant forms of harm, violence, and despair. I offer the beginnings of an imaginative framework for exploring what these futures might look like and how other species might flourish within and beyond the ruins in the context of a colonial category of life never meant to live lives of flourishing: farmed animals in settler-colonial-capitalist U.S. animal agriculture.

There is already a growing body of work within and beyond the discipline of geography that calls for and imagines multispecies survival, coexistence, and flourishing in the Anthropocene (e.g., Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015; Haraway 2016; Celermajer et al. 2020). This literature encompasses a wide variety of multispecies life including, for instance, wild species (Lorimer 2015), plant life (Kimmerer 2013; Kohn 2013), fungi (Tsing 2015), and free-living urban animals (Srinivasan 2019). The flourishing of farmed animals, however, has been left comparatively undertheorized. Farmed animals, in many ways, are such mundane figures in the human imagination, so embedded in human lifeworlds while they are alive, and much more so as dead flesh, that they “[become] the background noise of everyday life” (Probyn-Rapsey and Johnston 2013, xvi). Animal welfare in farming settings has been widely addressed by geographers as calls have been made for improved care and attention to farmed animals as commodities (e.g., Johnston 2013; Buller and Roe 2018) and critiques have circulated about the commodification of welfare discourses and practices (e.g., Buller and Roe 2014). Geographers have rarely

conceptualized farmed animals' lives outside of the spatial and conceptual constraints of their being farmed or outside of their status as capital and as property, however.

As such, this article's primary contribution is not to reproduce work that asks how farmed animals' lives can be made better under colonial-capitalist regimes of production and consumption. Rather, I argue that flourishing for farmed animals is an impossibility in these settings and I offer instead a new empirical and theoretical perspective to animal and more-than-human geographies that excavates the very bedrock of this system and imagines contexts where flourishing might occur. One such space, and the one I theorize in this article, is the sanctuary for formerly farmed animals. Although this article focuses on farmed animals, their plight, and their imagined futures, this case study should be useful in illustrating the possibility of disrupting hegemonic logics of capital and colonialism more broadly that shape nonhuman life, labor, and death in settler states today. Animal agriculture is one institution that highlights the ongoing violence of colonial-capitalism on vulnerable life, on social relations and lifeways, and on the landscape. Animal agriculture as an enduring process and practice is a crystallization of these problematic structures. It is insidious, taken for granted, and integral to the very fabric of contemporary settler-capitalist society.

Colonial-capitalist animal agriculture is both everywhere and seemingly nowhere in its entrenched structuring of everyday life. It is important, then, to locate these practices in specific and generalizable geographies. As a starting point for this analysis, I am writing from occupied Duwamish land, embedded as a White settler in the hyperintensified, hyperextractive colonial-capitalist context of the United States, and although this is a geographic setting with place-specific particularities, the underlying violence of animal agriculture is not at all confined to the United States or North American contexts or to the scale of industrialized farming. Farming animals globally in increasingly industrialized contexts spans a range of specific geographies in which long-standing colonial-capitalist regimes operate (see Neo and Emel 2017; Potts 2017; García 2021).¹ These logics are, of course, not limited to how they shape nonhuman life, so it is hoped that this project will resonate with work on the violence of capital for other forms of life, too, and what it means to flourish within and despite colonial-capitalist structures of power

and oppression. Interrogating these structures and how they touch down on the ground for farmed animal species might offer a way to disrupt the hierarchies cemented by colonial-capitalism that sustain this violence in the first place.

Positioned outside of this hierarchical configuration, place-based Indigenous scholarship and ways of knowing have, since time immemorial, been rooted in understandings of and commitments to multispecies flourishing as humans, animals, plants, land, water, and spirits are seen in context-specific ways as part of a constellation of nonhierarchical relations (e.g., Goldberg-Hiller and Silva 2011; Simpson 2017). Human-animal and human-nonhuman dichotomies are born of and sustained by colonial-capitalism and Western Enlightenment thinking that hierarchize life along the Great Chain of Being (Kim 2015; Ko 2017). This colonial categorization of life is positioned in stark opposition to Indigenous ontologies that make no such hierarchical ordering and include a more expansive understanding of life itself, wherein even "stones, thunder, or stars are known ... to be sentient and knowing persons" (TallBear 2015, 234; Goldberg-Hiller and Silva 2011). As a way of life- and world-making, these Indigenous cosmologies manifest in understandings and practices of resurgence that center life, reciprocity, self-determination, and relationality within colonial-capitalist ruins and unfold within and intentionally outside of these extractive systems (Daigle 2016; Simpson 2017). My hope is that this framework for thinking about multispecies flourishing might contribute to theorizations of livability in decolonial geographies (Hunt and Holmes 2015; Daigle and Ramírez 2019). In particular, in its commitment to addressing farmed animal species as both unwilling perpetrators of settler-colonial violence and colonized subjects themselves, I imagine possibilities for and limitations of anticoloniality in this context.

In exploring these possibilities, methodologically, this article draws on original qualitative research, including participant observation at Pigs Peace Sanctuary in Stanwood, Washington, and semistructured interviews with Pigs Peace founder and director Judy Woods in 2019 and 2020. Interview transcripts and field notes were read and analyzed for key themes (Nowell et al. 2017), with a particular focus on those qualities that were central to the lived experiences of pigs themselves. This research is augmented by a decade of volunteering at Pigs Peace, developing educational materials, and learning from

Woods in less formal capacities, in addition to creating and teaching an undergraduate class on multispecies ethnography at Pigs Peace over two consecutive years (2014 and 2015; see Gillespie 2019). VINE Sanctuary in Springfield, Vermont, is the second primary sanctuary featured in this article. Although I have long followed VINE's work from afar, I do not have the level of experience of this sanctuary that I have with Pigs Peace. The data about VINE are drawn primarily from the growing body of scholarship written about VINE specifically (e.g., M. Jones 2014; p. jones 2014, 2019, 2020; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Blattner, Donaldson, and Wilcox 2020), in addition to participation in an in-depth tour of VINE in September 2018 and informal communications with sanctuary cofounder patrice jones. Other stories from sanctuaries included here are gathered from published writing, as well as participation in a public tour at Edgar's Mission in Victoria, Australia.

This article's analysis begins in the next section with a theorization of animal agriculture as a colonial-capitalist ruins and farmed animals as subjects of ruination. To imagine a world otherwise for farmed animals is what Cacho (2012) and Lawson and Elwood (2018) called an "unthinkable politics." To imagine contexts of flourishing in the midst of this unthinkable, it is necessary to first understand the ruinous conditions that make this flourishing unthinkable. Following this contextual orientation, the third section argues that sanctuaries for formerly farmed animals perform practical spatial and relational activities that imagine and manifest lives of flourishing for these species outside of capitalist logics and within and beyond the ruins of colonial-capitalism.² This is a world-altering project both for the future of farmed animal species themselves and for what it will demand of those who are accustomed to and feel entitled to using and consuming their bodies. Therefore, the concluding section of the article addresses the unthinkable politics at the heart of this project, the fraught questions and problems these politics raise, and what thinking these unthinkable politics might mean in world-making projects of multispecies flourishing.

Animal Agriculture as Colonial-Capitalist Ruins

In their imagining of a more abundant future, Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg (2015, 323) called for us to "reckon with the past," considering not

only the colonial-capitalist histories that underwrite the present but also the need to illuminate past articulations of multispecies abundance for which we could strive. They wrote, "Looking back directs attention to what Stoler (2008) calls *ruination*, the discursive material processes of annihilation, displacement, and replacement driven by imperialism" (Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015, 323). This article shares their commitment to reckoning with a past that has delivered us to the planet's present state; looking to the past helps us to understand the enduring violences of animal agriculture. It does not, however, help us to imagine futures of abundance and flourishing for farmed animal species. As long as they have been farmed, farmed animal species' lives have never been wholly oriented around their own flourishing or autonomy over their lives and bodies—farming animals to extract their life energies, their reproductive processes, and their very bodies is fundamentally at odds with their flourishing. Rather than looking back into history, then, for imaginaries of less violent, less extractive human-farmed animal relationships, it is necessary to engage in the radical and world-making work of manifesting the conditions under which farmed animals' lives could be made livable on their own terms. First, though, we must understand their ruins.

Within the organizing structures of settler-colonialism and capitalism, animal agriculture is its own institutional process of ruination. I say *process* because it is enacted and reproduced continually, reinscribing and normalizing its violences across temporal and spatial landscapes and on the bodies and lives of both farmed animals and those humans entangled in its extractive forms of labor. Animal agriculture is a temporally expansive institution of ruination—its longevity and historical reach cementing normative ideas about the place of farmed animals in human societies, the extractive logics that render life *property* and *capital*, and the relations of humans to land and nonhuman natures more broadly.

Ruination can be understood as simultaneously "an act of ruining, a condition of being ruined, and a cause of it. Ruination is an act perpetrated, a condition to which one is subject, and a cause of loss" (Stoler 2008, 195). Animal agriculture delivers ruination in all of these forms.

Industrial animal agriculture is a site of material devastation and ruin as a leading cause of anthropogenic climate crises (Food and Agriculture Organization

2006; Weis 2013; de Coninck et al. 2018), in its exploitation of precarious and vulnerable human workers (Ribas 2016; Waltz 2018), and in its impacts on nonhuman lives and bodies (Wadiwel 2015; Gillespie 2018). Less widely acknowledged, but no less relevant, are the deleterious environmental impacts of small-scale animal agriculture, the unjust labor relations even on many small farms, and the foundational harm to the animal built into farming animals at any scale (Weber and Matthews 2008; V. Stanescu 2010; Gray 2013). The ruinous nature of industrial-scale animal agriculture is increasingly condemned in the progressive imaginary of more just human–animal–environment relations, and the small-scale farm is exalted as a near-opposite, ethical alternative (V. Stanescu 2010). This is a false dichotomy, however; instead, these forms of animal agriculture should be understood on a continuum of ruination. As the ruins of industrial animal agriculture come into view, the bucolic settler “American family farm” aesthetic works hard, and largely successfully, to conceal the ruins on which it was built and that it continues to perpetuate. The small-scale family farm has, since its establishment, been a locus for heteronormativity and sexism, White supremacist hypernationalism, nativism, and xenophobia (V. Stanescu 2010). Contemporary small-scale farming is, in fact, a more exact replication of the kind of homesteader animal agriculture that was foundational to the early iterations of settler colonization than industrial forms of production. “White settler nostalgia” (Barraclough 2018) insulates settler farming and ranching from critiques of its origin and foundation, allowing instead debate only over the particulars of agricultural practices. The continuing occupation of land and violent social relations that define animal agriculture, however, can be understood as a hegemonic institution that works to sustain colonial capitalism as an enduring structure.

The farmed animals at the heart of these agricultural systems are born as sites of production and capital accumulation, their bodies genetically coded for commoditization and their short lives organized around logics of extraction of milk, meat, eggs, semen, and skin (Twine 2010; Gillespie 2018; Narayanan 2018). Other species have been understood to be subjects of “anthropocentric colonisation” and its attendant violences (Narayanan 2017, 476), and farmed animals occupy a complex role in understandings of colonialism. Farmed animals are themselves subjects of colonization—not as

metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012) but through the process of domestication, which rendered “animal bodies as colonial and capitalist subjects ... and was only possible because of and through the historic and ongoing erasure of Indigenous bodies and the emptying of Indigenous lands for settler-colonial expansion” (Belcourt 2014, 3). Animal domestication as an anchor of the twinned structures of capitalism and colonialism confined and assimilated formerly free-living species into colonizing human societies oriented around use, extraction, and commodification (Nibert 2013). Species who were domesticated and farmed were dispossessed of their land and their bodily autonomy; those who were docile enough already or could be “broken” into submission were bred, and those who resisted were killed. This process of assimilation into agricultural society has been achieved over 10,000 years of breeding farmed animals to meet, in ever-intensifying ways, the appetites of human consumers of farmed animals’ bodies, reproductive processes, and life energies.

Farmed animal species, however, were and are also historical and contemporary colonial apparatuses—colonized, objectified, commodified, and then instrumentalized to advance and sustain the ongoing process and structure of settler-colonialism. Farmed animals were not incidental to this process but were actively embroiled in “the death-work of settlement” (Boswell 2017, 120). Farmed animals, and cows especially, were used as instruments of colonization as ranching and settler agriculture physically occupied space, violently dispossessing Indigenous communities and native animal species from their land (Anderson 2004; p. Jones 2014). The presence of cows multiplied on the Western landscape as bison were exterminated; initially, cows moved freely on the range, controlled through herding by humans on horseback, but soon, like farmed animals already were, land became marked as property. Fencing (and barbed wire fencing in particular) became a violent technology of control—of enclosure and exclusion in equal measure (Netz 2004; Mayes 2020). Property itself is a colonial-capitalist apparatus, and rendering life as property has been integral to the success and rise of capitalism and the settler-colonial project. This physical demarcation of property on both land and animals reflected the growth of a hegemonic settler institution as a disciplining architecture that shapes contemporary settler society in the United States. Struthers Montford (2020) explained that

“colonists imported the institution of animal agriculture, farmed animals, legal statuses of property, and ontologies of Western human superiority that structured ways of being and living in their homelands. Colonists positioned animal agriculture as the civilized manner in which to interact with animals, as well as the proper way to relate to land as a resource” (228). Contemporary animal agriculture in a settler colony like the United States, then, is impossible to disentangle from the layers of colonial violence that birthed the settler state.

Tangled up with these processes of colonization are forms of capitalist extraction and accumulation that are embedded in colonial societies. “Cattle” were the earliest forms of capital, and farmed animal species today circulate as capital in and through food economies (Gunderson 2013). Writing on anticapitalism and antiextractivism, Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg scholar Simpson (2017) explained,

Resources and capital, in fact, are fundamental mistakes within Nishnaabeg thought, as Glenna Beaucage points out, and ones that come with serious consequences—not in a colonial superstitious way but in the way we have already seen: the collapse of local ecosystems, the loss of prairies and wild rice, the loss of salmon, eels, caribou, the loss of our weather. (77)

The concept of capital as a “fundamental mistake” highlights the incongruity between an anticolonial ethic and the very foundation on which animal agriculture is built—the domesticated farmed animal as capital, as resource, as site of extraction.

The kind of ruination wrought by these forms of capital and by animal agriculture itself is so old, so fundamental to the very architecture of global capitalism and colonialism, that its foundational violence is nearly impossible to see. Stoler (2008) wrote,

To speak of colonial ruination is to trace the fragile and durable substance and signs, the visible and visceral senses in which the effects of empire are reactivated and remain. But ruination is more than a process. It is also a political project that lays waste to certain peoples and places, relations, and things. To think with ruins of empire is to emphasize less the artifacts of empire as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime than to attend to their reappropriations and strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present. (196)

To excavate this political project of ruination is to uncover the skeletal frame that underwrites contemporary colonial-capitalism, and centering the

animals—the earth beings on whom the system relies—must be a core feature of these politics. Without making these more-than-human politics explicit, in such a pervasive system that relies so thoroughly on animals as units of production and consumption, the animals themselves are lost.

Farmed animals are born as property and as commodities, immediately buyable and sellable in capitalist circuits of exchange, and yet their primary value emerges only later in their lives: in the form of reproductive labor for milk, eggs, and semen; in death as meat; and following death in the form of rendered material commodities (Shukin 2009; Gillespie 2021). Recognizing the violence of commodifying living beings as farmed commodities necessitates an understanding of the ways in which farmed animal species in capitalist societies were never meant to flourish. In industrial farm settings—which, in the United States, comprise an estimated 99 percent of animal farming (Anthis 2019)—animals are meant to survive only long enough to become sites of extraction. Most farmed animals raised for meat are slaughtered in their adolescence, and those raised for their reproductive value are slaughtered later, when their reproductive capacities begin to decline. In the best farming settings, they are meant to live well enough to constitute “good animal welfare” while their lives remain oriented around their use as food, resources, and commodities. Discursively, farmed animals might be framed as flourishing in these spaces (as narratives of “happy meat,” “humanely raised and slaughtered,” and “free-range” promise, and as farmers themselves describe their close and caring relations with the animals they farm), but as V. Stanescu (2013) argued, “Standards of care will be undercut in a system in which animals are raised and sold for profit ... as an agricultural commodity which must be routinely produced for sale there exists a permanent and inherent contradiction between the welfare of animals and the profit of the business, as lower animal standards (if unperceived) always result in increased profits” (106). Furthermore, relationships of care, emotional attachment, and mutual respect between farmers and the animals they farm have inherent limits in farmers’ appreciation for animals’ lives, experiences, and relationships when animals themselves are conceptualized as food—fundamentally killable and exploitable as resource and capital—and thus denied the continuation of their lives, experiences, and relationships.

Tsing (2015) argued that “[i]n capitalist logics of commodification [and I would add, property relations], things are torn from their lifeworlds to become objects of exchange” (122). How might we think of this in the case of farmed animals, whose bringing-into-beingness as commodities aims to define a particular kind of lifeworld—or, rather, *deathworld*, as it may be—oriented from the start around use, extraction, and capitalist exchange (Gillespie 2021)? In other words, they are not torn from their lifeworlds so much as their lifeworlds are, instead, formulated from the very beginning as deathworlds. Animal agriculture—including farms, feedlots, breeding farms, highways, auction yards, slaughterhouses, and rendering plants—forms a deathworld, “where worlds and lives are unmade” (Rose 2012, 12). J. Stanescu (2013) called farmed animals a form of “deading life,” by which he meant “life whose production is fundamentally about its death, its consumption” (148). In the case of farmed animals, J. Stanescu argued, humans’ relationship to them is not about the “production of life” but about the “consumption of life” (148). Life, then—a *livable* life—becomes an impossibility when farmed animals’ existence is oriented around human consumption of their lives and bodies. If we attend to farmed animals’ positioning in human configurations of consumption, “life is not living ... life is merely a process and precursor to death ... life is but an adjunctment to the end product, death ... a different sense of life from living, one in which life is pure resource for death” (J. Stanescu 2013, 149). Farmed animals exist conceptually “as beings who should be alive, but are already somehow dead” (J. Stanescu 2013, 155).

Animals’ bodies and psyches become sites of ruination through which ruinous conditions and logics of animal agriculture and their effects play out, and the spatial organizing logics of this system are integral to its success. Belcourt (2014), of the Driftpile Cree Nation,

propose[s] a “politics of space” to conceptualize the ways in which settler moves to knowing and/or constructing animal bodies and/or subjectivities (re)locates animals within particular geographic and architectural spaces. The insertion of animal bodies into specific industrialized, colonized, and vacated spaces (such as (factory) farms, urban apartments, and “emptied” forests) is therefore *the* gesture through which animality is made intelligible and material in the settler imagination. In other words, ... colonial

animalities are inseparable from the colonized spaces in which they are subjected and labored. (3)

In this context, how might these colonial animalities be undone and the ruins transformed? How might we think about flourishing within and beyond these ruins? “Asking how people live with and in ruins redirects the engagement elsewhere, to the politics animated, to the common sense they disturb, to the critiques condensed or disallowed, and to the social relations avidly coalesced or shattered around them” (Stoler 2008, 196). What, then, are world-making practices that unsettle these ruins and that might make flourishing possible for those never meant to flourish? To explore these questions, I now turn to sanctuaries as one kind of project dedicated to the flourishing of individuals of farmed animal species.

From Ruin to Sanctuary

For those species that have always been subject to and foundational to colonial-capitalist ruins in such thorough and insidious ways as farmed animals have, it is a difficult task to imagine their flourishing. As Corman (2017) explained, even those scholars and activists dedicated to uncovering, communicating, and undoing the everyday violences to which farmed animals are subjected focus overwhelmingly on understanding the suffering that this violence inflicts. Although this is understandable given the ongoing denial of and need for scholarship and advocacy to communicate the severity of animals’ abjection, it risks “reduc[ing] nonhuman animal subjectivities to representations of suffering and victimization ... [and] the representation of their suffering alone can ... fail to unsettle fundamental assumptions about them, the very assumptions required for the continuation of capitalist industries” (Corman 2017, 252, 253). Therefore, to imagine the flourishing of individuals of farmed species, it is necessary to offer a fuller accounting of their subjectivities—how, within and outside of colonial-capitalist ruin, they are emotional, social, thinking, and feeling beings with complex inner worlds that humans are only beginning to understand.

Ethological research on farmed animal species has been slow to accumulate compared with that focused on other species, such as dogs (a species with whom humans live in close relationships and who many humans readily acknowledge possess complex inner lives and forms of sociality). Knowledge-making

about who members of farmed animal species are outside of settler conceptualizations of animals as property and outside of practices of animal agriculture are necessarily being formulated in large part outside of production spaces or animal science educational programs. Sanctuaries are primary sites of knowledge production and activism dedicated to a fuller accounting of animals' inner lives, experiences, and social connections. This knowledge is understood and collected by both academic researchers (e.g., Marino and Colvin 2015; Colvin, Allen, and Marino 2020) and through invaluable anecdotal accounts of human members of sanctuary communities who are involved in the day-to-day care of animals (e.g., Masson 2002; Hatkoff 2009). Knowledge from sanctuary members gained through lived experience disrupts notions of who counts as an expert, highlighting how both humans in these spaces and the animals themselves are crafters of ways of knowing what constitutes conditions of flourishing.

The best available knowledge combines an understanding of knowledge about *species* with knowledge about *individuals*. Cows, chickens, pigs, turkeys, ducks, geese, sheep, and goats possess complex cognitive and emotional inner worlds. They express clear individual preferences, likes, and dislikes. They are curious, loving, affectionate, playful, joyful, and empathetic, and they experience boredom, fear, stress, pain, frustration, loneliness, grief, anxiety, depression, and lasting traumas from the harms and losses they suffer. They form close and enduring bonds with kin and others, reflecting an intense intra- and interspecies sociality, and they have the capacity to resist the conditions that oppress them (see, e.g., Masson 2002; Hatkoff 2009; Marino and Colvin 2015; King 2017; Colling 2020). Often, attention to animals' emotions prompts accusations of anthropomorphism, but what is being asked here is not that we humanize them but instead that we try to understand and honor the "radical alterity" of their being; to humanize these individuals would be to strip them of their animality and thus their distinct experiences of the world (Van Patter, Bachour, and Chang 2020, 12).

Knowledge about the emotional and cognitive capacities of a species cannot be the only information that forms the basis of creating conditions for flourishing. We know, for instance, that as a species chickens have the capacity for close social bonds; they flourish in spaces with ample room for pecking,

scratching, foraging, dustbathing, and organizing themselves in social groups; they enjoy a wide variety of foods; they are curious, and adventurous and can be fiercely protective of their kin; and they tend to sleep most comfortably on roosts up above the ground. This is certainly information useful for creating conditions of flourishing; and, indeed, as Donaldson and Kymlicka (2015) wrote, "In the absence of any other information about an individual, we can start from the assumption that she will benefit from species-typical forms of flourishing. But this should be the starting point, not the end point. The good life for any individual will diverge in unpredictable ways from the species norm" (67).

Chickens Libby and Louie, for instance, both reaffirmed and diverged from species-typical norms. They lived together, monogamous and closely bonded, choosing to spend their time always apart from the larger flocks of chickens at Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary in Dear Trail, Colorado. Libby was missing a foot (an amputation caused by the wire floor at the egg farm from which she was rescued), and Louie, in his attachment to her, dramatically altered his normal routine to accommodate her disability. He tended to her carefully, making sure she got many delectable treats and diligently protecting her from potential threats. After years of roosting high in the rafters, after he met Libby, he slept on the ground with her because her missing foot made it difficult for her to perch. As Libby's mobility declined with age, Louie stayed close to the barn with her, adapting their foraging and daylight adventures to a more limited range and eventually following her into a small room in the human caregivers' house when she needed more acute human care (on Libby and Louie's story, see Lucas 2010). Libby and Louie cocreated their shared lives, both performing and resisting species-typical practices and engendering a sense of relationality, care, and kinship uniquely their own. Sanctuaries can create the conditions where animals can become "authors of their own lives" (Blattner, Donaldson, and Wilcox 2020, 1) and where heterogenous forms of inter- and intraspecies relationality can thrive (Scotton 2017).³

In animal agriculture, in varying degrees based on the scale of the farm, spaces of production are oriented around efficiency of production or convenience to human laborers. Dairy farms, for instance, are increasingly organized with the proximity of cows to the milking parlor in mind and the ease with which cows can be moved into the barn and

milked two or three times a day—a task that becomes highly labor- and time-intensive as the number of cows on a farm increases (Gillespie 2018). In sanctuaries like VINE and Pigs Peace, animal-led knowledge drives the creation and transformation of space that enables animals' embodied, emotional, and relational lives to flourish. This is not the case with all sanctuaries; sanctuaries conceptualize and care for animals using varying degrees of anthropocentric practices (Gillespie 2019). In many ways, Pigs Peace and VINE are exceptional in their attentiveness to allowing animal residents to shape the space and their own lives. They give animals the opportunity to create and “inhabit meaningful homes” in which “[r]esidents' storied experiences become visible in the rhythms of daily routines and movements through territories, appropriations of sanctuary spaces, and embodied practices through which affective relations with the landscape—and other individuals—emerge” (Van Patter, Bachour, and Chang 2020, 5). Animal sanctuaries are unique spatially and relationally both in the individual relationships unfolding at the sanctuary and in the sanctuary's relationship to the broader world.

Pigs Peace Sanctuary in Stanwood, Washington, is home to roughly 100 pigs, many of whom have come from agricultural production settings and from conditions of abuse and neglect. The design of the sanctuary space is oriented around pigs—their bodies and their relationships—with no end goal other than their own enjoyment, longevity, and overall emotional and physical well-being. The sanctuary contains a thirty-four-acre open area—half forest and half field—and most of the pigs live in this main sounder. Others with more involved care needs live in smaller areas, closer to the house where they can be tended to regularly and where the space can be transformed to accommodate different forms of mobility and independence. The pigs decide how they spend their days—frequently foraging in the field, building nests in the forest, sleeping in the sun-warmed hay, or cooling off in the numerous ponds. The high-quality food—specially formulated at a local mill and supplemented by fresh produce and hay—is oriented around longevity and wellness, and the fruits, vegetables, nuts, and other treats they receive are offered both for their nutritional value and for an enriching surprise. In the fall, the pigs feast on pumpkins grown at the sanctuary; in the summer, watermelons are a favorite; and year-round

they receive large weekly carrot donations from the local supermarket.

There are different forms of housing populating the sanctuary acreage—the main barn, dog-houses for smaller pigs, wooden lean-to constructions with low doorways, and elongated domed structures—all of which allow pigs to choose where they sleep and with whom. This housing is designed with pig comfort in mind above other considerations. These houses are often not comfortable (or sometimes even possible) for humans to enter, and pigs collect materials, like hay and scavenged roughage, to outfit their houses. These houses, and the sanctuary itself, are fluid spaces—made so by both pigs and humans. Judy Woods, the sanctuary founder and director, shared a story about when she had a large overhang constructed that extended from one end of the barn to create another outdoor covered area for the pigs to stay dry during the wet Pacific Northwest winters. She covered the ground under this sheltered area with woodchips, signaling that it was a walkway (sleeping areas are outfitted with high-quality hay). After its construction, though, the pigs had different ideas about the space, carrying hay from inside the barn, mouthful by mouthful, out into the walkway until it was no longer a walkway but instead a breezy sleeping area. The pigs have now for years enjoyed relaxing in this cool sleeping area in the summer and burrowing in its deep, dry hay for warmth in the winter. The sanctuary geography is malleable and constantly evolving as pigs shape the space themselves and as they teach Woods and the other human community members more about how pigs in general, and these specific pigs, prefer to live (Gillespie 2019).

At VINE Sanctuary, a queer, antiracist sanctuary in Springfield, Vermont, more than 600 formerly farmed animals live in multispecies spaces cultivated as sites where intra- and interspecies relationships of care and connection can unfold. The sanctuary is made up of several distinct areas—“the valley” (inhabited mostly by ducks, chickens, dogs, and cats), the “back pasture” (where cows live together in a large group with access to forest, pasture, and hillside and where they come along with nondomesticated animals who visit the sanctuary), and “the commons” (a space made up of a barn, coops, pasture, and woods, shared by chickens, turkeys, cows, goats, sheep, alpacas, emus, ducks, geese, and a pig; Blattner, Donaldson, and Wilcox 2020; p. jones

2020; Van Patter, Bachour, and Chang 2020). Like at Pigs Peace, these spaces are continuously evolving as the animal residents shape and communicate how these spaces can best accommodate their flourishing. Founders patrice jones and Miriam Jones initially started the sanctuary rescuing chickens and later expanded to include other species. Many sanctuaries segregate animal residents by species and then within species, by size, level of mobility, and age for reasons of safety and practicality—a model of species segregation that in part replicates the spatial organization of a farm (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015).

VINE operates on a different model. patrice jones explained that their ideas about multispecies cohabitation changed after taking in a group of birds that included a turkey, ducks, and chickens. Speaking about this particular flock, p. jones (2020) explained that

[they] were so deeply attached to one another, we realized that they might want to have relationships with people of other species and those might be enriching relationships ... we realized that allowing—creating—the ability to form relationships with folks of other species might be a component of self-determination that would enable greater flourishing. ... [The sanctuary became a] place where folks could have those relationships if they want them but there's enough space that nobody's forced into relationships that they don't want.

As the cows in the back pasture mingle with wild turkeys and deer, p. jones (2020) explained that the chickens at the sanctuary “were really interested in the wild birds who would come and join them at the food bowls, and sometimes when wild birds would fly by—migrating birds—they would send up this beautiful song.” Interspecies relationships extend within and beyond the individuals of farmed animal species living at the sanctuary, manifesting a social landscape that shapes the sanctuary itself and reaches beyond the confines of the sanctuary as wild species move freely across the sanctuary bounds or even permanently take up residence at the sanctuary, like the community of swallows who nest in the main barn at Pigs Peace. This is not always the case with sanctuaries, however, and this permeability of the boundaries of sanctuaries can pose problems when animals conceptualized as “predators” or “pests” pass through or inhabit the sanctuary grounds and are then sometimes expelled or eradicated (see Abrell [2021] for more on this).

For the intended residents of sanctuaries, in addition to the relational and spatial dimensions of the flourishing that can unfold at sanctuaries, sanctuaries create room for new forms of care—both in terms of humans' care for animals' bodies and in enabling the conditions where animals can care for themselves and each other. At Pigs Peace, for instance, ponds provide water where pigs can cool off on hot summer days and where they can coat themselves in mud as a natural sunscreen. Similarly, Edgar's Mission in Victoria, Australia, has devised a set of pig showers, alongside the pigs' barn, designed with a lever that pigs can turn on, delivering a shower of cool water. Sanctuaries take up the question of how we can resituate the body in space, in relation to others, to see the animal body not as a site of extraction (of meat, eggs, milk, semen, or skin) but as a dynamic container of a rich inner world of feeling, individuality, emotion, creativity, and sociality. This question about the intertwined nature of the body and mind informs the kinds of care performed at sanctuaries.

At Pigs Peace, medical care is delivered whenever possible at the sanctuary versus at a veterinary office and a sick pig's companion is invited to stay with them during their convalescence to reduce stress and support existing bonds. Even the medical care they receive is an indication of a radically different ethic around these individuals. Pigs and other farmed animals in agricultural settings are rarely provided comprehensive veterinary care; rather, decisions about medical treatment are made by considering the cost of treatment for various ailments weighed against the profit that will be accumulated as a result of that animal's continued productivity (Abrell 2021). At sanctuaries, no such calculations are made: Veterinary care is focused on longevity, quality of life, and overall well-being.⁴ Animals in sanctuaries are provided with geriatric care (an impossibility in farming settings where animals do not live to old age) and with ongoing care for cancer and other chronic or terminal illnesses. Because these are not forms of care offered in agricultural settings, sanctuaries together with willing veterinarians are often in the position of collaboratively building new forms of medical knowledge about farmed animal species—knowledge oriented around their flourishing rather than their commodification (Gillespie 2018).

Farmed animals' commodification has long been characterized by selective breeding for traits that

lend themselves to greater productive capacity—grossly increased volume in milk production in cows and capacity for egg-laying in chickens and the bodies of chickens, turkeys, and pigs designed for meat production that grow too fast and too large for their bones and cardiac systems to sustain them (Taylor 2017). As such, sanctuaries are regularly engaged in the care of disabled animals—disability resulting from their breeding and also as a result of injuries or poor care prior to their arrival at the sanctuary. Sanctuaries, though, are in a position to transform both the experiences and conceptions of disabled animals. The social model of disability locates disability not in the body but in the environment that does not accommodate that disability (Clare 2017; Taylor 2017). The animal sanctuary, according to critical animal and disability studies scholar Taylor (2017), “is in many ways an accommodation in and of itself, as the vast majority of farmed animals don’t have access to environments in which they can go about their lives in species-typical ways, let alone thrive—regardless of disability” (42). Honey came to Pigs Peace as a piglet, after she had been seized by a Montana sheriff who pulled a man over for drunk driving and found Honey on the floorboards of his truck. Her back legs had been crushed and, unable to walk, she got around by scooting on her backside, pulling herself along with her front legs. At Pigs Peace, her care evolved as she communicated what and how she needed to move around the sanctuary. Woods placed her in an area with gentle terrain with Ziggy, a pig born with three legs who had been rescued from a roadside zoo in Calgary, Canada. The area was covered with grass and specially purchased finely shredded woodchips that were soft on Honey’s backside, so that she could comfortably scoot around, navigating her home. In this way, Honey’s world was adapted and shaped by Woods and by Honey herself to fit her needs, disrupting notions of disability as a limiting body–mind formation.

The role of human residents at sanctuaries, then, becomes oriented around, as p. jones (2020) advocated, decentering humans and “creating the circumstances for [animal residents] to recover themselves ... circumstances in which they can have strong and rich relationships with each other.” Although reproduction is often prevented through sterilization at sanctuaries (a fraught issue when it comes to animal agency), some animals form adoptive bonds

between adult and infant or adolescent animals, as well as building other important kinship relationships. Sexual relationships, including those not involving reproduction, may also be important to animals, and these can be curtailed or allowed to flourish based on individual sanctuaries’ practices. At VINE, for instance, p. jones (2019) described the “queer eros” that flourished between ducks Jean-Paul and Jean-Claude and that necessitated a consideration of the importance of animal sexuality in these spaces and decision making. In this and other areas of relating to animals in sanctuary, sanctuary work is about

setting up the conditions under which the animal residents, as individuals and groups, can indicate to us how they want to live, rather than us imposing preconceived ideas of what they need or want based on alleged species norms, or on our ideas of what constitutes acceptable risks, desirable freedoms, and possible kinds of flourishing. It means starting from the basic assumption that, under the right conditions, animals may often be in a better position than we are to figure out how they want to live, and in ways that we may be unable even to imagine. (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015, 66)

Sanctuaries are spatial and relational sites of flourishing that manifest in spite of and actively against capitalist logics, where human–animal relationships can be radically redefined, articulated, and practiced—indeed, where animals’ lives are organized around how they can be made more *livable* (Gillespie 2019). Although sanctuaries are situated within the ruins of colonial capitalism and are thus embedded in and affected by the oppressive context of these structures, “sanctuaries directly challenge the commodification and exploitation of living beings ... and are spaces for unmaking the property relationships that have afflicted animals for centuries” (Abrell 2019, 110). Sanctuaries have the potential to disrupt processes of ruination, where colonial animalities can be undone and where animals’ lifeways and bodies can be reclaimed as their own.

Thinking an Unthinkable Politics

Sanctuaries are imperfect spaces, constrained by uneven power dynamics, property relations, and logics of commodification, even as they operate “as models of alternative modes of interspecies engagement” (Abrell 2017, 5). Animals in

sanctuaries are still captive, their bodily care affected by power imbalances in which various forms of control are exercised without the explicit consent of animal residents (M. Jones 2014; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Abrell 2021). Medical care, end-of-life care, and euthanasia are sites of decision making by humans that significantly affect animals' lives and deaths. Reproductive control in the form of sterilization is done without consent and is the norm in animal rescue work to preserve the limited room and resources available to sanctuaries for new rescues (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Abrell 2021; importantly, however, this is different from what occurs in farming contexts where animals' reproduction is controlled for the purposes of commodification and consumption). Decision making at sanctuaries is fraught, mistakes are made, and ethical issues are often unresolved. Yet sanctuaries are spaces where these considerations are made, carefully and repeatedly, with individual animals' needs, preferences, and social connections in mind.⁵ One of the projects of sanctuary work, then, is consistent attention to how these mechanisms of power and control can be mitigated as much as possible.⁶

Animals in sanctuaries are also still, in settler legal structures, categorized as property, as is the land the sanctuary occupies. Requirements core to animals' flourishing are also property (in the case of land) and commodities (in the case of land, food, medical care, hay and straw, and the materials needed to construct housing). Therefore, sanctuaries operate within a capitalist economy, requiring capital to sustain animals' lives and the spaces where they live, and thus need streams of income to enable their work. Most sanctuaries operate as nonprofit organizations fueled primarily by donations or by other creative ways of generating income that do not exploit animals. For instance, Pigs Peace owns and runs a vegan grocery store in Seattle, where the proceeds are directed to the costs of running the sanctuary, in addition to donations they receive. For most sanctuaries, though, they are rarely economically self-sustaining (and thus rely primarily on donors) precisely because they do not commodify and extract capital from their residents as farms do. In this sense, sanctuaries are precarious spaces of flourishing so long as capitalist logics govern what is possible.

Another way to look at sanctuaries' situation within a capitalist economy is as an opportunity for

settler-descendants to acknowledge the harm we have done to farmed animal species over many centuries and to make amends through supporting the flourishing of those colonial subjects living today. Supporting sanctuaries, as well as abstaining from the consumption of colonial subjects, can be a step toward "disrupting the commodification of animal bodies, and abolishing animal agriculture ... as anticolonial gestures that reify decolonial futurities insofar as these forms of knowledge production, capitalism, and food culture sustain the settler state" (Belcourt 2014, 8). Sanctuaries, however, are not naturally anticolonial projects. Chang (2018) argued that an anticolonial ethic in sanctuary work must be enacted intentionally, continually, and in collaboration with other anticolonial projects. Sanctuaries are fraught spaces in which "colonial-capitalist relations of private property have directly enabled [sanctuaries] to acquire lands to rescue and provide care for farmed animals, making them beneficiaries of settler colonialism" (Chang 2018). Indeed, Pigs Peace occupies the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Tulalip, Stillaguamish, and Skagit peoples. VINE is on the traditional lands of the Western Abenaki peoples. Both sanctuaries are founded by and run by settler-descendants. Thus, anticolonial action is especially important for these and other sanctuaries that benefit from settler-colonialism and reproduce settler lifeways in their occupation of land.

At the same time, sanctuaries "work to challenge and dismantle colonial-capitalist animal agriculture industries, which are actively destroying lands and waters while perpetuating institutionalized mass violence against countless humans and nonhuman animals" (Chang 2018). This complex positioning of sanctuaries prompts questions about whether and how it might be possible for a colonial subject's life, embodiment, and existence to be reimaged within a settler-occupied and operated space. It is for this reason that farmed animal species, as colonial subjects, must be centered as crafters of their own lifeworlds and futures to enact an anticolonial ethic. How might we think about the settler-descendants who are in the role of caring for these colonial subjects and thus occupy the land of Indigenous peoples and native animal species? One way to think about this might be to frame the role of settler-descendants at sanctuaries as working in service to animals' own world-making projects as a form of anticolonial action. Sanctuaries are one site where this kind of work can be done,

and where sanctuaries, as “beneficiaries of settler colonialism,” must take up explicitly anticolonial action as it relates not just to colonial animal subjects but also to Indigenous communities, lands, and native wild animals (Chang 2018).

Because decolonization as a praxis requires a repatriation of land (Tuck and Yang 2012), how might we think about land that sanctuaries occupy—as spaces often run by settler-descendants but inhabited by colonial animal subjects who are simultaneously the ancestors of settler animal subjects? Farmed animals are peoples displaced from their ancestral lands, which are not the lands they occupy now, and they are peoples alienated from the social relations and lifeways of their nondomesticated ancestors. How might an anticolonial land ethic be shaped in this context, in relation to enabling the flourishing of individuals of farmed animal species, as well as those nondomesticated species who might pass through or inhabit these spaces? As a step in this direction, VINE has preserved more than half of the land the sanctuary occupies as a refuge for wild animals and cares for this land with nonhuman residents in mind (e.g., they leave brush piles for birds and small mammals to use). They also cultivate a range of native plants that encourage the flourishing of bees and other pollinators, working to restore the rich ecosystem that has been compromised by settler agriculture.

Amidst the complexities of farmed animal species’ position and possibilities for multispecies flourishing in the ruins, rather than offering a conclusion, what I offer is another set of problems and another set of questions for animal and more-than-human geographers. What are farmed animal species owed—as subjects of colonization, as settlers themselves, and as intensely exploited living beings? A common refrain in considering how farmed animal species might live outside of farming logics and contexts is that they would not live at all—that were they not farmed, they would (and perhaps should) go extinct. Belcourt (2015) pointed out, however, that “the erasure of domesticated animals would itself be a form of settler-colonial genocide in which colonized subjects are disappeared” (8–9). We need, then, a different response—a different understanding of care, flourishing, and livability outside of farming, where those members of species formerly farmed are supported in their own world-making projects. As Cacho (2012) argued, “If we suspend the need to be

practical, we might be able to see what is possible differently” (31). How, as animal and more-than-human geographers, can we build new theory that more deeply excavates the structures that exploit and prevent the flourishing of other species so that, instead, their flourishing can become a lived reality? How might this move us, as scholars and as members of the human species, toward a transformative politics of interspecies solidarity (Coulter 2016; Abrell 2021)? I hope that this article is one modest step in that direction, but this is a difficult task.

To suggest that members of farmed animal species should not be subjected to the violence and denial of their subjectivity involved in raising and killing them for food is a form of Ahmed’s (2010) “killing joy”—in this case, the “joy” of those accustomed to consuming their bodies and reproductive energies. To call for and practice an anticolonial practice is a process of revoking the sense of entitlement to the colonial subject’s body, land, and lifeways that underwrites settler life. This revocation is an “unthinkable politics”—“transgressive, rebellious, and illegible to racial capitalist regimes of production, consumption, and governance” (Lawson and Elwood 2018, 224). As such, it is a politics that extends through and beyond individual practices of consumption to demand an undoing of the very structures that underpin these normalized seemingly personal choices and practices. Daigle and Ramírez (2019) called for a politics of refusal as decolonial practice, arguing that “[r]efusal is liberation from the violent fractures of settler colonialism and white supremacist structures. Yet, liberation also builds on refusal through a resounding affirmation and embodiment of alternative relationalities” (3). For farmed animal species, refusal, then, is not just about eliminating their exploitation, creating a void of experience—through extinction, for instance—but instead filling the absence of exploitation with opportunities for self-determined lives and relationalities of flourishing. “To kill joy ... is to open a life, to make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance” (Ahmed 2010, 20). Fostering radically different geographic spaces of care is one kind of “making room for life”; another is a conceptual “making room” for a fundamentally different understanding of life that allows for these “alternative relationalities” of flourishing to evolve.

Lawson and Elwood (2018) argued that unthinkable politics “are a way of seeking other possible worlds,

even as they always also take shape in the shadow of thinkable worlds.” Sanctuaries, as an unthinkable politics, are currently taking shape in these shadows. They are projects of world-making within and beyond the ruins of colonial capitalism, ruins that form—in all their destruction and violence—thinkable worlds, so normalized and naturalized in the minds and lives of those who benefit from them that their ruination forms the fabric of living and dying. Perhaps, though, these world-making projects germinating and growing in the shadows can transform from an unthinkable politics to a politics of flourishing that can be thought, manifested, and lived.

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Notes

1. This article does not address subsistence animal agriculture, nomadic pastoralism, or Indigenous agricultural practices. The focus here is exclusively on colonial-capitalist practices of animal agriculture in settler-colonial regimes—in this case, the United States.
2. In this analysis, this article contributes to the fast-growing field of sanctuary studies both within and beyond geography (see Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Abrell 2017, 2019, 2021; Pachirat 2018; Gillespie 2019; Blattner, Donaldson, and Wilcox 2020; Van Patter, Bachour, and Chang 2020).
3. These practices can be understood as animals exercising agency in their everyday lives. See Abrell (2021), Blattner, Donaldson, and Wilcox (2020), and Donaldson and Kymlicka (2015) for theorizations of agency in sanctuary sites.
4. In sanctuary contexts with limited resources that are strained by the intake of too many animals, the expense of a particular treatment or life-saving surgery might factor into decision making about medical care (Abrell 2021).
5. See Srinivasan’s (2014) theorization of “agential subjectification” in sea turtle conservation for an excellent discussion of the nature of human decision

making and its impacts on individual animals and collective populations.

6. These considerations can be extended to the intrahuman politics at the sanctuary, including around human labor in sanctuary work, which is sometimes paid and often volunteer (see, e.g., Abrell [2021], 117–18, 121–22, 125–26), and which also extends to considerations of animal labor as well (see Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Coulter 2016).

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